REFRAMING THE COMMUNITY:

HOW MEMBER PARTICIPATION SHIFTS IN THE FACE OF SPATIAL CHANGE

Krystal Laryea
Graduate School of Education, Stanford University

Under review

ABSTRACT
How is communal participation sustained in the face of change? I draw on the case of a collegiate religious fellowship that moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic to examine how individuals' participation patterns evolve their community undergoes a collective shift. Members' participation trajectories were puzzling: core members moved on while periphery members moved in, often becoming core members. I explain this puzzle through the process of *reframing,* wherein individuals craft working lenses that answer the question "what does this community mean to me now?" This temporal focus reveals that those with the most positive frames (of the community as "beautiful") before the shift struggled most to adapt, reframing the group as "not what it once was." By contrast, periphery members with ambivalent frames prior to the shift came to reframe the group as beautiful, leading them to deepen their engagement. These findings have relevance for member participation in a variety of communal contexts as well as theorizing on framing more broadly.

KEYWORDS: organizational participation, frames, community, space, religion, ethnography

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS
I thank Forrest Stuart, Woody Powell, Matthew Clair, Matt Rafalow, Mitchell Stevens, Sarah Soule, Sasha Shen Johfre, Nick Sherefkin, Cathy Sirois, James Chu, and Chloe Hart for comments and conversations that greatly informed this paper. I am grateful for the insightful feedback provided by members of Stanford's Qualitative and Ethnographic Methods Workshop and the financial support of Stanford's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society during this research. My greatest thanks goes to the members of "Christian Fellowship" who shared their stories and lives with me.

How is communal participation sustained in the face of change? A significant body of research has provided insights as to the structural and cultural factors that shape individuals' participation in neighborhoods (Lichterman 2008; Small 2002; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999), civic organizations (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2014), social movement groups (Kellogg 2009; McAdam 1986), and schools (Guhin 2020). But we lack a full understanding of how participation patterns shift in the face of community-level changes, such as the loss of shared physical space. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought this issue to the fore, as schools, nonprofits, churches, corporations, and other collective endeavors have grappled with new formats for gathering, connecting, and pursuing shared endeavors.

This paper explores how loss of physical space and in-person connection conditions community by revealing how participation patterns shifted in a collegiate religious fellowship ("CF") which sought to sustain itself online during the COVID-19 pandemic. What happened with CF's members was puzzling: core members moved on, while periphery members moved in. Existing literature on participation leads us to expect that core members, who view the community in the most positive light, will stay involved even amidst setback and change, whereas periphery members will become less involved in the face of setbacks and change (Small 2002; 2004). Why did the reverse happen with CF? I argue that we can understand this phenomenon through the process of *reframing*. Frames are the lenses through which we observe and interpret social life (Small, Harding, and Lamont 2010) and framing is the process of fashioning (and re-fashioning) such lenses. I examine how frames are updated in times of change. I find that those who had the deepest commitment to the community and saw it through the most positive lenses prior to the pandemic struggled the most with adapting to community-level changes. By contrast, those who saw the community through tempered or ambivalent frames prior to the pandemic were better able

to sustain participation in the face of change, deepening their commitment to the group as they came to see it as increasingly "beautiful."

By shedding light on the reframing processes by which individuals decide whether to deepen or loosen their commitment to a community in the face of change, I contribute to sociological theorizing on participation and commitment more broadly (Kanter 1968; Lichterman 2008; Rosen 2017; Small 2002, 2004). Second, I advance theorizing on frames (Wood et al. 2018; Snow and Benford 2000) by highlighting how framing operates as a dynamic, temporal process, where individuals look to both past and future to cohere a working frame that can guide participation decisions in the present (Emirbayer and Mische 1999). Achieving and sustaining high member participation is at the heart of most collective enterprises. Thus, the process of reframing put forth here has relevance for scholars studying participation in religious congregations, civic associations, social movements, and neighborhoods. In the discussion, I consider both the limitations and implications of my findings for other types of communities and other community-level shifts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theorizing community-level shifts: A focus on spatial change

In order to theorize how member participation evolves in the face of change, we first must consider what constitutes a community-level shift which requires clarity on the key building blocks of community. Community is a slippery and politically contested term that resists easy definition (Vaisey 2007; Collins 2009). Yet there is consensus among scholars that any community has a few key elements (Hillery 1982). First, every community needs a binding force. For residential communities (such as neighborhoods), the binding force is usually shared physical space. Organizational communities have some form of a shared purpose, which may be, for example,

religious, political, economic, or social in nature. Second, every community needs social ties among its members (Simmel [1908] 2009). Third, communities need some form of shared space for the pursuit of purpose and fostering of social ties (Kellogg 2009; Small and Adler 2017). We can think of shared space as the stage upon which community is lived out. Although shared physical space has long been considered a bedrock of community (Brint 2001; Hillery 1982), technology enables communal spaces that are not bound by place (Rheingold 2000; Wellman 1979). A community-level shift can occur along any of these dimensions: a change in purpose, a change in the network of ties, or a change in spatial structure. In the present case, I focus on *spatial change* which has both theoretical and practical significance in contemporary times.

In the tradition of urban sociology, physical space is taken for granted as a central feature that structures social and communal life (Gieryn 2000; Park and Burgess 2019). Scholars have shown that attachment and sense of belonging emerge when people have long-term experiences in a particular place (Flaherty & Brown 2010; Sampson 1988, 1991). Likewise, in various veins of organizational scholarship, place plays a central role. For example, social movement scholars have documented the importance of free spaces for movement organizing (Polletta 1999). Communes and co-living endeavors fundamentally rely on shared purpose *and* shared place (Törnqvist 2020; Vaisey 2007; Zablocki 1971). Scholars of civil society, dating back to Tocqueville (2003), have highlighted the importance of everyday spaces – such as dance halls (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2014), bowling alleys (Putman 2000), libraries (Klinenberg 2018), and baseball fields (Fine 1987) – for bonding and bridging. In a recent review, Small and Adler (2017) conclude that physical space continues to play a central role in the formation of social ties.

On the other hand, the importance of physical space for communal endeavors has been challenged, especially by digital sociologists. Wellman (1979: 1206) argues that community in

modernity is neither lost nor saved, but liberated, affirming "the prevalence and importance of primary ties but maintain[ing] that most ties are not now organized into densely knit, tightly bounded solidarities." The advent of the telephone, the internet, and social media have all contributed to the possibility of robust social ties and communities existing without physical co-presence (Fischer 1992; Rainie and Wellman 2014; Rheingold 2000). Collectively, studies in this vein challenge the idea that shared physical space is essential for community but tend to focus on forms of community (Twitch, YouTube drama channels, etc.) that were never bound by physical space to begin with (Christin and Lewis 2021; Hamilton et al. 2014; Taylor 2018). Thus, it remains unclear how communities deal with *spatial change* - in this case, the shift from physically proximate to physically "scattered." To understand how communities can persist in the face of change, I focus on one key element of communal life: member participation. Existing scholarship reveals that individuals' *frames* of a community play a central role in shaping their participation in collective life (Benford and Snow 2000; Goffman 1974; Small 2002). But, as I outline below, this scholarship does not fully address how frames matter and evolve in the face of change. This is a critical omission, both for theorizing on frames and participation, given that communal organizations of all stripes regularly grapple with change and adaptation in modern times.

The role of frames in communal participation

The maintenance of any community relies on the ongoing participation of existing members as well as the entrance of new members. We can think of micro-level participation at two levels: *why do some people participate in a community and others do not?* And *why do people's participation patterns shift?*[1] I focus on the second question, but the two are related,

[1] Scholars have also addressed this question at the meso and macro level: why do some neighborhoods, counties, cities, and countries display higher levels of civic and political participation than others. At this level, structural and cultural variables both play a role, as Small (2002) discusses at length (see also Flaherty & Brown 2010).

especially in terms of entrance into communities. We can think of individuals as having two kinds of ties to a given community that may lead them to participate. First, individuals have personal ties: their attachments to other members in the group. Second, individuals have communal ties: their attachment to the group overall or its shared purpose (Törnqvist 2020). A community-level shift could affect either type of ties.

While significant research has focused on structural factors that shape participation, such as neighborhood poverty (Sampson 1991, 1999), recent work shows that cultural factors, such as frames and shared moral orders also play a central role in driving participation (Kanter 1968; Small 2002; Vaisey 2007). Small (2002) finds that members who framed Villa Victoria through a historical lens of political mobilization experienced their neighborhood as a "beautiful place to live" while younger members saw Villa Victoria as "the projects," a place they hoped to eventually transcend. This insight aligns with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) classic insight that reality is socially constructed – what matters is the lenses, or frames, through which a community is seen. As the old adage attests, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Frame analysis in sociology began with Goffman (1974:21) who defined frames as "schemata of interpretation" that allow individuals to "locate, perceive, identify and label" occurrences in life and in the world. Frames have been theorized as entities that are used strategically by groups to persuade audiences in the social movement literature (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow and Benford 1988) and as entities that structure perception within people in cultural sociology (Small, Lamont and Harding 2010). With the latter, frames are often confused with schemas. Wood et al. (2018) suggests defining frames as "situational material assemblages that activate schemas previously internalized by persons" to distinguish them from schemas. In other words, frames fit in the world of public culture while schemas fit in the world of personal, private

culture (Lizardo 2017). However, schemas are now recognized as deployable in automatic cognition, which is distinct from conscious deliberation (Boutyline and Soter 2021). Thus, we need something between external frames and internal schemas. Rather than viewing frames as solely material assemblages that can only exist outside of people, we can extend the definition of the framing process to include individuals' internal, deliberative work of drawing on both external frames and internal schemas to develop a working lens for a particular situation or community. How people develop these working lenses, their processes of framing and reframing their communities, is the focus of this article.

I am not the first to consider how individuals go about the process of framing to guide their participation strategies. For example, McRoberts (2003) shows how churches in Four Corners offer different ways of seeing the streets, which shapes whether church members avoid the streets as sites of temptation or engage them as sites of potential redemption. The churches offer frames, but individual members must decide how they are going to think about the streets, combining their internal schemas and personal past experiences with the external frames their churches (and other institutions) are offering. As another example, Lichterman (2008) offers the concept of mapping to show how people in different religious groups draw on religious language to map their place in the civic arena and the neighborhoods they want to "serve." Here, too, we see people combining multiple forms of internal and external material (religious beliefs, experiences in various neighborhoods, frames offered by their churches or fellow congregants, etc.) to develop overarching working lenses that they can rely on in shaping day-to-day decisions.

Given my focus on community-level changes, I zero in on one aspect of framing that I call *reframing.* The basic idea is that whenever a group undergoes a change, members need to update their working frames. Changes and crises create unsettled times wherein formerly taken for granted

frames are questioned and revisited (Swidler 1986). Individuals must answer the question: what does this community mean to me *now?* Scholars have tended to focus on frames themselves, as static entities, rather than the dynamic process of framing that unfolds over time (Snow and Benford 2000; Wood et al. 2018). One reason for this is methodological: the only way to observe framing happen in real time is to have long-term, close relationships with a community and its members. Some ethnographers have made steps in uncovering how framing operates as a dynamic process. For example, Rosen (2017) offers the concept of *narrative rupture* to explain why residents both remain in and exit high-crime neighborhoods. Families stay put when they can craft a story that justifies remaining, but when their narrative is ruptured by difficult experiences, residents shift their strategy and often exit. Extending this insight to organizational communities, we could expect that the ability to keep a story going about one's participation would lead to maintenance, while ruptures might lead to exit. Rosen focuses on challenging and traumatic experiences, but community-level changes may affect participation differently, rupturing narratives for some while creating redemptive possibilities for others.

The goal of this study is to advance our understanding of how framing, as a dynamic process, shapes participation patterns when a community-level change occurs. It may be that those who had the most positive frames (of the community as "beautiful") and deepest commitments will be most likely to sustain participation (Small 2002) in the face of change. On the other hand, it may be these very members who experience the most narrative rupture when the community changes and choose to detach themselves (Rosen 2017). To examine this process (and these competing intuitions), I draw on ethnographic and interview data from a deeply communal religious group that underwent a significant spatial shift, which I describe below.

CASE AND METHODS

The case

I draw on the case of a collegiate religious fellowship that went from being physically proximate to physically distant during the coronavirus pandemic (thus using religion as site rather than category [Guhin 2014]). This analysis exists within a broader research project that examines how deeply religious students navigate their college journeys within a prestigious, private university ("Western") that they consider to be quite secular. Christian Fellowship ("CF") has approximately 70 members in any given year, and members are diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and political orientation (compared to other religious groups on campus and religious communities in general). Table 1 provides an overview of interviewee demographics, which are representative of the broader group. Prior to the pandemic, CF relied on a strong moral order (Vaisey 2007) as well as structural conditions, created by their highly residential campus, that both supported the maintenance of robust, intimate community, which I describe in more depth at the outset of the findings.

The pandemic brought about a sudden and holistic form of spatial change: almost all students were sent home in March 2020, and the majority of them did college remotely for the 2020-21 academic year. When students were sent home, they were geographically scattered – some even moving out of the country to live with their families overseas. But their institutional status remained the same: they were still undergraduates at Western. CF continued to operate as a collegiate fellowship with services, small groups, and other gatherings moving from in-person to Zoom. The pandemic created an exogenous, unexpected shock, making this a strong case of spatial change. That said, universities are unusual organizations with unique features and a global pandemic is a rare event that affects multiple aspects of members' lives. In the discussion, I address

the scope conditions, limitations, and potential insights this case offers for considering other collective changes that may be experienced by other kinds of communal organizations.

Data collection and analysis

Ethnographic fieldwork began in fall 2019, which allowed me to conduct 6 months of participant observation when the group was in person, providing a baseline to observe how member participation changed when the group shifted to a virtual format in March 2020.[2] Both in-person and remote fieldwork consisted of participating in the weekly rhythms of the community (large group worship gatherings, small group bible studies, etc.), one-off events, and informal social gatherings. I also participated in the student leadership team's weekly meetings, which provided insights on what leaders were grappling with as they sought to support the overall community. On average, I participated in 2-3 group events or meetings per week from September 2019 to May 2021. The shift to doing remote fieldwork involved spending more time on the shared communication platforms (GroupMe, then Slack) and conducting more interviews because informal, serendipitous interactions with members became less common. Because the group moved its regular meetings to an online, videoconferencing format, my weekly rhythms of fieldwork and participation observation stayed relatively consistent (though joining Zoom rooms rather than physical gatherings on campus).

In terms of positionality, I am White woman and a Christian. Identifying as a Christian was important for access and trust-building in the community, while also allowing me to authentically participate in community rituals (Desmond 2008). Members of the group were aware of my research project and saw me as both a co-member and researcher. They regularly asked me about

[2] Due to my ethnographic approach, the primary outcome of interest, shifts in participation patterns, are based on observations rather than self-reports which is helpful for linking what members said with what they did (Jerolmack and Khan 2014).

what I was finding, and occasionally reached out to me to tell me about social dynamics in the group they thought I would find interesting, particularly as they grappled with the shift to a remote format. Throughout the fieldwork, jottings and fieldnotes were written during and after each interaction with the group. I also wrote analytic memos on what was happening with the group and how it changed over time, both in terms of group rituals and individual members' involvement.

In addition to ethnographic observations, I conducted 50 interviews with students involved in CF (35 of which took place after students were sent home) and 10 additional interviews with campus ministers and other students to gain broader insights on how various groups experienced member shifts during the pandemic. In selecting interviewees, I engaged in theoretical sampling to maximize diversity along various dimensions, including demographic characteristics, role in the organization, and year in school (Small 2009). I intentionally interviewed students who dropped off as well as those who became more involved to understand how these trajectories varied. Given the broader project scope mentioned above, interviews addressed a wide range of topics including respondents' religious identities and other important identities, their college journeys, and their reflections on and involvement with CF and other groups on campus. I also asked students to reflect on how CF was navigating the pandemic and how their own participation has evolved during the pandemic. All formal interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (conducted in person prior to the pandemic and via Zoom afterwards), and I also wrote field notes on informal "check-in" phone calls and walks with members.

The analysis of interviews and fieldnotes was abductive in nature, focused on the "pragmatic process of puzzling out and problem solving" (Tavory and Timmermans 2012:167) The puzzle that guides this analysis arose within weeks of CF's shift to a remote format: many core members became less engaged, while many of the members that I expected to drop off, whose

engagement was ambivalent on campus, became highly involved. To address this puzzle, I paid attention to how social dynamics shifted in worship gatherings, small group gatherings, informal social time, and communication platforms. I engaged in multiple rounds of coding field notes and interview data (using Excel and Dedoose to organize quotes and field note excerpts), beginning with general codes (such as any mention of the COVID-19 pandemic) then eventually creating specific, analytic codes that described members' frames of the community before and after the shift, their thoughts on the opportunities and limitations of CF's remote offerings, and their strategies for building and maintaining relationships during the pandemic. Overall, fieldwork observations enabled me to observe shifts in participation, how the community adapted, and how community-level frames were collectively negotiated and put forth, especially by leaders. The interviews were essential for understanding how members thought about the shift, the community, and their involvement (Pugh 2013). By engaging in ethnographic interviewing, I was able to bring immersive knowledge gleaned from fieldwork to bear in interviews and create opportunities for revisiting past participation and anticipating future participation (Rinaldo and Guhin 2019), which shed light on how reframing works in practice.

FINDINGS

The findings are organized as follows. First, I describe the CF community prior to the pandemic, and how the experience of community changed when Western (and CF) became remote. I outline the main participation shifts: many core members moved on (becoming less engaged with group activities) while periphery members moved in (becoming more engaged with group activities, and sometimes becoming core members). I then group members by three pre-pandemic

frames and outline how each of these groups engaged in reframing processes that drove their participation patterns.

CF in settled times: Striving to be a beautiful community

When I began fieldwork in September 2019, I visited CF's weekly worship gathering, which had about 40 students in attendance. Attendees hugged, prayed for, and teased each other, lingering long after the meeting ended to chat, putting off their problem sets that were due at midnight. Half a dozen students came up to greet me (a newcomer), inviting me to their small groups and fall retreat that was happening the following weekend. Given that CF is embedded within a prestigious American university where time is scarce and students are chronically overcommitted, this communal ethos seemed countercultural. I soon learned that this is intentional: the group's strategy to make their religious beliefs compelling to the (secular) campus is to cultivate a family-like atmosphere with a dense web of social ties. For example, the campus minister often told stories about non-religious students who had joined the group because they observed how CF members loved one another and wanted to have such friendships. While the group doesn't "do community" perfectly, most students I interviewed (both new and longtime members) cited "community" as CF's greatest strength.

The group is marked by both communal and personal intimacy. Core members are attached to the group itself as their primary source of community in college, and they are attached to specific co-members who they consider to be their best friends. Because the shared purpose is religious and most members consider faith to be their most important identity, the group has a strong, shared moral order (Vaisey 2007) as well as a dense network of strong ties (Granovetter 1973). For example, core members often build lifelong friendships and find future spouses within the group.

Like most social groups, CF has both core and periphery members. Seth, one of the student leaders, explained CF's structure to me in an interview:

> **Seth:** I kind of think of CF as, there's the core core people and then there's the regular CF people. And then there's the fringy CF people.
> **Krystal:** And the core are the people who are at everything?
> **Seth**: Yes. These are people like Mara and Isaac [lists other names]. These are people who are...You see them a lot in CF and who are committed to CF.
> **Krystal:** Are frosh [freshmen] ever in the core, or do you kind of have to wait and see if they stick around?
> **Seth:** Um, I would, I would not put frosh in the core. And Greg [the campus minister] doesn't either. He doesn't ever think of a frosh as committed to CF. Even sophomores are usually not in the core…

Core members frame CF as their primary organizational commitment and as a beautiful community, while periphery members frame CF as one of many commitments, and "fringe" members frame it as barely on their (communal) radar.

Shared physical space played a critical role in the communal life of CF. Most Western students (>90%) live on campus for all four years. Beyond intentional time together at CF gatherings, members have serendipitous interactions through being in the same classes, eating at the same dining halls, and working out at the same gyms. In some sense, co-living on campus is even more intense than in neighborhoods because elite, private universities are near-total, quasi-sovereign institutions where most aspects of life - work, play, civil society, the intimate sphere - co-occur on campus (Goffman 1961; Eaton and Stevens 2019; Stevens, Armstrong and Arum 2008).

Flavia, one of the few core members who did have substantial social commitments outside of CF, explained to me:

> If you wanted to do something with CF, you could do something every day. It's insane…Most students at Western would never sign up for that. They are like, "I don't have that kind of time." But CF somehow manages to have well attended events pretty much every day of the week.

She listed out a typical week: church Sunday, large group Monday, life group Thursday, prayer meeting Friday, and game night Saturday. I watched this high frequency of interaction play out over the first 6 months of in-person fieldwork. For example, before going to large group, I would see CF members in the dining hall, eating together. Then, members would linger after group, breaking off into smaller subsets to work on homework, or grabbing late night meals at Western's burger joint. Members were often roommates with each other, and one house ("the Quad") had an "open-door" policy where any CF member could come visit anytime. When attending small group, I noticed other CF small groups co-occurring next door (on the floor where all the campus religious organizations have offices). When my small group ended, members of the other groups would wander in to chat. In short, propinquity, composition, and configuration all worked together for CF members (Small and Adler 2017), fostering thick community with a strong sense of purpose.

The shift to community scattered

In March 2020, the president of the university announced that students heading home for spring break should bring their important belongings because it was unclear when they would be able to return to campus. I attended CF's final, in-person worship gathering on March 11:

> The tone of large group was heavy tonight, as students weighed the decision of whether to go home, many preparing to do so. Passion was high as students belted out songs. For the last song, Esther said: "sing this as a praise to God, praising him with all that you are." The campus minister chimed in: "This may be your last song with CF for a very long time, so be sure to give it your all." The leaders put down instruments, leaving only a chorus of voices. At the end, there was a pregnant pause. After a moment, Brad turned to Esther and said, "I can just feel God so palpably in this room. I can *feel* Him!" (fieldnotes)

The very next week, they had their first remote gathering on Zoom. The change was significant:

> Twenty-six students attended; half had their video on. Ruth played opening songs; a few others sang while muted. The gap between this and last week's singing was stark. Greg gave a short devotional, then put people in breakout rooms for prayer. In person, prayer is embodied: a student stands close to a friend, puts an arm around their shoulder, and they pray together. The breakout room, by contrast, was awkward. Kari had her video off and said she couldn't talk but would write in the chat. Lila followed - she did not want to talk

> either. Rea responded that her laptop was about to die, so she may drop off at any point. Back with the entire group, Greg closed the "official" gathering but invited folks to stay on and keep talking. He did a round of check-ins, asking individuals how they are doing. The easy flow of lingering conversations that happen after a normal meeting was replaced with a single, stilted conversation. Individuals petered out slowly, but a core group stayed on to talk well into the night. (fieldnotes)

Most of Western's student groups stopped meeting entirely – some for a month, others for a year. CF, in contrast, chose to persist and adapted rapidly to an online format. The group's main offerings, such as weekly worship gatherings, small groups, and prayer gatherings moved to Zoom, a video conference platform. They attempted to recreate informal social gathering space through online game nights. Doing religious activities online is challenging, because embodiment is a fundamental aspect of religious practice (Ammerman 2020). Some sacraments, such as baptism or communion, cannot transfer online. Other practices, such as musical worship and prayer, can persist, but much of the power of embodied, collective rituals is lost in an online format.

Given these dynamics, I expected CF attendance at group gatherings would decline rapidly, as students either focused on their closest friends or reconnected with physically proximate communities in their hometowns. In an interview, I asked the campus minister if he was worried that involvement with CF would peter out. He was optimistic:

> You'll appreciate this sociologically. When people have to sacrifice for a community it strengthens the community. And so, the fact that CF is less convenient now means that it's more significant that people are prioritizing it. To the extent that they are…So I would say, and this is still up in the air, how much this is gonna work out numerically.

That said, he did note key limitations:

> What is missing, I think, is serendipity. Both on the community front and the evangelism front. On the community front, the way the relationships are built is a combination of planned and unplanned occurrences, right? That is, if you were involved in CF for four years as an undergrad, and all you ever did was come to large group and life group - you probably would graduate and hopefully have fond memories of us, but you would not graduate with "*my best friends are in CF*". That's part of the framework. But there's also got to be the, you're in the dining hall, and you say: "oh, hey, hey, you!" Then you sit down and have lunch together. And then you wind up with taking a class one day together, you

> happen to be in the same study groups, all these little incidental things that that life is woven out of. That's going to happen much less organically this quarter.

In short, Greg expected the possibility of increased commitment, but also challenges on the "community front" due to loss of serendipity. What played out over the months to follow was puzzling. In fieldnotes, I often wrote things such as: "Mara has been strangely absent – I wonder what is up with her. Maybe wedding prep stuff? Isaac missed as well." Mara and Isaac are seniors, so I knew they may drop off a few months early, despite how unusual this would be in any other year and how important CF was to them. But other seniors, like Asher and Diego, maintained a consistent presence, and some, like Corina, moved *into* the core despite impending graduation. Further, the periphery members who moved in were not the ones I expected: students whose commitment to CF was ambivalent while on campus or who were barely involved with CF prior to the pandemic.

The findings that follow document and describe the reasons behind these changes. I argue that commitment precedes community – not the other way around – and commitment stems from reflecting on past frames to update present frames. I begin with the core members who moved on and compare them to those who maintained their commitment to CF to show how their frames evolved differently over time. I then discuss what happened with periphery and new members who moved in, outlining why and how reframing led them to deepen their participation.

From CF as *beautiful community*[3] to CF as *not what it once was:* Core members moving on

Though many core members dropped off, I was most perplexed by Mara and Isaac's disappearance from large group gatherings. Unlike other core members, who focused mostly on their best friends in the group, Mara and Isaac framed CF as a beautiful community worth

[3] The term "beautiful community" is an intentional reference to Small's (2002) terminology wherein older residents in Villa Victoria saw the neighborhood as a "beautiful place to live".

sacrificing for. Prior to the pandemic, Mara told me that she was disappointed by others who "only hang out with each other" rather than being mentors and reaching out to new members. Mara and Isaac were both highly looked up to as leaders. I did not think that anything could affect their investment in the community prior to their graduation, given their desire to "leave a legacy" at Western through CF.

After noticing her absence for a couple of weeks, I reached out to Mara for a phone call. She told me: "I have felt really disengaged this quarter…it feels like it's time to move on from Western." She went on to explain that she is in a "totally different life stage" from others in the group, and "there is nothing more to gain from CF" (fieldnote, 4-19-2020). What is notable here is the stark shift in Mara's *frame* of CF. While before, she focused on what she could give, here she says that there is "nothing more to gain." While before, deep engagement in CF's communal rhythms was taken for granted, now she could not bring herself to log onto Zoom large group. The lens through which she saw CF changed from *beautiful community* to *not what it once was.*

A similar reframing process occurred with Isaac. I asked him, in April, how his involvement with CF had changed: "I kind of feel like I'm on the way out anyway. And it's really sad cause you didn't really get to say goodbye, there's no closure at all." He went on to say:

> I think that CF is doing an interesting job because, where I am right now, I don't really feel like talking to people that much. Yet, I still want to tune into CF, and I look forward to that. It's been cool seeing how well life groups work online. Which is a surprise to me.

In person, Isaac is gregarious and charismatic, and he loves talking to people. This disengagement from the social aspect of the group (where he would watch the sermon but skip the Zoom lobby afterward) occurred because his frame for CF changed. He told me:

> You start to…a lot of my friends when I was in CF before were older people. Since my freshman year, I've really enjoyed hanging out with these older guys that have a lot of wisdom that I can learn from. And so, this year as a whole has kind of felt like…most of my closest friends are now graduated. I still - I still love people. And I know a lot of people,

> and have been getting to know a lot of them. And they're always the people in your class too…But I guess they don't feel gone to me yet.

The phrasing here is important. Isaac begins ("you start to…") and then trails off to explain how CF is different now than it was in past years. This is evidence of reframing, where Isaac starts to rethink what CF means to him, which in turn shapes how he engages with the group. Notably, he is not suggesting that things are different *online* (which he is overall pleased with), but rather that the *entire year* is "the year where his friends had already graduated." Before the spatial shift, his focus was on the co-members he mentored, not the ones that had already graduated. He did not question his place in the community: Isaac knew everyone, sang the loudest, and cracked jokes during sermons. When CF changed, his position changed. His role was not what it once was, which led him to reframe CF as "not what it once was."

Some core members who were juniors also disengaged when CF changed. Like Mara and Isaac, they viewed CF as a uniquely beautiful community on campus prior to the pandemic. Flavia told me: "CF is the most genuine community I have found on campus." Foundin said: "CF is the absolute best thing on the planet." They, too, invested in specific friendships with co-members and the overall community. For example, Finny (one of Foundin's best friends and housemates) told me about his role in the group prior to the pandemic:

> At one point I felt pretty strongly that I wanted to, and should, invest in creating some sense of community. So, it's a lot of trying to get people together, which, I don't think was the only contributing factor, but looking back I do think it was helpful, because we do have a pretty tight class group, at least for the juniors. As time went on, it's just less pressing of an issue, because once we had that done, it's kind of like, I'm not particularly motivated to try to create community for a super broad circle - even though I still think it's a good thing. It's just hard when you live with your three best friends, which is really fun.

Similar to Mara and Amos, Finny sees himself as someone who helped make CF a beautiful

community and who gets to enjoy the fruits of that labor. This highlights an important point: members' frames of the community are closely interconnected with how the community allows them to see themselves.[4] The more central a group is for one's own sense of purpose, the more likely one is to frame the group as beautiful, transcendent, and worth sacrificing for. A spatial shift not only changes how the community operates; it also changes the place of core members. Finny said: "most of the people that I talk to are still CF people, but the size of my social circle has shrunk considerably because there's just only so much time in a day." He participated in fewer group events and stayed in touch with fewer co-members.

Finny focused on spatially proximate relationships instead:

> I feel very fortunate because I get along really well with my parents. And hanging out with them is like what I was saying before, living in the Quad with my three best friends. Now, I feel like I am just living with two of my best friends, my sisters, so it's kind of like I don't feel the need to connect to other people like I do at Western.

Finny is engaged in reframing: by coming to see his sisters as best friends and recreating what CF provided through his family, he also began to see CF as *not what it once was.* Foundin also stopped attending group events, even though he did not have a physically proximate community. He said: "I lived by myself in a cabin in the woods, which was pretty wack." He did not see the point in joining CF events online, because it was nothing like the experience of community that he had with CF while at Western. In short, many core members, especially those who saw CF as beautiful and who were perceived as leaders by the rest of the group, reframed CF as "not what it once was" and disengaged from group events.

The importance of reframing as a driving factor behind participation shifts becomes even more clear when we consider core members who did not drop off. Diego (a junior), for example,

[4] I thank Cathy Sirois for this insight.

remained equally engaged in group events, attending large group and small group every week online. But Diego had a different frame of CF prior to the change. CF had been his primary community throughout college, but the journey had been rockier. He had a falling out with Finny his freshman year and significant roommate conflict with Seth his junior year. He was not part of "the Quad" that Finny and Foundin were in. Diego's frame for CF was one of *tempered beauty,* rather than transcendent beauty. His attachment to the group itself was high, but his network was not marked by as strong of ties as core members like Mara, Isaac, Finny, and Foundin. When things changed, his frame remained consistent: CF is imperfect but worth sacrificing for. Other core members maintained or increased participation because they took on *more* central roles in the shift to an online format. For example, Esther (a sophomore), said that she was "bumped up leadership-wise" because Greg chose her to help him coordinate events for other international students. Because she took on a central leadership role, she continued to see the community as "beautiful" and "worth sacrificing for" even though she, like Finny, was close to her family and participating was often inconvenient. For example, she often joined large group at 4AM local time in addition to attending the large group for international students, which highlights her high commitment to participation.

Multiple factors influenced core members reframing processes: their timelines of organizational exit, the availability of spatially proximate community, shifts in informal leadership, and what CF meant to them prior to the change. Reframing is the process in which they made sense of CF and their place in it during this time of change. It is a cohering process, wherein various changes (positive and negative) are brought together into an overarching frame that then guides members' decisions around whether and how to participate in communal rhythms. When CF was reframed as *not what it once was,* core members' participation in CF declined.

From CF as *one of many commitments* to CF as *a beautiful community*

The process of reframing not only explains why core members drop off in the face of change, it also plays a central role in periphery members moving in during times of change, deepening their commitment to groups that previously played only a small role in their lives. I start this section with the case of Corina, who moved in and became a core member when CF shifted to an online format. Corina's case is striking because she was a senior when the pandemic hit.

Corina spent her first three years of college involved with Hope Ministry (another large Christian fellowship on campus) but became disillusioned with the group over time and sought a new fellowship her senior year. In explaining her decision to increase her involvement with CF as it shifted to an online format, she told me:

> What I really enjoy about CF is I feel like I can get poured into so much. I feel like people are praying for me, and I know people are praying for me in a way that I didn't get the impression of in Hope. I also feel like I get to contribute wisdom and little nuggets. My small group has gotten a lot closer since quarantine.

Just as core members compare their online experience of CF to the experience they had with CF on campus, Corina compares her online experience of CF to the (lack of) community she experienced in Hope. Corina became a core member her senior year and stayed deeply involved the following year while she did a one-year masters at Western, even though almost everyone else in her class had moved on already. On campus, she had been ambivalent about CF. But at home, during quarantine, CF large group and small group gatherings were what she had left. CF filled gaps created by the pandemic, leading her to see the community as beautiful and invest more time in group events. Through this investment of time, she cultivated new friendships, often with people she likely would not have been friends with on campus (such as underclassmen).

Another CF member who moved in, Mateo, was a freshman when the pandemic hit. Unlike core members whose only community on campus was CF, Mateo had a robust social life with his

dorm friends. We were in the same small group, which met on Friday evenings. Halfway through group, he would start checking phone and looking at the door. “Sorry to leave early, all,” he would interject during a lull in the conversation. “But I’ve got to get this basketball game…” There were some freshmen who seemed likely to become the next “core” for CF. Mateo was not one of these: he was as comfortable drinking beer with dormmates as he was at worship gatherings. While some made plans to live with other CF members their sophomore year, Mateo prioritized dorm friends.

Things changed after CF moved online, and Mateo’s uptick in participation was as surprising as Mara’s early exit. Mateo quickly became more committed to small group, lingering long after the official meeting ended and joining a Bible reading plan with Diego, his small group leader. He got on the radar of CF’s student leadership team and was invited to join the team and represent the younger classes. He quickly became one of the core members of the group. Diego explained to me in an interview:

> CF for me was literally two hours a week [on campus]. I didn’t know a lot of people outside my life group until spring, when Western was canceled. The dorm was a big source of social events and community in general – until I realized that [the dorm] is not a lasting community. There is nothing that binds us besides we live in the same place for X amount of time. The community broke down after COVID hit. That’s when I realized, I need to invest more in CF, because this is a community that lasts beyond years, and has a central devotion to God that is strong and that doesn’t go away after you go home. Out of all the clubs that I was in, the only one that met after COVID was CF.

Just as students like Mara, Isaac, and Foundin saw CF as a transcendent community, Diego initially saw his dorm as a transcendent community. But the dorm community fizzled out when co-living stopped, and Diego realized that the dorm “is not a lasting community.” Likewise, his framing of CF shifted – CF went from one of many commitments to a community that “lasts beyond years.” Because Diego did not experience transcendent community in CF before the pandemic, he was impressed with the post-pandemic offerings (which fell flat for many core

members). He told me, with a chuckle, “whereas before Western provided community on its own, now we [CF] are offering a product that is even more in demand than it was on campus.”

This process played out with several others. Lola, a first-generation college student, was similar to Mateo. In small group, she chatted with other women about how she likes dorm parties, even though she does not drink, because she gets to “play mom” for her friends and take care of them. Her initial perspective on CF was mixed. She told me, “I love CF, but sometimes it does feel like it’s a safe haven for Christians who feel like they can’t be friends with non-Christians.” But when the pandemic hit, CF was what Lola had left. This was especially pronounced because she took a year off school after struggling academically with doing classes remotely. She expressed in an interview:

> CF was a really big community during the time of being home for COVID. I definitely was going to services every week and life group was super helpful. And it just helped me maintain that sense of normalcy and friendships.... My sophomore year, I'm on a gap year, a leave of absence. My CF friendships have been the one that I've maintained the most. And I've actually gotten closer to some people at CF through being online than I was on campus, which has been cool.

Lola’s perspective of CF shifted because it met a crucial need (enabling her to maintain a connection to Western) while she was on a leave of absence. Because of this, she came to frame CF as a beautiful community rather than one that she was ambivalent about. Before, she thought CF pulled Christian students away from overall campus culture. But during the pandemic, CF allowed her to *maintain* a tie to Western when she was otherwise distant due to her leave of absence. CF provided community in a time of isolation, deepening Lola’s commitment to the group. Even when her leave of absence ended and she returned to campus, CF continued to be her core community, because she had established a new frame for the group as a beautiful community.

From CF as *barely on the radar* to CF as *beautiful community*

Even more surprising than periphery members moving in was “fringe” members moving in (individuals who were uninvolved or barely involved with CF before the pandemic). For example, consider Kevin (a junior), who in six months of in-person observations, I had never seen at CF. During the first month in which CF had shifted to an online format, Kevin became one of the most active and committed participants in Zoom gatherings. In an interview, he explained:

> My first few years at Western, I was not very involved in CF. It didn't start until this year, that I was super involved. But what was really amazing about CF for me was that everyone was super, super nice to me. [Later in the interview] Communicating with friends across the country is really, really hard. And CF has worked really hard to make sure that we all stay together as a tight-knit community. We have the zoom lobby after [gatherings] and we talk till 12:30am. It's very similar to the college experience that I always…that I've had, and I have always wanted.

As with periphery members, CF provided a way for Kevin to maintain his connection to Western, despite his physical distance from the campus. Beyond that, it also met his need for friendship. He said: “CF has filled the whole missing friend void in my life.” While core members focused on all that had been lost in the shift to a remote format, students like Kevin experienced CF online as a tight-knit community where conversations lasted deep into the night. CF went from being barely on Kevin’s radar to a beautiful community that he identified strongly with.

Cal, who was also a junior when the pandemic hit, had a similar trajectory as Kevin. He said:

> I'll be honest, I've actually been really enjoying these zoom worship sessions. And the small groups and the random community time after watching the livestream together. I've been really getting to know people a lot more, I've been getting a lot closer to people. Because, for context, I basically wasn't part of CF for the first two years of being at Western, which means all the friendships that people form early on - I was kind of trying to jump in from the outside. So, I've always felt like an outsider in the group. And so, zoom as a format, just - you can't really have cliques over zoom, you know, you get put in a breakout room and you're just in that breakout room of people, you have good conversation, you pray for each other. It's a very positive experience.

The remote format CF embodied during the early months of the pandemic brought unique affordances (Evans et al. 2017; Davis and Chouinard 2016). While some core members (like Isaac) experienced their central position in the group being flattened online, fringe members like Cal and Kevin benefitted from the equal opportunities for participation and breakdown of cliques. Here, too, we see how framing comes into play for divergent interpretations of common experiences. While core members framed randomized breakout rooms as a failure to achieve the organic community CF had in person, newcomers saw this as a "very positive experience," as Cal notes.

The final example I highlight in this section is Autumn, a junior who had never attended a CF gathering prior to the pandemic, nor been involved with any sort of religious fellowship on campus. She explained her entrance to CF as follows:

> It was during that time [spring 2020] that I felt really open to new things. And once I got an email from Ellie about the pen pal thing.[5] I was like, I love writing letters. I would love to do that. And it would also be cool to get involved with CF somehow because it was always in the background in my mind like "okay, CF, a little bit shy. I don't know what this is about." And I also lived across the hall from Esther - I never reached out to her but she always had a sign on her door that said "ask me about God" or something. I was always really close to asking her about God and wanting to go to one of those worship nights. But I don't know why, something stopped me every time. So, I'm just really grateful for that openness during that time.

Whereas Kevin framed CF as a beautiful community because it filled his friend void and loved the group Zoom gatherings, Autumn valued the potential for a more tentative entrance to the group that was created by spatial distance. But upon entering, she quickly came to frame CF as a beautiful community. She told me:

> I wasn't sure what small group was going to be like, through zoom especially, and the minute I joined, I just felt so welcomed. And such a warm community - that just really was impressed upon me. And I wasn't expecting that at all. And I just felt like, 'ah, why, why didn't I join this years ago?' It felt really special.

[5] Autumn received an email because she was on CF's listserv, even though she had never been to an event. It is common at Western to join many group listservs, especially early in college, when students are not sure what type of groups they want to be a part of. Being on the listserv shows that Autumn did have some interest in CF, but as the quote highlights, she was tentative about actually getting involved prior to the pandemic.

Autumn is engaged in reframing, in that CF was warmer and less intimidating than she had imagined the group would be when she lived on campus. While she was hesitant about a digitally mediated small group, it exceeded her expectations, leading her to see CF as a "special" and beautiful community that she wished she had joined long ago.

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of individuals' reframing processes to understand why some members become more engaged and others less engaged in the face of community-level shifts. Many core members who viewed CF as a beautiful, transcendent community before the pandemic dropped off. This is because they compared the new version of CF to their past experience of CF, and it did not measure up. This made participation difficult to sustain, as they were constantly reminded of all that had been lost in the change. By contrast, periphery members who had ambivalent views of CF, and saw it as one of many commitments prior to the shift, often deepened their engagement. CF continued when these other commitments fizzled out, leading them to see CF as more beautiful than they previously thought. Likewise, new and "fringe" members, for whom CF was barely on the radar, were surprised by the thick community they experienced during livestream worship watch parties, Zoom small groups, and pen pal programs. In the discussion, I zoom out from these specific findings to consider the scope conditions and limitations of this study as well as how reframing may shape participation in other communal and organizational settings. I conclude by considering the implications of these findings for theorizing on frames.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This article draws on the case of a college-based religious fellowship that underwent a significant spatial shift, from physically proximate to community "scattered," to examine the

broader question of how communal participation can be sustained in the face of change. Building on existing scholarship that highlights the centrality of frames for understanding participation in a variety of settings (Johnston and Noakes 2005; Small 2002; Snow 2013), I examine how members update their frames when their community undergoes a shift (in this case, the loss of physical co-presence and shift to a remote format). This process, which I call *reframing,* resolves the empirical puzzle I observed wherein core members moved on and periphery members moved in. While frames of the community as "beautiful" and "transcendent" sustain high participation in settled times, these very frames can act as a liability when community-level shifts occur. Core members who loved the group most in person, could not help but compare the changed group to what they once had. By contrast, individuals with more tempered or ambivalent views of the community, as "one of many commitments" or "barely on the radar" develop *more* positive frames when the community underwent a collective change, coming to see it as beautiful in comparison to their other experiences of community or past perceptions of the group.

The member cases that I highlighted show that a variety of factors come together to influence the reframing process in the face of change. These factors include orientations towards digital platforms (such as Zoom), network shifts (gaining or losing friendships), the availability of spatially proximate communities, and organizational timelines (such as whether organizational exit is near at hand). I argue that the process of reframing has explanatory power for participation patterns because people cohere around overarching frames for specific communities that encapsulate these factors. Reframing is the work of deciding on a guiding lens that one can rely on to decide whether to show up for community-wide events and sacrifice time for a group more broadly. It is the process of answering the question: what does this community mean to me *now*?

These findings deepen our understanding of framing as a dynamic process, highlighting its fundamentally *temporal* nature wherein people compare their present experiences of community to specific reference points in the past (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) and anticipations for the future (Tavory and Eliasoph 2013). Whether the changed community exceeds, meets, or fails to measure up to individuals' reference points shapes participation patterns. My argument is that the dialectic between prior and present frames is a primary factor that drives changes in participation. These findings were developed in reference to a specific case: a collegiate fellowship that shifted to a remote format during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although I believe these findings have relevance beyond the present case, this case has limitations that merit discussion in order to clarify the broader implications.

There are two major scope conditions with regards to the broader, theoretical question of how communal participation can be sustained in the face of collective shifts. First, I focus on participation in a *communal organization*. As such, these findings are more directly applicable to other communal organizations – such as some nonprofits, associational groups, churches, and social movement groups - than they are to geographic communities (e.g., neighborhoods) where much existing participation scholarship has taken place (Small 2002; Rosen 2017). Further, this communal organization is embedded within a broader institutional context (a university). While most communal organizations are embedded in broader institutional fields (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; DiMaggio and Powell 1983), for a collegiate group, the institution is near at hand. Thus, these findings may be particularly relevant for groups embedded in broader organizations[6] as well as other religious or educational settings (Ammerman 2020; Stevens, Armstrong and Arum 2009).

[6] For example, these findings may be relevant for social movement groups that are embedded within firms (Soule 2012), hospitals (Kellogg 2009), or universities (Soule 1997; Zhao 1998).

In addition, I focus on a specific kind of collective change: the shift from physically proximate to physically remote due to a global pandemic. This spatial change is particularly relevant in modern times. A pandora's box has opened as individuals have grown accustomed to working, learning, socializing, and worshiping from home. As organizations reopen their physical doors and buildings (or choose to stay remote), the response of their members is ambivalent. Church attendance, for example, is 30% to 50% lower than it was before the pandemic (Adamy 2021). In the educational realm, as many as 3 million students disappeared in 2020, many of whom are from marginalized groups (Litvinov 2021). In the corporate sector, many companies (especially in high-tech) have made permanent changes to being "remote-first" (Brex), "virtual first" (Dropbox), declaring "office-centricity over" (Shopify) and allowing people to work "where they are most productive" (Zillow) (Stoller 2021). But the results of these shifts are unclear. Bloom (forthcoming), for example, finds that remote working conditions have minimal effects on men but negative effects on professional outcomes for women. My findings suggest that some of these broader trends, such as lower church and school attendance, may be primarily attributable to frame shifts. Reclaiming people may require a strategy that addresses both prior and present frames, presenting a compelling vision for the future that shows the value of physical co-presence and is compelling to those who are currently oriented towards "moving on." Prior frames may need to be restored for participants to return, which is something for organizations with dwindling membership to consider.

But communal organizations undergo many other kinds of collective changes, such as leader transitions, mission changes, or shifts in institutional context. The reframing process outlined here likely applies in these settings as well. Nonprofit and social movement scholars, for example, might examine whether those who are most committed to and have the highest view of

their organizations struggle most with adapting to leader turnover. As another example, neighborhoods regularly undergo changes in their spatial layouts, such as the establishment and dissolution of central gathering spaces and institutions (coffeeshops, barbershops, libraries, parks, etc.) (Klinenberg 2018). Further work may consider how spatial change at this level affects neighborhood participation and communal ties (Small and Adler 2017). In a more extreme sense, climate change and natural disasters fundamentally alter places in ways that communities must grapple with. How member and citizen participation evolve in the face of these challenges is an important area for future research (Klinenberg et al. 2020).

To conclude, I briefly consider how these findings advance recent theorizing on frame analysis. Wood et al. (2018:252) suggest that we think of frames as "situational assemblages of material objects that evoke certain responses from individuals, in part by activating particular sets of schemas." But this dialogue between external frames and internal schemas is not automatic. Framing not only applies to the groups assembling frames, but also occurs within persons as they pull together external and internal information to develop working lenses for how to act in the present (Small, Harding and Lamont 2010; Winchester and Guhin 2019). As Simon (1997) noted, rational decision making is costly and time consuming; thus, rationality is always bounded. Internal framing is the setting of these bounds. Individuals who are part of any community need a general frame for that community that makes day-to-day participation decisions easier, the community as "beautiful" or "flawed," as "worth sacrificing for" or "not what it once was." In times of community-level change, *reframing* encapsulates the process of reflecting on past instantiations of community, as well as hopes and anticipations for future community, to refashion working lenses that can guide participation decisions in the present.

REFERENCES

Adamy, Janet. 2021, December 5th. “Post-pandemic, will church ever be the same?” *Wall Street Journal.* Retrieved from: https://www.wsj.com/story/post-pandemic-will-church-ever-be-the-same-b5ffdcf8

Ammerman, Nancy T. 2020. "Rethinking religion: Toward a practice approach." *American Journal of Sociology* 126, no. 1: 6-51.

Benford, Robert D., and David A. Snow. 2000. "*Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment.*" *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, no. 1: 611-639.

Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor.

Boutyline, Andrei, and Laura K. Soter. 2021. "*Cultural schemas: What they are, how to find them, and what to do once you’ve caught one.*" *American Sociological Review* 86, no. 4: 728-758.

Brint, Steven. 2001. "*Gemeinschaft revisited: A critique and reconstruction of the community concept.*" *Sociological Theory* 19, no. 1: 1-23.

Christin, Angèle, and Rebecca Lewis. 2021. "*The drama of metrics: Status, spectacle, and resistance among YouTube drama creators.*" *Social Media+ Society* 7, no. 1.

Davis, Jenny L., and James B. Chouinard. 2016. "*Theorizing affordances: From request to refuse.*" *Bulletin of science, technology & society* 36, no. 4: 241-248.

Desmond, Matthew. 2008. *On the fireline*. University of Chicago Press.

DiMaggio, Paul J., and Walter W. Powell. 1983. "*The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields.*" *American Sociological Review*: 147-160.

Eaton, Charlie, and Mitchell L. Stevens. 2020. "*Universities as peculiar organizations.*" *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 3: e12768.

Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Ann Mische. 1998. "*What is agency?*" *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4:962-1023.

Evans, Sandra K., Katy E. Pearce, Jessica Vitak, and Jeffrey W. Treem. 2017. *"Explicating affordances: A conceptual framework for understanding affordances in communication research.*" *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 22, no. 1: 35-52.

Fine, Gary Alan. 1987. *With the boys: Little league baseball and preadolescent culture*. University of Chicago Press.

Fischer, Claude S. 1994. *America calling: A social history of the telephone to 1940*. University of California Press.

Flaherty, Jeremy, and Ralph B. Brown. 2010. “A multilevel systemic model of community attachment: Assessing the relative importance of the community and individual levels.” *American Journal of Sociology* 116, no. 2: 503-542.

Fligstein, Neil, and Doug McAdam. 2012. *A theory of fields*. Oxford University Press.

Gieryn, Thomas F. 2000. “*A space for place in sociology.” Annual Review of Sociology* 26, no. 1: 463-496.

Goffman, Erving. 1968. *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. Aldine Transaction.

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.

Granovetter, Mark S. 1973. "*The strength of weak ties.*" *American journal of sociology* 78, no. 6:1360-1380.

Guhin, Jeffrey. 2014. "Religion as site rather than religion as category: On the sociology of religion's export problem." Sociology of Religion 75, no. 4: 579-593.

Hamilton, William A., Oliver Garretson, and Andruid Kerne. 2014. "Streaming on twitch: fostering participatory communities of play within live mixed media." In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems*, pp. 1315-1324.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 2010. "The new politics of community." *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 1: 7-30.

Hillery, George A. 1982. *A research odyssey: Developing and testing a community theory.* Transaction Publishers.

Johnston, Hank, and John A. 2005. Noakes, eds. *Frames of protest: Social movements and the framing perspective*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1968. "*Commitment and social organization: A study of commitment mechanisms in utopian communities.*" *American Sociological Review*: 499-517.

Kellogg, Katherine C. 2009. "*Operating room: Relational spaces and microinstitutional change in surgery." American Journal of Sociology* 115, no. 3: 657-711.

Klinenberg, Eric. 2018. *Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life*. Crown.

Klinenberg, Eric, Malcolm Araos, and Liz Koslov. 2020. "*Sociology and the climate crisis*." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46: 649-669.

Lichterman, Paul. 2008. "*Religion and the construction of civic identity.*" *American Sociological Review* 73, no. 1: 83-104.

Lichterman, Paul, and Nina Eliasoph. 2014. "*Civic action.*" *American Journal of Sociology* 120, no. 3: 798-863.

Lizardo, Omar. 2017. "Improving cultural analysis: Considering personal culture in its declarative and nondeclarative modes." *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 1: 88-115.

McAdam, Doug. 1986. "*Recruitment to high-risk activism: The case of freedom summer*." *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 1: 64-90.

McRoberts, Omar M. 2003. *Streets of glory: Church and community in a black urban neighborhood*. University of Chicago Press.

Litvinov, Amanda. 2021, July 8th. "Finding the Lost Students of the Pandemic." *National Education Association.* Retrieved from: https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/finding-lost-students-pandemic

Törnqvist, Maria. 2021. "Communal Intimacy: Formalization, Egalitarianism, and Exchangeability in Collective Housing." *Social Forces* 100, no. 1: 273-292.

Park, Robert E., and Ernest W. Burgess. 2019. *The city*. University of Chicago Press.

Polletta, Francesca. 1999. "*Snarls, quacks, and quarrels: Culture and structure in political process theory.*" In *Sociological Forum*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 63-70. Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers.

Pugh, Allison J. 2013. "*What good are interviews for thinking about culture? Demystifying interpretive analysis*." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 1: 42-68.

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon and Schuster.

Rainie, Harrison, and Barry Wellman. 2014. *Networked: The new social operating system*. Vol. 419. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Rheingold, Howard. 2000. *The Virtual Community, revised edition: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. MIT press.

Rinaldo, Rachel, and Jeffrey Guhin. 2019. "How and why interviews work: Ethnographic interviews and meso-level public culture." Sociological Methods & Research: 0049124119882471.

Rosen, Eva. 2017. "*Horizontal immobility: how narratives of neighborhood violence shape housing decisions.*" *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 2: 270-296.

Sampson, Robert J. 1988. "*Local friendship ties and community attachment in mass society: A multilevel systemic model.*" *American Sociological Review*: 766-779.

Sampson, Robert J. 1991. "Linking the micro-and macrolevel dimensions of community social organization." *Social Forces* 70, no. 1 (1991): 43-64.

Sampson, R. J., Morenoff, J. D., & Earls, F. 1999. Beyond social capital: Spatial dynamics of collective efficacy for children. *American Sociological Review*, 633-660.

Simmel, Georg. [1908] 2009. *Sociology: Inquiries into the construction of social forms (2 Vols.)*. Brill.

Simon, Herbert. 1997. *Administrative Behavior, 4th edition.* Free Press

Small, Mario Luis. 2002. "*Culture, cohorts, and social organization theory: Understanding local participation in a Latino housing project.*" *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 1: 1-54.

Small, Mario Luis. 2009. "*How many cases do I need?' On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research.*" *Ethnography* 10, no. 1: 5-38.

Small, Mario Luis, David J. Harding, and Michèle Lamont. 2010. "Reconsidering culture and poverty." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 629, no. 1: 6-27.

Small, Mario L., and Laura Adler. 2019. "*The role of space in the formation of social ties.*" *Annual Review of Sociology* 45: 111-132.

Snow, David A. 2013. "Framing and social movements." *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*.

Stevens, Mitchell L., Elizabeth A. Armstrong, and Richard Arum. 2008. "*Sieve, incubator, temple, hub: Empirical and theoretical advances in the sociology of higher education*." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34:127-151.

Stoller, Kristin. 2021, January 31. "Never want to go back to the office? Here's where you should work." *Forbes.* Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/sites/kristinstoller/2021/01/31/never-want-to-go-back-to-the-office-heres-where-you-should-work/?sh=22e19f536712

Swidler, Ann. 1986. "*Culture in action: Symbols and strategies*." *American sociological review*: 273-286.

Tavory, Iddo, and Nina Eliasoph. 2013. "*Coordinating futures: Toward a theory of anticipation.*" *American Journal of Sociology* 118, no. 4: 908-942.

Taylor, T. L. 2018. *Watch me play: Twitch and the rise of game live streaming*. Princeton University Press.

Timmermans, Stefan, and Iddo Tavory. 2012. "*Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis.*" *Sociological Theory* 30, no. 3: 167-186.

Tocqueville, Alexis De. 2003. *Democracy in America: And two essays on America*. Penguin UK.

Törnqvist, Maria. 2021. "Communal Intimacy: Formalization, Egalitarianism, and Exchangeability in Collective Housing." *Social Forces* 100, no. 1: 273-292.

Vaisey, Stephen. 2007. "*Structure, culture, and community: The search for belonging in 50 urban communes.*" *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6: 851-873.

Wellman, Barry. 1979. "*The community question: The intimate networks of East Yorkers.*" *American Journal of Sociology* 84, no. 5: 1201-1231.

Winchester, Daniel, and Jeffrey Guhin. 2019. "Praying "straight from the heart": evangelical sincerity and the normative frames of culture in action." *Poetics* 72: 32-42.

Wood, Michael Lee, Dustin S. Stoltz, Justin Van Ness, and Marshall A. Taylor. 2018. "Schemas and frames." *Sociological Theory* 36, no. 3: 244-261.

Zablocki, Benjamin David. 1971.*The joyful community: An account of the Bruderhof, a communal movement now in its third generation*. Penguin Group.

Table 1: Interviewee demographics

Interview type	**N**	**%**
CF member	44	73%
Non-CF member at Western	3	5%
Campus minister / religious life staff	7	12%
Longitudinal interviews with CF members	6	10%
Demographic categories (n=47, excludes campus ministers)		
Gender		
Man	22	48%
Woman	24	52%
Race/ethnicity		
Asian	16	35%
Black	6	13%
Latinx	3	7%
Native American	3	7%
White	14	30%
Mixed/other	4	9%
International student		
Yes	5	11%
No	41	89%
Identify as FLI (first generation and/or low income)		
Yes	12	24%
No	34	74%