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# Building a Sense of Community: A Case Study of the Fairmount Neighborhood in Woonsocket, Rhode Island

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**Building a Sense of Community:  
A Case Study of the Fairmount Neighborhood in Woonsocket, Rhode Island**

**Bethany Yeo**

**May 2018**

**A Master's Paper**

**Submitted to faculty of Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the department of  
International Development, Community, and Environment**

**And accepted on the recommendation of  
Kathryn Madden, Chief Instructor**

## **ABSTRACT**

Building a Sense of Community:

A Case Study of the Fairmount Neighborhood in Woonsocket, Rhode Island

Bethany Yeo

This thesis study examines the relative sense of community by isolating key factors that contribute to a sense of community: social trust, identity, and bridging/social cohesion. It also analyzes the relationship, if any, between these three factors and the built environment. Data was collected from 107 archived community impact measurement surveys from NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley. The results show that residents experienced a lack of sense of community despite the built environment although results were not significant.

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## *Chapter I: INTRODUCTION*

I spent the summer of 2017 walking up and down the streets of the Fairmount neighborhood in Woonsocket, Rhode Island engaging residents in a Community Impact Measurements survey for NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley (NeighborWorks BRV) a community development corporation. What started out as a simple community feedback survey for NeighborWorks BRV's program evaluation purposes inspired this research study after I identified several residents who described a "lack of a sense of community" in the Fairmount neighborhood. This trend emerged from casual conversations with neighbors as well as that which was transcribed in open answer survey responses. The feedback from the community intrigued me for several reasons. First, I was curious about the key elements needed to generate a sense of community. Furthermore, I wondered if a lack of sense of community was due to a collective behavioral issue or, if it had to do with cues from the built environment. Finally, was it possible to overcome these challenges through cooperation, respect, trust, and a collective consensus to be more inclusive?

The purpose of this research is to uncover the key factors influencing why social interactions between neighbors are not occurring thus resulting in the lack of a sense of community experienced by residents. For the purpose of this paper, sense of community will be defined as the "feeling of being a member of a larger community supported by interpersonal sharing and an emotional connection" (Mannarini, Rochira, & Cosimo, 2012).

This study will use the framework from the sense of community theory proposed by Chavis and McMillan in 1990 to identify and explain the elements that are missing from the



Fairmount Neighborhood such as social trust, identity, and bridging/social cohesion, which form the backbone of a sense of community. This conceptual model supports my hypothesis that a strong sense of community can be developed through a collective change in behavior with a focus on first building trust among residents and bridging identities, which subsequently nurtures the development of a sense of community.

The present study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the researcher to the context in which the research question was originally formed. The second chapter examines previous literature written on three themes: social trust, identity, and bridging, or, social cohesion. This chapter also introduces the context of the case study in more detail such as the geographical layout of the neighborhood and the demographics of the population. The third chapter incorporates the methods of how the data was collected, measured, and analyzed. The fourth chapter provides the results from the data collection and interprets the raw data using descriptive statistics, tables, maps, and charts. The fifth chapter analyzes the results and acknowledges if they support or contrast with previous research in related fields. This chapter also recommends areas for future research. The sixth chapter concludes this study by reiterating the key findings, expressing the limitations of the study and makes recommendations to NeighborWorks BRV for community development activities to aid in the re-development of sense of community.

## *Chapter II: LITERATURE REVIEW*

### *Sense of Community*

A community was originally a term used to refer to a community of place (Perkins & Manzo, 2006). Community of place is geographically defined, usually used to describe the space within the boundaries of a neighborhood (Perkins & Manzo, 2006). With the development of sophisticated technology such as electricity, automobiles, and the internet, people were provided with more opportunities for social interactions with people living outside the bounds of the neighborhood. Over time, this phenomenon led to a collective dis-investment in community of place and a simultaneous introduction to a second conceptualization of community: community of interests (Perkins & Manzo, 2006). Community attachment has been researched extensively (Goudy, 1990; Kasarda & Janowitz's, 1974; Brown et. al., 2003). Community attachment may be based on friendship ties or may be place bound (Sundblad & Sapp, 2011). A community of interest may also be a community of place. For the purposes of this research, community and sense of community will refer to that of a community of place.

The topic of sense of community gained momentum in the field of Social Psychology in the 1980s when two social psychologists, Chavis and McMillan (1986) noticed increasing reports of experiences with loneliness and social isolation from their subjects. They proposed a theory for sense of community with four core elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (Chavis, McMillan, 1986). Chavis and McMillan (1986) argued that membership requires boundaries and that boundaries are a “necessary evil” as they clearly announce “us” from “them” and diminish uneasiness by defining who can be “trusted”. Boundaries may come in the form of geographical boundaries

such as landmarks or street corners to the way people behave and the attire they wear. In addition, “boundaries create insiders and outsiders, but it also gives incentives for those on the outside to be on the inside. It creates behavioral changes in those outsiders as they change their behavior to match those of the insiders” (Chavis, McMillian, 1986). In summary, they proposed that strong communities are built from members’ positive experiences in their surroundings, social relations and perceived control and empowerment in and over their community. This model for sense of community is the most widely known and used theory to explain and predict sense of community (Walton, 2016; O’Connor, 2013).

For the purposes of this study, I have built off the framework of Chavis and McMillian’s theory of sense of community. This study will use three themes that are important to consider when examining a sense of community into three themes: Social Trust, Identity and Bridging/Social Cohesion. These themes will act as a framework to interpret previous literature on the topic of sense of community as well as to interpret the data.

### *Social Trust*

Social Trust is defined as the “inherent norms of reciprocity experienced when working together, which makes people feel that their neighbors will treat them fairly” (Richey, 2007). A growing body of literature argues that developing a sense of community, and therefore general social trust, has to do with a behavioral change or a shift of “in-group trust” (Harding,2009). Interestingly, research suggests that social trust and a cycle of trustworthiness can be sparked by a single individual’s behavioral change by simply “acting as if she trusts another, even though her attitude towards that other is not trusting” (Harding, 2009). A

computational model by Macy and Skvoretz describes the spread of social trust as if it were a disease by describing distrusters as “mutants” who ‘infected’ the greater community with distrusting behaviors causing a collective implosion of cooperation and trust. The two authors analyzed how neighborhood size influences the creation of social trust, arguing that small neighborhoods are favorable as they reduce the coordination complexity of normalizing a behavior thus encouraging the emergence of trusting attitudes and cooperation (Macy & Skvoretz, 1998). In contrast, a large neighborhood may not be able to coordinate cooperation to restore order and trust in the first place (Macy & Skvoretz, 1998). In summary, while it takes a single individual to spark trusting behaviors, that trust can be destroyed just as easily as it was created if all members of a community are not conscious of the consequences of their distrustful behaviors.

Research studies provide evidence that perceptions of crime in an environment creates distrust of others and prevents social interactions from occurring that are necessary to create a sense of community (Orgambidez-Ramos, Borrego-Ales, Relinque-Medina, Dominguez-Gomez, & Vazquez-Aguado, 2015).

A sizeable volume of research suggests that the more demographically diverse a community is the greater chance members will experience “substantially more problems with the creation of various kinds of social capital, cooperation, trust and support necessary for collective action” for the development of a sense of community due to differences of values and civic responsibilities (Stolle et. al, 2008).

Research studies across cultures have consistently found that residents from low-income neighborhoods reported lower levels of trust compared to those of higher economic statuses (Reeskens, 2013). Ross et al. (2001) contends that this is due to a scarcity in terms of access to socioeconomic resources in low-income neighborhoods which forces residents to compete for an inadequate source of tools, provoking distrust among neighbors and feelings of disempowerment. Furthermore, pockets of low income families and individuals combined with social isolation means that residents often lack opportunities to mingle with “employed adults, stable families, and social networks that may assist them in efforts to improve their life circumstances” (Jencks and Mayer 1990; Massey and Denton 1993; Quillian 2003; Rankin and Quane, 2000). Consistent with this finding, Kitchen, William, & Chowhan found that sense of belonging, a key element of social trust, was particularly high among those with an income of \$80,000 or more who reported a ‘very strong or somewhat strong’ sense of belonging compared to those with a limited income of less than \$20,000” (Kitchen, Williams, & Chowhan, 2012).

### *Identity*

When discussing the factors that influence a sense of community, it is important to keep in mind that not everyone is equally sensitive to their surroundings, nor do all cultures exhibit the same norms regarding social trust and social cohesion. For instance, a study examining social embeddedness compared African Americans and Caucasians and found that African Americans were more likely to have extensive social networks and more frequent interactions with those in their social network than Caucasians (Snowden, 2001). This study illustrates that

the cultural lens through which residents discern their neighborhoods predicts their disposition to “get involved” socially (Snowden, 2001). Variance in significance of neighborhood for residents from diverse backgrounds creates another hurdle to overcome to build social trust (Manzo and, Perkins, 2006; Small, 2004; Stolle, Soroka, & Johnson, 2008).

Putnam (2007) states his proposal that the presence of ethnic heterogeneity in a neighborhood decreases social cohesion, as all ethnic groups appear to “hunker down,” diminishing social trust, philanthropy, and coadjuvancy in the neighborhood (Walton, 2016; Putnam, 2007).

Putnam’s argument follows the framework of the theory of social identity developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 which states that social behavior is based on a spectrum of interpersonal and intergroup behavior. The key presumption of social identity theory is that all individuals seek to attain a ‘positive distinctiveness’ or a positive self-identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Those who feel as though they lacked this positive distinctiveness will adopt different in-group behaviors to a). increase their individual positive distinctiveness by separating from their ingroup, b). stay within their in-group and compare their in-group to an out-group by adding values to creative attributes without altering the tangible resources of either group or, c). compare in-group and out-group statuses on a value system that is shared by society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Out of these three strategies, the last one is the most commonly found by social scientists and can result in out-group discrimination by the in-group. Contrastingly, Reeskens (2013) found that societies where trust is given easily are more accepting of cultural minorities, too. Therefore, if the majority population has a high-level of trust, they are also more likely to exhibit inclusive behavior towards outsiders (Reeskens, 2013).

Besides race and ethnicity, income level also influences social identity(Watson,2006). Income sorting is a term used to describe the phenomenon of economic segregation in metropolitan areas. Income sorting is most evident when looking at housing stock during a lull in the economic growth of a city. Housing styles reflect the design preferences of former generations of residents; thus, Watson explains that, “if existing housing costs less than the price of new construction or retrofitting, there is little incentive to change the housing stock. Rising segregation occurs in slow growth areas only if the change in market pressure for segregation is sufficient to overcome the costs of new construction or retrofitting.” (Watson,2006). Therefore, those affluent enough to cover the costs of constructing new housing will most likely incorporate styles that match the preferences of the current generation. Economic segregation perpetuates issues with social cohesion and traps those less well off in cycle of poverty. Income sorting is often seen integrated with other types of segregation particularly racial segregation against people of color (Watson, Carlino, & Gould Ellen, 2006).

#### *Bridging/Social Cohesion*

Bridging is the act of bringing together people with diverse backgrounds rather than bonding which is the act of bringing together those who are already alike (Stolle et. all, 2008). In a novel cross-national comparison study, Stolle et. all (2008) found that diverse neighborhoods experienced fewer issues when there were “regular, personal interactions between neighbors.” These frequent social interactions between neighbors provided enough commonality to override the potentially threatening existence of the racial and ethnic makeup of the surroundings and ultimately built trust between otherwise disparate residents. In

summary, a sense of community is built on a foundation of social trust. Social trust, and therefore sense of community can be influenced negatively within the context of social identity in heterogeneous neighborhood due to structural social disorganization which limits opportunities for socio-economic growth for those in need of assistance, thereby trapping them not only in a cycle of poverty, but also of distrust. Therefore, the presence of commonly practiced community engagement strategies such as neighborhood associations may not be enough to limit the lower levels of social trust and sense of community in low-income and ethnically diverse areas (O'Connor, 2013). Rather than telling residents they should invest in developing a sense of community, communities should be focusing on bridging social identities within the community by developing basic, social trust through intentional, behavioral interventions involving consistent, social interactions with their neighbors to successfully overcome structural divides and reach indivisibility. Interventions should focus on training a handful of resident-vetted community leaders with the skills necessary to facilitate small, intimate group discussions among residents, as well as to implement strategies for future community organizing.

### *Chapter III: METHODOLOGY*

#### *Research Design*

The research design utilizes a case study and resident cross-sectional surveys. The research is designed to measure the levels of social trust and bridging experienced by the residents, as well as examine the interrelationship of residents' social identity with their geographical location within the neighborhood.



### *Setting*

I chose to focus survey responses specifically from residents living in Fairmount Neighborhood as NeighborWorks BRV has less preliminary data on Fairmount Neighborhood than Constitution Hill, a bordering neighborhood, which has been their primary area of focus. NeighborWorks BRV expressed an interest in expanding their target area to include Fairmount Neighborhood.

NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley is a community development corporation that works with residents, businesses, and neighborhood institutions to enrich neighborhood life and make affordable housing opportunities available throughout Northern Rhode Island. NeighborWorks BRV operates under their mother organization, NeighborWorks America. NeighborWorks America's overarching mission is to create "opportunities for people to live in affordable homes, improve their lives and strengthen their communities." ([www.neighborworks.org](http://www.neighborworks.org)). In the past, NeighborWorks BRV has worked towards rehabilitating multi-family homes in Constitution Hill (a neighborhood that borders Fairmount) into affordable housing options in Constitution Hill. NeighborWorks BRV's efforts have also helped to reverse the visual blight seen in both Constitution Hill and Fairmount neighborhoods by way of community gardens, painting housing exteriors and clean ups. In addition, NeighborWorks BRV offers a variety of social service programs to aid residents in low and moderate-income households in the region.

### *Participants*

NeighborWorks BRV obtained the survey subjects through a randomized computer-generated list of addresses in their target neighborhood Constitution Hill as well as the neighboring Fairmount Neighborhood in Woonsocket, RI. Out of the 200 subjects surveyed, I will be examining responses for only the 107 that live within the study area of Fairmount neighborhood. Participants were required to be at least 18 years old, and only one survey was accepted per household. Within the sample population for Fairmont neighborhood, 66% were Caucasian/White, 15% were Black/African American, 12% were Mixed Race, and 6% were Asian. Furthermore, 25% of respondents identified as Hispanic.

### *Instruments*

This study used archived data from NeighborWorks BRV's Community Impact Measures Survey. The survey was designed by NeighborWorks BRVs mother organization, NeighborWorks of America and is distributed nationally at all NeighborWorks branch locations. The survey consisted of a 33-item multiple choice, self-reported evaluation of community members' perception of their neighborhood. In the past, NeighborWorks BRV has used the feedback from the surveys to provide community-centered direction towards the development of future programs. The 33 questions focus on seven categories:

1. Perception of quality of life within the community
2. Past involvement with the community (i.e. volunteering)
3. Perception of other residents' rate of involvement/willingness to be involved in the community

4. Quality of public services available to residents
5. Perception of safety within the community
6. Future predictions of what direction the community is towards (optimism)
7. Demographics

Each category had at least one multiple choice question pertaining to the category followed by open-ended questions prompting the subject to elaborate on their answers to the multiple-choice questions. The survey was in English on one side and Spanish on the other to be inclusive of the large Hispanic population living in Woonsocket.

#### *Procedure*

NeighborWorks BRV gathered 200 completed surveys between June-August 2017. Surveys were distributed in two phases. First, hard copies of the surveys were delivered to each subject by a team of two NeighborWorks BRV employees. The second phase included a wider variety of methods to deliver the surveys to subjects including: mailing via postage or taping to the door of each subject's residence. Subjects were compensated for completing the survey with a \$20 gift card to Walmart or a choice of three local restaurants. Surveys were written in English and Spanish and conducted in Spanish by a NeighborWorks BRV staff member if a subject requested a translator. The Community Impact Measurements Surveying was funded by NeighborWorks of America and conducted by NeighborWorks BRV. Limitations in the study include the fact that I, the researcher, am a white female. This may have influenced residents' initial responsiveness to participating in the surveys and could be a contributing factor as to why a great number of participants were also white. Furthermore, the fact that there is a greater

representation of Lower Avenue residents than Upper Avenue could be explained by the housing stock, as a greater number of single homes in the Upper Avenues would suggest a lower population pool to recruit participants.

### *Measuring Social Trust*

Two items from the survey were used to measure the level of social trust:

- Perception of neighborly assistance in four given scenarios
- Perception of personal and communal safety within the boundaries of the neighborhood

These items were chosen because they reflect social trust or lack thereof. For example, an untrusting neighbor may report that they believe that it would be *very unlikely* that their neighbors would come to their aid if the following circumstances occurred, while a trusting resident may report that they believe their neighbors would be *very likely* to respond in the event of a crisis/situation where they needed external help. Similarly, in the questions concerning perception of safety in the community, residents with low social trust are more likely to perceive their surroundings as less safe than those with higher social trust (Reeskens, 2013). Since perception of crime in a neighborhood can be particularly detrimental to the development social cohesion and social trust (Reeskens, 2013), I chose to examine responses related to residents' perceived safety in my research.

Subjects were asked how likely that people in their community would help if they needed assistance in a certain scenario ranging from if they needed a ride somewhere to if they needed childcare in an emergency. Responses were given on a four-point scale that ranged

from *very likely* to *very unlikely*. The Cronbach's alpha was used to analyze the internal consistency of the survey questions. A good internal consistency reliability is a score of between .7 and .9. The study demonstrated good internal consistency reliability with a Cronbach's alpha =.74. On a 4-point scale ranging from *very safe* to *very unsafe*, respondents were asked to report their perceptions of safety within the community during the day and at night, as well as their perception of the safety of children commuting to and from school and of elderly members of the community (Cronbach's alpha =.72). Responses were coded as such: Very Likely/Very Safe (1), Somewhat Likely/Somewhat Safe (2), Somewhat Unlikely/Somewhat Unsafe (3), Very Unlikely/Very Unsafe (4) analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS to calculate the means and percentages.

#### *Measuring Identity and 'Bridging'*

Identity and Bridging were measured using Google Street View to illustrate housing density and neighborhood layout. Maps and tables were also created to analyze the relationship, if any, between geographical location and the built environment and social identity and evidence of bridging. The maps focused on the walkability of the neighborhood by highlighting which avenues had sidewalks and which did not. Lastly, qualitative comments in the surveys that regarded identity/bridging, or the lack there of, were used to back up quantitative data shown in the maps.

Conclusions were drawn based on these observations, qualitative data from the open-answer questions on the surveys and tables created from the dataset. My hypothesis is that geographical location and the structures of the built environment have a detrimental impact on

the quality of the neighborhood by dividing social identities among neighbors and creating physical barriers to overcome in addition to differences in culture, race, and income level. This study was limited by the lack of qualitative data that are needed to gain a clearer sense of the subcultures and identities within the neighborhood as well as its retrospective survey design. Further limitations included barriers to information such as crime data.

#### *Chapter IV: CASE STUDY: Fairmount Neighborhood, Woonsocket RI*

Woonsocket was originally one of the most well-known industrial cities (The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1997). Situated on the Blackstone River it offered a prime location for a textile mill industry. Woonsocket is perceived as a diverse city with a rich cultural history stemming from three waves of immigrants. French-Canadians dominated the city during the late 1800s, recruited from Quebec to work in the textile mills (The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1997). Many of these factory workers made their home in Woonsocket which eventually became a predominantly French speaking city (The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1997). The second wave of immigrants arrived around the 1900s as Eastern Europeans from Poland and the Ukraine settled in Woonsocket seeking employment opportunities available in the mills. Currently, Woonsocket is experiencing a third wave of immigrants arriving from countries within both Central and South America as well as South East Asia. The presence of Dominicans, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Colombians, Hmong and Cambodian immigrants and refugees adds to the richness of Woonsocket's identity (The Rhode Island Historical Society, 1997). This diversity is represented in Fairmount neighborhood and acts as a force of cohesion as well as division. The population who are 18 years of age or older in

Fairmount are predominantly White, followed by Black or African American with approximately 22% identifying as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau,2010 Census).

Race/Ethnicity	Census Data (2010)	Participant Sample Population
White/Caucasian	69%	66%
Black/African American	9%	15%
Asian	9%	6%
Hispanic/Latino	22%	25%

*Table 1 Participant sample compared to Census Data (2010) Track 174 Block Groups 1&3 for Race/Hispanic or Latino Population Over 18 years old*

Comparing these statistics with those of the sample population it is found that the sample is a sound representation of the overall population (Table 1) with the sample population representing Fairmount is a low-income neighborhood with 62% of its population earning an income of less than \$30,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Geographically, the neighborhood is built into the side of a steep hill which increases in elevation as the street numbers increase from First Avenue to Eleventh Avenue (Figure 1 and Figure 2).



*Figure 1 Fairmount Neighborhood Within Woonsocket, RI (ArcGIS, 2018)*





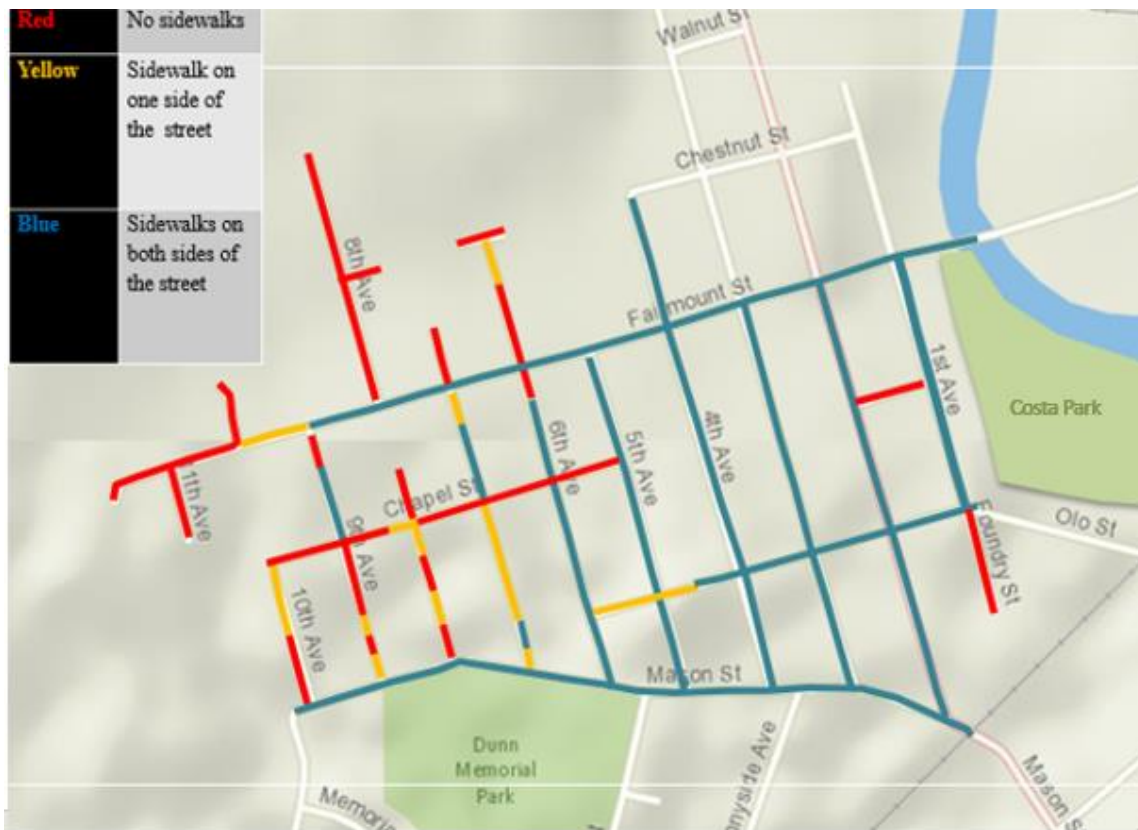
Figure 2 Topography of Fairmount Neighborhood. Highest Elevation: Approx. 305 ft. Lowest Elevation: Approx. 178 ft.



Figure 3 Study area shaded in yellow within Fairmount Neighborhood (Google Earth, 2016)

There are two parks that border the neighborhood: Dunn Memorial Park to the South and Costa Park to the east. Dunn Memorial Park includes a baseball field, soccer field, basketball court and playscape (Figure 3). The park transforms into a social hub during the summer months due to regular athletic games that are played in the space. Costa Park also has those features; however, it is less popular due to its isolated location. Costa Park is situated along the Blackstone River. Across the river from Costa Park is a holding facility for the Woonsocket school buses. With woods surrounding the rest of the park, it is vulnerable to criminal elements because it is tucked away and out of sight from residents living nearby as well as those driving by on the street.

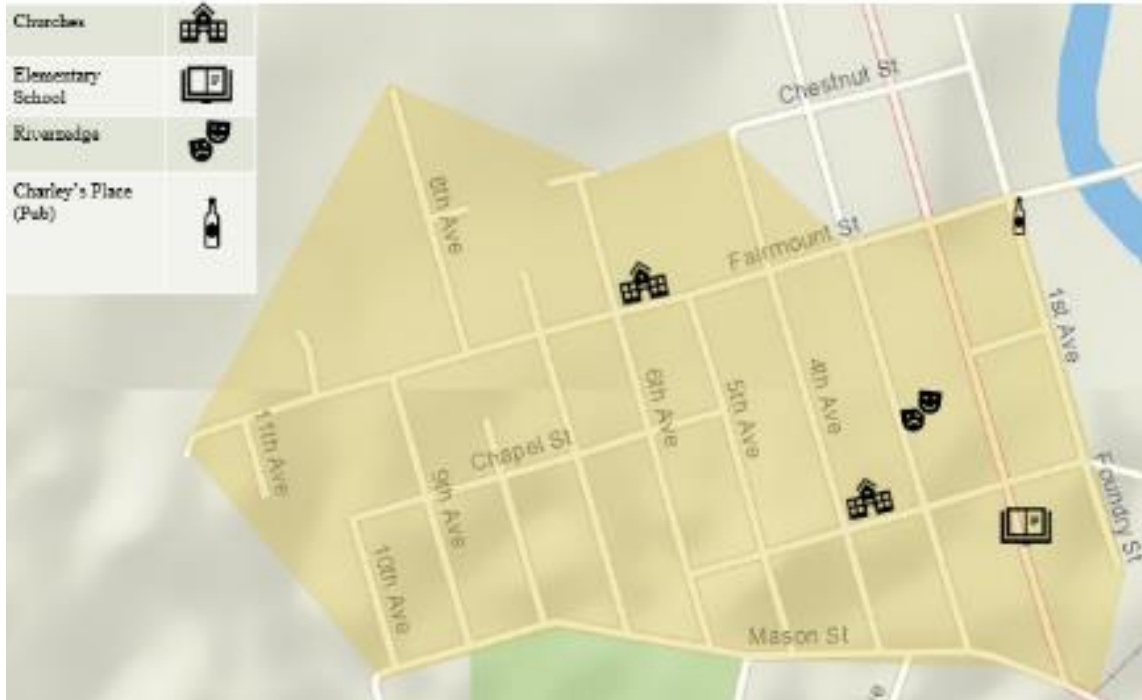
I defined walkability in the neighborhood in terms of whether there was sidewalk connectivity between and along the avenues. Figure 4 illustrates that walkability deteriorates as one moves from First Ave to Eleventh Avenue. It also shows that critical connecting streets between the avenues such as Chapel Street lack adequate sidewalks.



*Figure 4 Walkability in the Fairmount Neighborhood is disrupted by lack of sidewalk connectivity. Two parks, Dunn Memorial Park and Costa Park border Fairmount neighborhood*

The Fairmount Neighborhood is primarily residential. Included within the boundaries of the neighborhood are two churches: the Sacred Heart Catholic Church on the corner of Olo Street and Third Avenue and the All Nations Church-God-Christ on the corner of Fairmount Street and Sixth Avenue There is also an Elementary School on Second Ave and Riverzedge Arts, a non-profit organization that works towards creating opportunities for under-served youth in the area (Riverzedge Arts, 2014) on Third Avenue on the corner of First Ave and Fairmount Street are Charley’s Place, a neighborhood pub which Woonsocket residents claim has a

comfortable and friendly atmosphere.



*Figure 5 The study area is primarily residential with labeled staple institutions*

### *The Effect of the Built Environment on Social Cohesion and Identity*

Based on the structural divides in the built environment shown in Figure 6, I divided the neighborhood into two sides using participants' language: The Upper Avenues and the Lower Avenues. The Lower Avenues consisted of First Avenue through Fifth Avenue while the Upper

Avenues consisted of Sixth Avenue through Eleventh Avenue.



*Figure 6 The built environment in the neighborhood creates a structural divided between the Upper Avenues (Sixth Avenue-Eleventh Avenue) and the Lower Avenues (First Avenue-Fifth Avenue)*

Starting in the Lower Avenues the housing types are predominantly wood-frame, multi-family homes and triple decker apartments with only as few single-family homes. Although sidewalks are present, there is a general absence of trees, houses are set close to the street and yards are limited to the backyard (Figure 7).





*Figure 7 Housing types are predominately wood-frame, multi-family homes set close to the street. First Ave (Google, 2012)*

By Sixth Avenue the housing types begin to change to include more single-family homes as seen in Figure 8.



*Figure 8 Moving up in the Avenues there is a change of housing types to single family homes, set farther back from the street and with no sidewalks as pictured on Sixth Avenue (Google, 2012)*

This trend continues as the Avenues rise in number along with a noticeable increase of trees, larger front yards, and an increased distance that houses are set back from the street.







*Figure 9 Housing density in the Lower Avenues pictured in the bottom image is greater*



than that of the Upper Avenues pictured in the higher image. (Google Earth, 2018)

The discontinuance of the sidewalks visually and spatially divides the neighborhood into the Lower Avenues (First Avenue to Seventh Avenue) and the Upper Avenues (Eighth Avenue to Twelfth Avenue). In terms of ethnic identity and geographical location, most respondents who identified as either Hispanic or Latino/Latina lived in the Lower Avenues as seen in Figure 10.

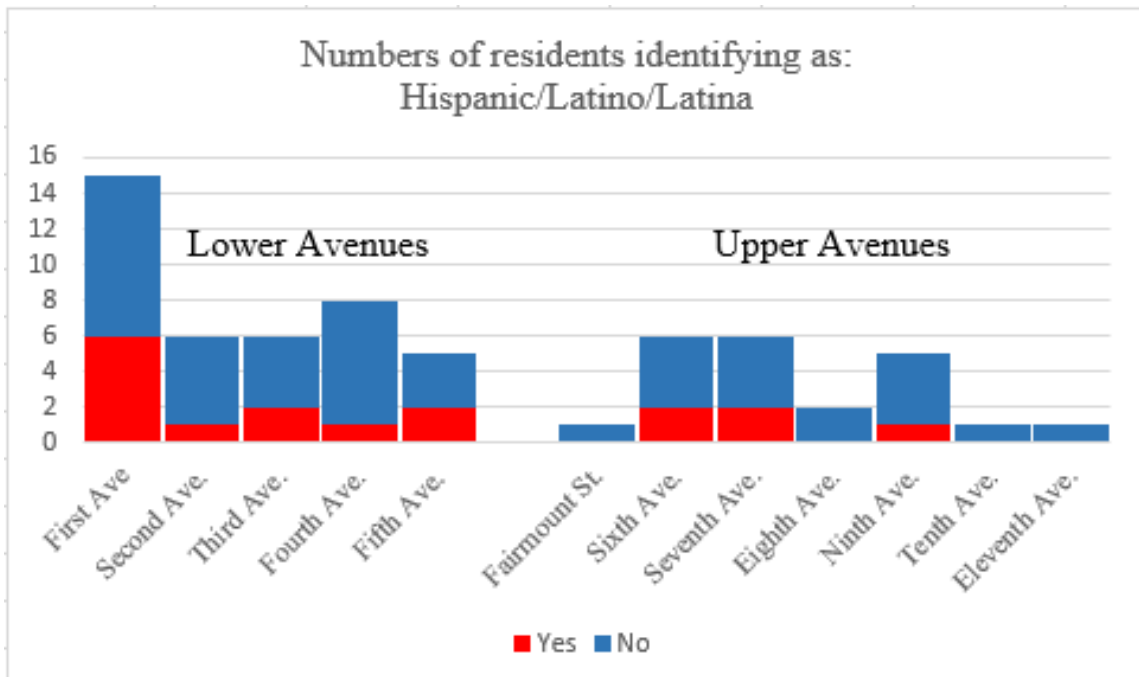


Figure 10 Ethnic diversity is highest in the Lower Avenues. Short Street and Olo Street were excluded from this chart as no residents from those addresses recorded an answer for the question on ethnicity.

Out of the 107 survey participants, 98 recorded their race. The relationship between race and residents' addresses of either the Upper and Lower Avenues was examined as seen in Table 2.

Geographic Location	Black/African American	White/Caucasian	Asian	Mixed Race	
	Lower Avenues	12	43	3	9

Upper Avenues	3	22	3	3
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*Table 2 Greater racial diversity found in the Lower Avenues than the Upper Avenues*

This table illustrates that Lower Avenue respondents were four times more likely to identify as Black/African American and three times more likely to identify as Mixed Race than those in the Upper Avenues. Those who reported their race as Asian remained constant in both the Lower and the Upper Avenues.

Social trust is the foundation upon which a sense of community is built, therefore, measuring the existing level of social trust is an important step in the process of developing a strong sense of community (Cohrun, 1994). This section will analyze social trust using a framework of four themes: Neighborliness, Safety, Social Cohesion and Volunteerism. These four themes were derived from the raw data using statistical and qualitative analysis.

1) *Neighborliness*

“Neighborliness” measures the likelihood that a neighbor will come to the aid of another in a time of need. The survey provided four questions that implied a sense of neighborliness such as sharing a ride, borrowing a tool/picking up the mail, helping an elderly neighbor and providing childcare in an emergency. Table 3 illustrates that residents in the Upper Avenues demonstrate greater neighborliness than those in the Lower Avenues except when it came to sharing rides. Those in the Lower Avenues reported a greater chance that a neighbor would give them a ride if they needed one.

Neighborliness Likelihood	Ride Sharing	Borrowing a Tool/Picking up Mail	Helping an Elderly Neighbor	Emergency Childcare
<b>Upper Avenues</b>				
Likely	62.00%	89.00%	92.00%	85.00%
Unlikely	39.00%	12.00%	8.00%	15.00%
<b>Lower Avenues</b>				
Likely	71.00%	67.00%	74.00%	65.00%
Unlikely	29.00%	33.00%	27	35.00%

*Table 3 The likelihood of neighborly practices was greater in the Upper Avenues than the Lower Avenues. The ‘Likely’ category contains responses both Very Likely and Somewhat Likely. The ‘Unlikely’ category contains responses for both Very Unlikely and Somewhat*

When examining the Fairmount neighborhood as a single entity, less than half (35%) of the residents who responded to the survey reported that they believed it was *Very Likely* that a neighbor would give them a ride should they need/ask for one with 22% rating this probability as *Very Unlikely*. The possibility that a neighbor would pick up the mail for the resident (by request) or let them borrow a tool was rated as 41% *Very Likely* and 13% *Very Unlikely*. A neighbor providing childcare in an emergency was rated as 49% *Very Likely* and 12% *Very Unlikely*. Helping to check in on an elderly neighbor was rated the highest at 52% *Very Likely* and 11% *Very Unlikely*. These findings suggest that there is an element of social trust among residents in the Fairmount neighborhood. However, never more than a little over half of the participants were confidently able to predict that a neighbor would aid them in a time of need.

In summary, most of the residents demonstrated a trusting attitude towards their neighbors and the greater community no matter their address.

## 2) Safety

There was no statistically significant correlation found between sense of safety in the community and the subjects’ place of residency. Observing the neighborhood on a whole, most individuals (74%) reported that they felt *Very Safe* during the day in their community however,

this high level of perceived safety decreased by 40% at night (See Table 4). Concerning the safety of youth commuting to and from school, 39% of respondents felt that children were Very Safe with and only 6% felt that the youth were Very Unsafe commuting to and from their schools. The safety of senior residents in the community was perceived as 49% Very Safe and 4% as Very Unsafe.

Perceptions of Safety at a Neighborhood Level	
Safety (Day)	Very Safe: 74%
Safety (Night)	Very Safe: 26%
Youth Commuting to School	Very Safe: 39% Very Unsafe: 6%
Safety of Senior Residents	Very Safe 49% Very Unsafe 4%

*Table 4 Level of perceived safety decreases by 40% after dark.*

In the qualitative data one of the residents living in the Upper Avenues, while speaking highly of their own experience with their neighbors, commented that, “there is still a lot of crime on the Lower Avenues” (Upper Avenue Resident, personal written statement, July 2017). Validating this resident’s comment, several residents who did live in the Lower Avenues reported a heavy usage of marijuana from those in their vicinity. This could be the criminal acts those living in the Upper Avenues were alluding to as mentioned previously in the paper. Future research should investigate if crime statistics support residents’ perception of crime

occurring in the neighborhood as well as the type of crime residents feel is a threat to their safety.

### 3) *Social Cohesion*

Not all respondents utilized the open-ended comment section; however, those who did reported being satisfied with their neighbors: *“Those in my neighborhood are a community that look out for each other. [This is the] only place I ever lived where all are accepted and welcome”* (Lower Avenue Resident, personal written statement, July 2017). Some who had lived in the neighborhood for over 25 years remembered better days, *“for the most part I love my community [but] the last 5 years or so it has gone downhill”* (Lower Avenue Resident, personal written statement, July 2017). Further comments illustrated that this opinion was shared by other long-term residents throughout Fairmount neighborhood and was not specific to the Upper or Lower Avenues: *“We have seen the deterioration of our neighborhood significant enough to cause us to think of moving out of state and also the downward movement of the city's economy.”* (Upper Avenue Resident, personal written statement, July 2017). Although the data shows that social trust is present in the neighborhood, residents have yet to get involved in ‘bridging’ their individual and collective differences as one resident in the Lower Aves acknowledged saying, *“Loud community. Need to learn to integrate [and] become involved.”* (Lower Avenue Resident, personal written statement, July 2017).

### 4) *Volunteerism*

I chose to look at rates of volunteerism because it reflects individual interest in giving back to their community. To support or negate my hypothesis, I chose to look at the relationship between volunteer rates and respondents' place of residency in the neighborhood.

The volunteer activities on the survey included the following eight categories:

1. *Participated in a community, resident, or tenant association*
2. *Volunteered to help others in the community*
3. *Participated in a community improvement project, such as a clean-up, community gardening, or other beautification effort*
4. *Supported local business events, such as a sidewalk sale or "shop local" day*
5. *Participated in an organized community social event, such as festival, block party, or other celebration*
6. *Supported a local political organization, candidate, or ballot initiative*
7. *Participated in an advocacy group, such as a school parent-teacher association, environmental organization, or labor union*
8. *Personally, took action to improve the community, such as reporting a hazard or contacting authorities about an incident*

I gave each respondent a score from 1 to 8 depending on how many community volunteer activities they participated in during the last year. I did not include a score of zero in my analysis; the respondents who reported zero volunteerism in the past year were for the most part either elderly residents who were no longer able to engage in outside activities due to their age or new residents to the neighborhood who had not yet settled into the community or had the opportunity to take part in volunteer activities. Thus, it would be naïve to assume that all of those who reported a zero for community engagement in the past year are not interested in supporting their community. Elderly residents may have devoted decades of their time to the

neighborhood earlier in their lives and newcomers may have been active volunteer members in their former neighborhoods.

I categorized engagement in volunteer activities into two categories:

- *Low-Participation in 1 to 4 volunteer activities in the community within the last year*
- *High- Participation in 5 to 8 volunteer activities in the community within the last year*

I weighted the scores to create percentages reflective of the entire sample population (See Appendix Table 4). The data showed that 67% of the residents living in the Upper Avenues participated in a *low* level of community engagement via volunteering in the last year while 33% of respondents living in the Upper Avenues reported a *high* level of community engagement. In the Lower Avenues, 76% of respondents reported a low level of community engagement while 12% reported a high level of participation in community volunteer activities within the past year. Ultimately, the data illustrates that there was no significant difference between volunteer rates in the Upper Avenues than those in the Lower Avenues. However, in both the Upper and Lower Avenues, a greater volume of residents reported a low rather than high engagement rate in the community. More research is required to understand the factors that contribute to this low rate of volunteerism.

## *Chapter V: DISCUSSION*

### *Impact of Housing Density and Walkability on Social Cohesion and Identity*

Triple decker and multi-family housing styles inherently provide greater opportunities for social interactions as there are more shared spaces such as driveways, hallways, staircases, and backyards. The simple fact that these homes are physically set closer together with porches and stoops, also increases the chances of social interactions occurring as there is less space and more people using the space. Meanwhile greater distance between houses as seen in the Upper Avenues may make for satisfying relationships between neighbors; however, satisfying relationships do not necessarily mean that there are social interactions occurring between neighbors. It could be that a ‘good’ neighbor is defined as someone who minds their own business and does not seek out social interactions unless it is under emergency conditions. The impact of housing density on social cohesion is inconclusive in this study and further research is needed to define the characteristics of a “good neighbor” as the definition may vary greatly depending on the cultural and social context. The absence of connectivity in sidewalks was not found to be statistically significant in altering the sense of community or social cohesion in this study contrasting with prior research studies that suggests a positive correlation between walkability and social cohesion (du Toit, Cerin, Leslie, & Owen, 2007). It may have contributed to the segregated social identity of those who identified as belonging to the Upper Avenues versus the Lower Avenues. This differentiation between the Lower Avenues and Upper Avenues is important to note because it suggests that not only does the built environment create a spatial and visual divide in the neighborhood, but it has also manifested in a conceptual



divide in social identity and the perceived neighborhood. However, it may be more constructive and sustainable to focus on changing the resident perceptions of their neighborhood first. Even after a city has decreased crime rates and cleaned up blighted neighborhoods, negative perceptions, once attached to a place, are difficult to shake.

*Neighborliness and Safety as Predictors of Sense of Community*

Residents' generally reported having good relationships with their neighbors and having a respectful relationship with their neighbors was expressed as a foundational factor for their satisfaction in living in the Fairmount neighborhood. These findings are consistent with research on social cohesion which states that friendly relationships between neighbors is a key dimension of social cohesion as it suggests that the neighborhood is perceived as source of support on both an individual and a community level (Buckner, 1988).

Contrastingly, while respondents had positive things to say regarding their relationships with their neighbors in the open-ended questions, the statistics gathered from the multiple-choice survey questions told a different story and hinted at underlying themes of distrust. Trust is developed through cooperative interaction. This phenomenon has been witnessed and documented in a variety of contexts from sports teams to community currency programs and soldiers (Richey, 2007). It could be that the residents low level of social trust is simply because they have not been presented with a scenario or a common goal within the neighborhood boundaries that could not be overcome/achieved without cooperative interaction thus social integration.

Feelings of being unsafe in one's home community is an indicator of lack of social trust and therefore lack of sense of community. Securing a sense of safety in and around one's home is a universally high priority. As Lofland states, "The situation of living as a stranger in the midst of strangers has within it the logical potential for a chaotic unpredictability that no human would find tolerable." (Lofland, 1973). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs displays safety as one of the primary needs to be attained before a person can concentrate their energy on other needs such as psychological needs (self-esteem; sense of belongingness) and self-fulfillment needs (creative activities to reach one's full potential) (Maslow, 1943) it is unclear what elements nighttime caused residents' to have low perceptions of safety after dark. Further research will be needed to delve deeper in the issues of residents perceived safety at night.

A lack of perceived safety may also lead towards feelings of being out-of-control, which can manifest in defensive behavior towards others. Lack of safety may also contribute towards a phenomenon of coping with social disengagement called nonsocial transient behavior (Kim, 2012). Nonsocial transient behavior involves a conscious disengagement of social interactions thus is a social interaction in and of itself that people use communicate to others that they do not want to be disturbed (Kim,2012). A step below being courteous, nonsocial transient behavior is described as more of a shared understanding among strangers that allows people to let down their guard. Kim writes that the defensive behavior occurs when "people create an invisible boundary around themselves and contain themselves within it. As a result, confrontations are usually uncommon. When conflicts or outbursts occur, it functions to reinforce the norms of the space." (Kim, 2012). Taking this into consideration, it could be

that this active disengagement with others is occurring on a neighborhood level in the Fairmount. This would explain why there were many reports of having “good neighbors” while at the same time a noted lack of familiarity and cohesiveness with those same neighbors. The concept of nonsocial transient behavior also supports my hypothesis that to gain a sense of community there must be a collective change in social behavior.

#### *The Effect of Diversity on Sense of Community*

The reason for greater racial and ethnic diversity represented in the Lower Avenues is consistent with previous studies that have found Blacks and Hispanic to be clustered in higher density housing than Whites (Tigges, Browne, & Green, 1998). The findings also suggest that Fairmount neighborhood is an example of Watson’s income sorting/economic segregation argument. This is evident in both the higher housing density in the Lower Avenues, where the older housing stock exists (i.e. triple decker; multi-family homes) compared to the more spread out layout of the Upper Avenues where more recently constructed housing stock (i.e. single-family homes) are found. The results illustrate how the built environment often perpetuates structural racism and segregation.

#### *The Relationship between Volunteerism and Geographical Location*

The results showed that engagement in volunteer activities within the community were consistent across the neighborhood and were not influenced by geographical location. This is both good and bad. It is good because it means that in general, residents are interested in giving back to their community. High volunteerism is associated with a high sense of community as

those who carry community concern are more likely to be motivated to participate in an action that encourages valued behavior in the neighborhood and that directly benefit the neighborhood (Omoto & Packard, 2016). It is bad news because although constant across the Avenues, the numbers stayed low with most residents only participating in 4 categories of volunteerism in the past year. This result indicates an overall low sense of community and shared community concern among Fairmount residents. Low volunteer engagement could be due to a lack of connection to volunteer opportunities, or a lack of leadership to initiate such volunteer events. It is also important to note that the survey did not define the term “community” and left that term to be defined by the survey respondent as they saw appropriate. Further research is needed to determine the causes for why residents are not participating in more volunteer activities on a yearly basis as well as to clarify what residents define as their “community”.

#### *Chapter VI: CONCLUSIONS*

In conclusion, approximately 50% of the respondents expressed a high level of social trust in their neighbors. Resident identity and the potential for ‘bridging’ appeared less influenced by geographical location than by structural features in the built environment such as sidewalks and housing styles. For example, social cohesion appeared more dependent on the absence of sidewalks and differences in building type such as the presence or lack thereof of a setback and porches, rather than the topography. The data suggests that residents are willing to take part in bettering their neighborhood; however, it appears that they are unclear where to begin that process.

Recommendations to NeighborWorks BRV include developing a program for resident leaders to take part in a crash course in strategies for community organizing so that they may have the hard skills to create effective change. NeighborWorks BRV may also benefit from including the question *What does being a “good neighbor” mean to you?* in their 2021 Community Impact Survey. This question should have multiple choice answers but include an open-ended response section for participants to elaborate on their reasoning (if they choose to). By defining what residents feel makes a neighbor a “good neighbor” one gets closer to identifying individual/cultural values that may present misunderstandings between residents of different backgrounds.

Another strategy for developing a sense of community is the practice of NeighborCircles, a strategy piloted by the nonprofit Lawrence CommunityWorks in Massachusetts. NeighborCircles involves a neighbor hosting a small group of others (no more than 10) from their block at their home(O’Connor,2013). These group meetings should occur in a series of 3 meetings and include some refreshments or a full meal. At each meeting, two trained staff members from Lawrence CommunityWorks help to facilitate conversations(O’Connor,2013). The initial meeting should provide each member of the group a chance to tell their story of how and why they ended up in the block that they live. The key is for the host to be unfamiliar with the attendees to build relationships that wouldn’t otherwise have occurred (O’Connor,2013). These intimate meetings allow for neighbors to get to know each other and help to develop trust and respect for one other thus paving the road for a strong sense of community.

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APPENDIX

A. Table 5 Residents' geographical location does not significantly influence volunteerism rates

	<b>Low Engagement (1-4)</b>	<b>High Engagement (5-8)</b>	Overall Score/Percentage of respondents who participated in a volunteer opportunity in the last year
<b>Upper Avenues</b>	1(1s);7(2s); 8(3s);4(4s)	4(5s);5(6s);1(7s)	N=30  34.9% of those who responded lived in the Upper Avenues
Total	N=20  18.7% of total population (N=107)  66.66% of respondents in Upper Avenues	N=10  9.3% of total population (N=107)  33.33% of respondents in Upper Avenues	
<b>Lower Avenues</b>	11(1s);10(2s);11(3s);6(4s)	5(5s);3(6s); 1(7s);3(8s)	
Total	N=38  35.5% of total population (N=107)  or 76% of respondents in Lower Avenues	N=12  11.2% of total population (N=107)  11.9% of respondents in Lower Avenues	50 respondents lived in the Lower Avenues