ABSTRACT

MYCEK, MARI KATE. Reaching Across the Table: An Investigation of Social Ties, Commensality, and Community in Two Food Justice Organizations. (Under the direction of Dr. Sarah K. Bowen).

Many sociologists investigate the role of social ties, social networks, and social capital in trying to better understand how and why societies function the way that they do. Some researchers examine the role of communal eating, or “commensality,” in the process of how people create and sustain relationships. Within this field of study, some argue that eating together has the potential to create and foster community across relatively rigid social boundaries. In an era of increased concern over the possibility of declining social capital and community, many seek to better understand new ways that individuals and groups are working to build social ties. One of these new efforts to create new, diverse social ties is the creation of organizations with explicit aims of creating relationships through communal eating. While these efforts have received positive acclaim in the media, there is little sociological evidence investigating the process and repercussions of these attempts to build new social ties.

In this dissertation, I analyze the practices of two food organizations that are explicitly trying to build social ties between diverse groups by creating intentional space for them to eat together. This research aims to better understand the factors that aid and impede the cultivation of social ties, and the process behind building relationships in spaces that are purposefully trying to make these connections, through qualitative data collection: interviews and ethnographic observations. My study is based on two cases, Breaking Bread and Unity Café. This project helps us better understand the processes behind how people make (or not) social ties in spaces whose explicit intention is trying to build relationships across diverse groups of people.

Taken together, the following analyses tell an important story about how people make (or do not make) social ties. I argue that in order for people to make relationships in both spaces,
they needed to intentionally break established social norms about how strangers interact. I also find that the physical space of the organizations, and the role of commensality were important factors in the facilitation and impediment of creating social capital. I also examine the social construction of “community” in these two spaces, detailing how volunteers and staff in both organizations used “community talk” to create positive narratives about the organizations and their roles in the spaces. I find that volunteer’s also rationalized experiences that defied the community ideology with an adherence to an ideology of meritocracy that resulted in the ostracism and judgment of some of the low-income volunteers and clients at both organizations. My analysis contributes to our understanding of how people socially construct the meaning of community within food justice organizations. I also found an important gendered division of labor within the café space; I analyze how women performed gendered carework in the café and detail an important gendered division of labor. I introduce three concepts to capture this: community emotional labor, embodied welcome work, and interactional body labor. Similar to the carework women perform at work and in the home, this carework is vital to the success of Unity Café. I conclude the dissertation with a discussion of key sociological findings, limitations to the study, and paths for future research.
Reaching Across the Table: An Investigation of Social Ties, Commensality, and Community in Two Food Justice Organizations

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Sociology

Raleigh, North Carolina
2019

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my best friend and other half

There is no one as special in the world as my sister, Kara Mycek, whose unwavering support throughout graduate school has gotten me to the point of writing a dedication for a dissertation I didn’t think I could write. For all the little reasons you make my life better, and all the big reasons you’ve shaped who I am as a person – I dedicate this dissertation to you.
BIOGRAPHY

Mari Kate Mycek grew up in upstate New York with her loving family who always encouraged her to do more than she thought she could. She graduated from Purchase College with a bachelor’s degree in Media, Society, and the Arts in 2012. She moved to Raleigh, NC to complete both her master’s and doctorate degrees in sociology at North Carolina State University. She lives in Raleigh with her very brave and large dog, Coppelia.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a great deal of gratitude to the participants of this study, who let me into their lives and shared their stories. Thank you for answering my questions, letting me eat with you, and welcoming me into your spaces. I could not be more grateful.

Thank you to my chair and advisor, Dr. Sarah Bowen, for helping me through the entire process of this dissertation. I am grateful for your commitment to making this a great project and all the logistical and emotional support you’ve provided over the many years we’ve worked together - on this project and others. Thank you also to my committee members: Dr. Michaela DeSoucey, Dr. Michael Schwalbe, and Dr. Jessi Streib for providing helpful and instrumental feedback.

Unmeasurable gratitude goes to my family – I would not be here without you. Thank you to my parents for all the little things you’ve done over the years that have made me smile and keep going. What a rare and beautiful thing to have parents that believe in you so much and so convincingly that you can’t help but believe in yourself too. You both have provided me with incredible guidance and unwavering friendship for every weird, silly step I’ve taken.

Thank you to my incredible brother, Billy, for always being there for me in so many ways. Your encouragement throughout graduate school has been invaluable, and I am so thankful that you’re always willing to take a few minutes (at least) out of your busy schedule to check in and help me make hard decisions. Thank you to Sarah, my soul-sister-in-law, for being much more than a sister-in-law. You are a great friend. Our weekly intentions and Sunday check-ins this past year made my life infinitely better. A very special thank you to my niece Ruby, who is a constant source of inspiration and joy. Whenever I got stuck in the writing process I would think of when you told me, “Not your best work, Kate.” It made me laugh and work a little harder. Thank you to my FAVORITE brother-in-law, Randy, for always being willing to jump
into any silly thing I pull out of my sleeve. Your kindness and generosity are unmatched. Poppy is one lucky son of a morck. Thank you to Jay, Laurie, Mammie, Eva, JJ, Jaxson, Jasper, and Emmie, for always providing love and care for me during breaks. An extra thank you to Eva, for being a great pen pal this year and checking in to see “how writing my book was going.”

I would like to thank my writing group who spent many hours reading, editing, and helping me develop this dissertation. A special thank you to Heather, some of your comments pushed me to see things in a new way, which I am forever grateful for. Even more important, many of your comments made me smile and laugh – which made writing so much better. I am also so grateful to the women in my graduate support group on campus, you all are amazing. Words cannot describe how thankful I am for you. Being in that space with you each week taught me to be a better version of myself, and in turn made this a better dissertation.

Thank you to all my wonderful friends and fellow graduate students who I’ve met in the past six years. Thank you, Michelle, you’ve been such a wonderfully supportive friend, both when you down the road and a few hundred miles away. Thank you for always skilling your support. Thank you to Blake, my emotional support huffle, for all the amazing food and advice in crises. Going through grad school felt much less daunting with you by my side. Much gratitude to Marissa, my soul mate, whose youthfulness has brought such vivacity into my dull, old, adult life. Thank you also for always showing up at the perfect time and being the best friend anyone could ask for. Thank you, Lilly, for always listening and giving great advice. Thank you, Cindy, for introducing me to the coolest things, asking the hard questions, and being a great friend. Michael, thank you for bringing such joy into my life during a time I thought there would be little. There are so many little and big ways you made the process of finishing this dissertation, and my life in general, better.
Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my favorite editor, ghost writer, and best friend, Coppelia. No words can express how instrumental you were in this dissertation. I stand firm that the only way to write a dissertation is with a dog on your lap.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Meals provide a landscape from which to explore all manners of cultural and economic dilemmas. Decisions about whom we eat with, in what manner, and what kinds of food are inextricably tied to social boundaries.”

Sociologist Alice Julier, Eating Together, page 2

People and organizations are constantly trying to come up with new ways of addressing social problems, especially in the food world. In the past few years and across the globe, different organizations and individuals have created programs that bring strangers together to eat, with the aims of creating more meaningful and inclusive relationships that create positive social change. Could shared meals change the ways we think about each other, change how we think about social problems? I needed to know. These efforts immediately caught my attention as a scholar and a food lover. I spent many nights of my childhood at the family dinner table arguing with my siblings and overwhelming my parents by recounting every detail of the books I was reading. I made friends in college by inviting them over to eat. In grad school, the first time I ever lived alone, I realized how important shared meals were to me when they were mostly gone from my life. When I started to read about these new shared meal initiatives around the world, I was profoundly intrigued, and I looked for ways I could study this phenomenon from a sociological perspective.

This project focuses on two of these efforts to promote shared meals in the United States, though this phenomenon is happening all over the world. In 2014, Ebba Akerman, a Swedish language teacher, started arranging dinners in Sweden between immigrants and Swedish natives, in the hope that sharing a meal would lead to building trust within her community. She realized that many of her immigrant students did not know any native Swedes, which spurred her to create a program to help integrate immigrants into European societies. Since then, her organization “United Invitations,” now hosts dinners between immigrants and native-born residents in countries throughout Europe. In early 2016, Amanda Saab, a Muslim woman living
outside of Detroit, invited neighbors she did not know into her home under the event title, “Dinner with Your Muslim Neighbor” to combat the hurtful stereotypes she and others faced in her community. Reflecting on the event, she concluded, “During our conversation, we came to focus on our similarities (of which there are many) and not on differences (where there are so few).”

People have implemented similar programs in cities around the U.S., all with the underlying message that we can learn from each other, create positive social change, and build stronger communities and relationships at the dinner table. While their design and structure vary, these dinners share the same underlying message: that food can draw together people with different ideas and backgrounds with positive results. In both the public and private sphere, people are taking on the task of trying to connect and strengthen communities through shared meals.

While popular media articles covering these events have been overwhelmingly positive, there is, as of yet, little sociological research that examines and analyzes the effects of these new initiatives that work to bring diverse people together over a meal. They are particularly relevant to sociology, as sociologists have argued that eating together has the potential to both create and bridge symbolic boundaries (Fischer 2011b). In fact, some scholars suggest that food has the potential to create and foster community across relatively rigid social boundaries (Douglas 1984; Julier 2013). While many these shared meal programs involve people inviting others into their homes, others use the same underlying concept of trying to bring different people together at the table in the public sphere. Cafes are popping up across the United States with the mission of building community at the table. What can we learn about how people meet and make social ties

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1 This quote comes from an interview Amanda Saab did after her event, available here: https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-06-29/could-dinner-parties-bring-hearts-and-minds-together-muslim-woman-giving-it-try
through these new food programs? What can this tell us about the changing social significance of how and why people eat together in the 21st century?

We tend to conceptualize the dinner table, both literally and figuratively, as a place that brings people together. Its significance in popular American culture was cemented during the Industrial Revolution when farmers-turned-factory workers were no longer able to eat their main meal during the middle of the day. The main meal of the day shifted to the evening, and because this became the only time siblings and parents could reconnect – dinner became special and has remained so in our public imagination (Carroll 2013). The dinner table evokes an often taken-for-granted assumption: we eat together, and it is meaningful. Yet, the reality of what happens at the dinner table is often less magical than depictions in popular culture suggest. While many families do eat together and find the practice meaningful, many do not, because of often-overlooked financial and time constraints, and the dinner hour is often filled with conflict and tension, rather than joy (Bowen et al. 2019). Beyond the family, we also see communal eating as an important part of building connections and strengthening relationships with others (Julier 2013). Whether family members, friends, co-workers, or significant others, we think of sharing food with someone as a way to bond and become more alike (Fischer 2011b).

In my dissertation, I focus on two food organizations that are explicitly trying to build social ties between diverse groups by having them eat together. This research aims to better understand the factors that aid and impede the cultivation of social ties, and the process behind building relationships in spaces that are purposefully trying to make these connections, through qualitative methods, including both interviews and ethnographic observations. My analysis is based on two cases: Breaking Bread and Unity Café. Breaking Bread is a church-based outreach program that provides a meal and other resources (e.g., bus passes, social service support) to

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2 Organization names are pseudonyms.
people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity, with an explicit focus on creating “community” and social ties between volunteers and guests. Unity Café is a pay-what-you-can café. Its mission is to provide a healthy meal to all regardless of their ability to pay, addressing hunger in part through the creation of a stronger, more diverse “community.” The café has two target populations: people experiencing food insecurity and homelessness, and middle to upper-middle class people. Importantly, both organizations explicitly aim to build relationships between the groups they intend to serve, thus offering comparable research sites.

This project adds to a growing body of literature that examines how and why people eat together. Work on “commensality” looks at how people create social ties and how we create and maintain social boundaries through eating together (Douglas 1984). Commensality is defined, simply, as people eating together (Sobal and Nelson 2003). Commensality researchers mostly agree that eating meals together can have positive health and social benefits by creating intimacy and fostering relationships as people engage in a necessary task. Researchers argue that eating food together regularly is an important social event with lasting consequences. As Fischer writes, “If eating a food makes one become more like that food, then those sharing the same food become more like each other” (Fischer 2011b, emphasis added). Sharing meals becomes a way of defining members of a social group, a way of creating social boundaries (Douglas 1984). Notably, however, almost all of the research on commensality focuses on meals shared by people who have preexisting relationships: friends, families, coworkers, romantic partners.

Existing research on commensality provides important insights that frame my dissertation. Julier’s (2013) qualitative exploration of commensality and social capital offers rich insight into the changing structure and experiences of how Americans share meals. Through the exploration of different communal meals such as dinner parties, family meals, brunches, and potlucks, Julier explores the new and changing ways that Americans socialize. She concludes
that people are eating together in different ways than in the past, and that these new forms
deserve more exploration. Julier finds patterns related to gender, race, and class and ultimately
concludes that food remains a key arena for how we construct social boundaries. Moreover, she
observes that the people we invite into our homes for a meal generally have the same
socioeconomic positions as their hosts. She argues that because social capital is such a
significant aspect of class-based resources, maintaining social ties is not a trivial activity.
Therefore, the homogenous nature of commensality can reinforce existing inequalities. These
results are not surprising given that in general, Americans tend to interact and have ties with
people who are very much like themselves (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001).

The ways we eat together are changing, and researchers are trying to better understand
this shift in socialization. Fischer (2011a; 2011b) also studies commensality and social ties but
using large-scale quantitative data sets. Similar to Julier, he finds that the ways we eat together
are changing; dinner parties inside people’s homes, at one point a popular activity, have declined
significantly in recent decades. Fischer (2011a) argues that commensality is unique in that it can
foster both inclusion and exclusion into a group or community, depending on whether or not an
individual is invited to the table. He suggests that people still have just as many friends as they
used to, but they do not invite them into their homes; people in the US are eating more take-out,
snacks, and individualized meals (Fischer 2011a). People’s lives in general are more privatized,
and their eating patterns reflect this shift. Communal meal groups like those of my dissertation
sites are not commonly how we interact with others over food, as people are spending more time
with their families and less time socializing with others over food.

My research sites aim to counter the dominant narrative about what shared meals can
look like. In the US, we tend to have relationships with people of the same race and similar class
backgrounds (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). In both of my research sites,
organizers aim to foster relationships between the people they serve, mostly people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity, and their middle-class volunteers (and in the case of the café, customers). Both sites therefore aim to promote ties between people across race, class, and gender identities. These cases thus allow me to contribute to an important gap in the commensality literature. Within studies of commensality, researchers have called for more attention to cross-racial sociability (Julier 2013), as well as for additional qualitative studies of commensality (Fischer 2011a). Many agree that changes in social relationships exist and how they change matter but note that we need to know more about the why and how (Fischer 2011b). Researchers have also emphasized the need for studies on commensality that occurs in public eating outside of the home (Sobal and Nelson 2003). As Fischer (2011a) notes, the bulk of research on social ties and commensality draws on survey research. While surveys give us a great deal of information, they also “systemically fall short in covering Americans at the edges of society—the transient, the homeless, the non-English speaking…people who tend to lack social resources” (Fischer 2011a, pg. 40). This is a particularly important gap, given that these groups could potentially benefit most from having larger and more diverse social networks.

For middle class individuals and families, commensality and hospitality are not necessarily essential for survival, but social networks could possibly change the life circumstances and food security status of lower-income people (Desmond 2017). For families that experience eviction or regularly run out of money for food, having someone to call can be the difference between eating and not eating or having a place to stay or losing one’s house. Both of my dissertation sites aim to not only foster social relationships, but also feed hungry people who are experiencing food insecurity, poverty, and homelessness. Despite the surplus of food produced in the US, an estimated 1 in 8 people in the US are food insecure (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2018). The percentage of hungry people in the US has been relatively stagnant for decades,
and there is a vast and complicated web of programs aimed at addressing this inequality (Winne 2008). The neighborhoods, families, and communities that are most direly affected by food insecurity and hunger are predominately low-income and people of color (Billings and Cabbil 2011; Chavez et al. 2007; Kaufman and Karpati 2007; Sano et al. 2011; Slocum 2011).

Unfortunately, the most prominent and persistent food insecurity efforts have not been successful in changing the severity of hunger and insecurity in the US (Winne 2008). Research finds that emergency food programs (such as food pantries and soup kitchens) often take away the autonomy of food choice and the ability to obtain culturally appropriate foods. They fail to address underlying causes of hunger based in structural inequality (Dickinson 2014). The need for new solutions is dire, and studying two organizations working with new organizational aims and missions towards alleviating hunger is an important step to combating hunger and food security in the US.

In this dissertation, I explore these pressing questions of commensality, hunger, and the role of eating together in the 21st century. The two organizations in my study, Unity Café and Breaking Bread, are also situated within a history of alternative food practices that work toward changing the conventional way people eat, purchase food, and interact with the food system. Most studies of alternative food systems research have focused on the effects and outcomes of market-based food justice models, such as community supported agriculture programs and farmer’s markets. Many scholars critique such efforts for their reductionist approach to structural inequalities related to race, class, and gender. For example, researchers find that many alternative food organizations and their accompanying spaces cater to white people and do not address issues of white privilege (Guthman 2011; Slocum 2007). Those in charge of these programs and spaces are predominately white, whereas the vast majority of those they are targeting are non-white (Passidomo 2014). Many farmer’s markets and CSA’s say that they appeal to all and it
would be racist to target black and Latino communities; ideas of universalism pervade these spaces, they assume that the values held by those in charge (white people) are normal and widely shared by everyone (Guthman 2011).

Even when food spaces work towards inclusion and diversity, they have often encountered numerous challenges in creating welcoming spaces for less privileged groups (Kato 2013). The products that these outlets chose to buy and plant are based on the preferences of those in charge, who assume that everyone will be happy with the outcome. However, research finds that even if the price is affordable, people are not interested in buying the foods these markets are selling because of taste or cultural preferences (Kato 2013). Furthermore, researchers critique these alternative food practices for their focus on changing the food situation for marginalized people rather than explicitly challenging the systematic conditions that produce the underlying structural problems that produce poverty and disadvantaged groups (Alkon and Norgaard 2009).

Some research has also looked specifically at the role of social ties within alternative food market spaces, which was an important step in the sociological understanding of social ties and food consumption. Researchers find that even in spaces like farmer’s markets and community supported agriculture programs, the social and economic relations are difficult to separate (Hinrichs 2000). Farmer’s markets might provide an alternative to the monoculture market economy but do not challenge the fundamental commodification of food; the creation of social ties between consumers and producers doesn’t preclude the presence of market sensibilities: people still care about the price (Hinrichs 2000). Through a closer examination of these markets, scholars often find that they are centered around neoliberal and profit-based exchanges and can perpetuate inequality (Hinrichs 2000, 2003; Winter 2003).
In this dissertation, I contribute to the literature on commensality, social capital, and sociology of food. This project helps us better understand the process behind how people make (or fail to make) social ties in spaces whose explicit intention is trying to build relationships across diverse groups of people. It also illuminates the social processes surrounding the formation of social ties. While I provide more specific research questions in each of the following chapters, my overall goal is to understand the conditions and factors that facilitate and impede the cultivation of social capital. We know little about the process behind how people create social ties in spaces that are intentionally and explicitly trying to do so, and this project aims to fill this gap. Whether or not people create social ties, the intentionally and explicit talk and documentation of both organizations that this is one of their main aims provides an important starting point.

My dissertation is organized as follows: in Chapter 2, I give a detailed description of my research sites and situate them within the history of food insecurity and charity food organizations in the US. I also describe my methods for data collection and analysis, including a discussion of my positionality in the project. In Chapter 3, I examine what factors facilitated or impeded the creation of social ties. I find that the intentionality of people to make social ties and physical and symbolic boundaries in both spaces were important factors in understanding how and why people did or did not create social ties. I also provide a more detailed description of the organizational mission statements and site trajectories in this chapter. The mission statements and organizational goals are an important aspect in understanding each of my analyses in the subsequent chapters. In Chapter 4, I examine the social construction of “community” and detail how volunteers and staff in both organizations used “community talk” to create a positive narrative about the organizations and their role in the spaces. I find that this idealization of community obscured their adherence to achievement ideology that resulted in the ostracism and
judgment of some of the low-income clients and trade volunteers at both organizations. This analysis furthers our understanding of how people socially construct community and the role of accounts in the process of creating positive identities in food spaces. In Chapter 5, I analyze how women performed gendered carework in the café and detail an important gendered division of labor. I introduce three concepts to capture this: expressions of inclusion, embodied welcome work, and interactional body labor. Similar to the carework women perform at work and in the home, this carework is vital to the success of Unity Café.

Taken together, these three chapters tell an important story about how people make (or don’t make) social ties. The gendered carework at Unity Café and the ideologies regarding community at each site tell a more comprehensive story of how actors created social ties. In Chapter 6, I conclude by illustrating what all these findings call tell us about the formation of social ties, gender in food organizations, and commensality. Moreover, I articulate paths for further research and limitations to this study.
Chapter 2: Data and Methods

RESEARCH SITES

Food Insecurity, Hunger, and Charity in the US

Data for this project comes from observations and interviews at two organizations, which I call Breaking Bread and Unity Café. Both organizations do work that can be considered food justice work. Food justice is loosely defined as the theoretical and political bridge between scholarship and activism on sustainable agriculture, food insecurity, and environmental justice (Alkon and Norgaard 2008; Guthman 2014). Simply put, food justice activists use food as a tool for social justice (Sbicca 2018). In general, food justice literature focuses on understanding how efforts to combat the inequalities of food access can be situated in larger conversation of inequality (Kato 2013; Slocum 2007). Many food justice scholars aim to connect conversation of food access to broader questions of power, capitalism, race, class, and gender (Alkon and Agyeman 2011). Food justice efforts focus on making sure people have sufficient food and access to healthy food, as well as on improving of food relations, both inside and outside markets.

As both of these food justice organizations seek to overcome class-based differences, we can best understand them in conversation with larger national discussions of food insecurity and hunger, and the different paths individuals and organizations have taken to try to alleviate these issues. The USDA defines food insecurity as a lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. There is an ongoing effort to curtail food insecurity and hunger in the United States through charity and non-profit based organizations. While the vast majority of governmental food assistance comes from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), there is a cultural belief that charitable food programs are very important (Poppendieck 1980). Beyond SNAP, non-profits are

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prolific in the anti-hunger landscape; volunteers provide most of the labor and they are funded by charitable giving. In many ways this allows government leaders to shed its responsibility to the poor, relying on community members to fill in the gaps of providing food beyond what is covered by SNAP (Poppendieck 1980). Both Breaking Bread and Unity Cafe fall under this banner of charity-based solutions to hunger.

Both of my research sites goals focus, in part, on increasing people’s access to “healthy” food. Despite the surplus of food produced in the US there is a huge population of citizens who go hungry; 11.8% of American households were food insecure in 2017 (Coleman-Jenson et al. 2018). North Carolina has hovered around the 10th highest state for food insecurity measures in the last ten years, with some studies suggesting that 1 in 10 people in the state struggle with hunger and food access. Researchers find that many solutions fail to fully address the complexity of food insecurity; suggesting that measurements are often unclear and do not account for the whole picture of what is going on in the communities and lives of those who are food insecure (Alkon et al. 2013). These critiques have spurred more complex and multifaceted food insecurity research, looking not only at individual’s physical proximity to food but many other relevant factors. Quantity of stores, quality of stores, location of stores, time of travel, transportation options, food preferences, and food prices are all relevant factors in people’s ability to get the food they need (Alkon et al. 2013; Carney 2012; Macnell et al. 2017).

Both of my research sites are a part of a large network of individuals and organizations throughout the country working towards solutions to combat hunger and food insecurity. While the approaches adopted by these organizations vary considerably, all focus on the goal of providing food and resources to people who are hungry. There are important distinctions that made Breaking Bread and Unity Cafe ideal sites to investigate the changing nature of food

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3 Healthy food is a somewhat sociologically contentious concept (Biltekoff 2013). Here, my sites define “healthy food” as non-processed, fresh foods.
charity, food justice, and commensality. Both organizations address hunger in part through the creation of social ties. This is a novel approach that deserves examination, especially since some researchers find that higher levels of social capital within a community are positively associated with a community’s ability to address food insecurity (Crowe and Smith 2013; Irwin et al. 2008; Martin et al. 2004). These studies, while informative, often take a quantitative approach; we know little about the actual processes of how social support can affect people’s ability to address hunger.

Research also calls for a more complex understanding of non-profit food organizations, with scholars cautioning that we should neither over-romanticize the vision of charity organizations nor throw out the entire food movement as unsuccessful (Broad 2016). Instead, they note, there is a need for research that emphasizes and explores the complicated and often contradictory nature of non-profit food organizations (Broad 2016). Given that many researchers who study hunger and food insecurity find that attempts to curb hunger and provide better food access to disadvantaged communities can often create more (or different) forms of inequality, it is important to study new strategies as they emerge. My dissertation sites combine both new and established food charity strategies. Both organizations focus on alleviating hunger through the distribution of food, although they do it in different ways. While they work toward the commonly employed goal of feeding the hungry, they do so with a new message of community and social engagement that goes beyond just serving food.

Site 1 - Breaking Bread

Breaking Bread is an outreach program instituted by Heartgrove Church, a Christian church in a large city in central North Carolina. Their aim of situating food insecurity within larger conversations about inequality suggests they can be classified as a food justice
organization, while the organizers and volunteers did not use this term. Volunteers, church members, and church staff commonly refer to the meal as a “fellowship” program. Furthermore, Heartgrove Church has deep roots fighting for social justice in a variety of ways (e.g., civil rights, LGBTU equality, homelessness) for many decades. Breaking Bread has been in operation for over a decade, although it has taken different forms during that period. It is a community program that provides a free meal inside the church’s community center twice a week, with no limit on the amount of times a person can visit. The meal I observed is served between 2:00-3:00 p.m. on Tuesdays.

In many ways, Breaking Bread exemplifies a common model for addressing hunger and food insecurity in the US: a charity-based soup kitchen (Poppendieck 1998). What made it such an intriguing research site was one meaningful distinction — that its mission statement also included language indicating a push for creating cross-class social ties and relationships between the program’s middle-class volunteers and poor clients. I provide a detailed description of the program’s mission statement and its evolution over time in the following chapter.

The food served at Breaking Bread is donated or bought using church funds allocated for the program. Most of the food is donated by a varying array of local sources: other local churches, local food pantries, local garden groups, individual church members, and other local food organizations (e.g., a student group that reclaims food that was going to be thrown away on the local college campus). The actual food served each week varies considerably and includes both homemade and commercially-prepared food, including pastries donated from a coffee shop. For every meal, volunteers make coffee and provide a jug of unlimited water for clients to drink throughout the time. Frequently there is a large green salad, though its contents beyond lettuce varies each meal (sometimes including lots of other vegetables and proteins like nuts, cheese, or eggs). The “main dish” of the meal ranges from hot dogs and hamburgers, to a full
Thanksgiving-style turkey dinner. There is also frequently fruit (either canned or fresh). The food takes up four long rectangular tables, and there is frequently lots of variety. The quality of food varies considerably. Some meals the clients raved over, other meals volunteers created from predominately expired or repurposed foods were not as appealing to clients, who voiced this opinion.

There are a variety of people at each meal that Breaking Bread serves. There are usually between six to twelve volunteers who come in around 12:30 to help prepare the meal and set up the dining room space. They stay until 3:30 to help wash dishes, put away food, and clean up the space post-meal. The majority of volunteers are white and middle-class. There is often a mix of men and women, and ages range from 40-75, though there are more women than men on average (usually five to eight women and two or three men). These demographics are consistent with broader volunteer culture in the US: women are more likely to volunteer than men, and volunteers are often over age 60, white, and middle-class (Bussell and Forbes 2002; Wilson and Musick 1997). Two of Breaking Bread’s regular volunteers were originally clients: one is a middle-aged white man and the other is a middle-aged black woman. The church’s community minister, Paul, is often also in the space helping or talking to people, for at least a portion of the meal. Breaking Bread serves between 70-130 people each week. They track how many people come in with a clicker at the door, which allowed me to keep track of how many people they served. More clients come in during the end of the month, because their SNAP and social security benefits tend to run out at this time. However, there is a lot of variability in number of clients from week to week. I never found a consistent pattern to explain why some meals they served 70 people and others 130. Clients create a line outside of the church doors starting at 1:30, and some people linger outside the church until 3:30. Regular clients often sit with the same people each week.
The dining room itself is a large open room with a wall of windows along one side, proving a great amount of bright, natural light. There is a stage in the room with a piano that clients would sometimes play, after asking a volunteer or Paul if it was okay. The kitchen is set away from the dining area and volunteers keep the door closed. I never heard anyone say that clients were not allowed in the kitchen there were never any in the space. The church also allows clients to use the bathrooms in a hallway near the dining space, which includes access to showers.

Site 2 - Unity Café

Unity Café is a pay-what-you-can café that opened in January 2019. It is a hybrid non-profit model that relies on volunteers and paid employees and allows customers to pay full price for a meal, some of the price of the meal, or get a meal for free by volunteering. The café also falls more obviously in line with the recent food justice movement, with emphasis placed on local and healthy foods from environmentally-sustainable sources (Alkon and Norgaard 2008; Slocum 2007). The pay-what-you-can model was established by the organization One World Everybody Eats, which says that it aims to “create spaces where people are nourished in body and soul. People come together, eat in dignity, and form strong bonds that foster an interconnected community.”⁴ There are now over 60 pay-what-you-can cafés in the US (and 50 outside the US), all under the umbrella of One World Everybody Eats but with slightly different mission statements and organizational structures. Each pay-what-you-can café operates independently. Unity Café’s mission statement focuses on the creation of a community space that is welcoming to all people, including those who cannot pay for a meal, are food insecure, or are experiencing homelessness. Prioritizing building community is central to Unity Café’s identity.

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⁴ https://www.oneworldeverybodyeats.org/
provide a more detailed description of the café’s mission statement and history in the following chapter.

While Breaking Bread exemplifies the traditional soup kitchen model, Unity Café’s structure is a bit more novel. The café looks like any other café, save for the fact that the mission statement and directions for payment are displayed throughout the space. The prices on the menu board are “suggested donation prices” and patrons are encouraged to “pay whatever you can.” In its idealized form, the café operates with an 80/20 model of patronage – 80% of the people who come in pay full price for their meal (or more than the suggested donation price) and 20% of the people pay nothing or some portion of the suggested donation price. Café staff asks people who do not pay anything for their meal to volunteer for one hour. Café promotional materials refer to this exchange as a “hand up not a hand out.” Those who volunteer for their meal do things such as: wash dishes, sweep, wash windows, bus food, clean the bathrooms, and other tasks that require little to no training.

Unity Café offers both breakfast and lunch options all day, an espresso bar, and cooler full of specialty drinks like sparking water, juice, and kombucha. The menu includes items that the boards believes are “approachable” for people experiencing food insecurity and homelessness, like waffles, chicken salad, and a turkey club sandwich. It also includes menu items targeting middle-class people who want hip, fun food, like avocado toast, homemade pop tarts, and eggs benedict. The café has a variety of seating options, including a large “community table” (discussed at length in subsequent chapters), a bar area that faces the open kitchen, and smaller tables (seating 2 – 8 people) scattered throughout the space (including a small patio area with 6 additional tables). The café is open from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on the weekdays and 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on the weekends.

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5 This was discussed at length during multiple board meetings and community advisory board meetings I attended in 2017.
There are also a variety of people who inhabit the café space on a daily basis. About 20% of the people who come into the café for a meal pay for their meal by volunteering with the organization for an hour – doing things like washing dishing, bussing tables, sweeping, cleaning windows, and other tasks that require little or no training (hereafter I refer to volunteers who pay for their meals by volunteering as trade volunteers). When the café opened in January, it was serving about five free meals a day to trade volunteers, but by August they were up to thirty to forty free meals a day. The majority (approximately 90%) of trade volunteers are men, and there are more black men who volunteer than white men. The rest of the café patrons are people who come in for a meal and pay full price. Many of the people who pay full price also end up leaving a donation, referred to by the café as “paying it forward” to help offset the costs of the people who are not paying any money for their meals. There are also routine volunteers, who volunteer for three- or six-hour shifts and are almost exclusively white middle-class women (about 90%). These volunteers come in at the same time each week, every two weeks, or each month. They often sign up for their volunteer shift in advance. The routine volunteers are not volunteering in order to receive a free meal. Throughout my time observing, there were considerable staff changes. Overall, the café regularly employees four full time staff members, and 3-5 part time staff-members. There are usually only 4-5 staff members on site at any given time.

DATA COLLECTION

I collected data for this project in a variety of capacities. Through my involvement in these spaces I collected ethnographic and interview data. Data collection was slightly different at each site because of the structure of the organization and the physical space.

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6 This information is displayed in the café and was shared during meetings I attended.
7 This information is based both on my observations and an interview with the café director.
8 A participant summary table, detailing the pseudonyms and basic information for interviewees is available in Table A.
Gaining Access

I gained access to both sites in early 2017. I approached the founder of Unity Café for an interview via e-mail in January 2017. During this time, I was conducting exploratory preliminary interviews with people working on food issues, trying to establish my dissertation research question and sites. After this initial interview, I asked her if I could start observing meetings and events to learn more about the organization. I learned about Breaking Bread through another exploratory interview, with someone who was able to connect me with Holly, the lead volunteer at Breaking Bread at the time. Through e-mail, I introduced myself and asked if I could come volunteer and learn more about Breaking Bread.

When I first approached the groups, I began by asking the individuals in leadership positions for permission to observe and participate in the spaces. After I was given permission by the organizational leaders, I explained my research to the participants of Breaking Bread and Unity Café as I met them. As my observations continued, I gave a brief description of my dissertation and asked for verbal consent each time I met a new person. These conversations went something like, “I am collecting data for my dissertation about food insecurity in [city name], is it okay if I include you in my research notes? I do not use anyone’s real names.” If the person did not know what “dissertation” meant, as some did not, I explained that it was a school project I was completing for my doctorate degree. Many times, people did not understand what a dissertation was. However, many of them recalled working on school projects themselves and so this provided a moment of shared understanding.

The first time I attended a Unity Cafe board and community advisory board meeting I introduced myself and described my dissertation. I told everyone that I would be writing notes about the meeting and that if they did not want to be included in the data collection, they could let me know. I explained to each group that I would not use their names or any identifying
information and they had no obligation to consent. I also brought IRB-approved information sheets to each meeting and offered them to each person. During pop-up meals and other events, I introduced myself to new people in the same way.

**Methodological Approach**

For this dissertation, I utilized a qualitative case study method and grounded theory. Grounded theory is an “inductive, comparative methodology that provides systematic guidelines for gathering, synthesizing, analyzing, and conceptualizing qualitative data” (Charmaz 2001, pg. 6396). When trying to understand the complicated set of variables surrounding food consumption, qualitative methods can reveal the nuances of a situation or setting (Alkon 2013). Employing a case study methodology allowed me to better understand who group members were, what their stable and reoccurring modes of activity and interaction were, how they related to one another, and how the group was related to the rest of the world (Becker 1970). Given my interest in the members of the community with each organization, their connection with each other, and their broader community connections, utilizing the case study method was ideal (Lin 2018). Furthermore, the case study approach is well-suited to examining and understanding social processes and forming truly emergent knowledge (Small 2009). The case study approach is also well suited to “how” and “why” research questions, making it a practical methodological approach to answering my research questions (Lin 2018).

Given that the primary research question of my dissertation focused on how people created social ties (or did not), the predominant method of data collection was participant observation. Ethnography allows “the field researcher [to see] firsthand and up close how people grapple with uncertainty and ambiguity, how meanings emerge through talk and collective action” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). Through observations I was able to observe
interactions of individuals within the spaces that illuminated how people in these organizations either built or avoided the cultivation of relationships and social capital. Interviews acted as a supplement to observational data, filling in gaps and expanding upon ethnographic findings.

I reflected on interview questions after each interview and evaluated their effectiveness and whether to add or remove questions that were not working (Charmaz 2014). I simultaneously collected and analyzed interview data as grounded theory suggests; the data collection process was iterative (Charmaz 2014). Additionally, with all the interview guides, I intentionally used open-ended questions, in order to allow individuals to use their own language and concepts in responding to them (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). In many cases, I had developed relationships with interview participants throughout my time in the spaces before the actual interview occurred. These interviews followed a more individualized approach; for example, I was able to ask participants about specific people or specific events I had witnessed and wanted to learn more about.

Participant Observation at Breaking Bread

Observations at Breaking Bread began in February 2017 and ended in August 2018. Including preliminary observations in the space, I collected a total of approximately 145 hours of observation at the Heartgrove Church from 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. on Tuesdays. During these observations, I took jottings on my note application on my cell phone because this was faster and easier than carrying around a notebook. This was helpful because I was often walking around or standing.

I took an “active-membership-researcher” role at Breaking Bread (Adler and Adler 1987). As a white middle-class woman, I resembled the volunteers more than the clients in many respects and only differed in age. Furthermore, because volunteers allowed me to be in the dining
space before the 2:00 p.m. opening time to observe (and often help) with preparation of the meal, the clients associated me with the volunteers. Access to the space before 2:00 and after 3:00 was a privilege only allowed to volunteers, and my ability to go inside marked me in this category.

Part of my data collection included spending specific time observing just the volunteers. I started my observations at 12:30 p.m., when the majority of volunteers arrived. Some volunteers came earlier or later; the bulk arrived by 1 p.m. I spent the first hour of observation in the kitchen and dining area, talking and helping with the meal set up. At 1:30, I sat with the group as they did their “centering” activity. During this time, they discussed updates about volunteers, guests, and church; provided particular directions or information about the food for the day; and shared a short poem, story, Bible verse, or prayer. During “centering,” the group leader assigned different jobs to volunteers. If new volunteers were present, I told them about my dissertation and obtained verbal consent at this time. I carried information sheets in my backpack or in my car for all observations and offered them to people when I obtained verbal consent. Only two people ever took an information sheet; both gave them back to me after reading them.

I also purposefully collected observational data when only clients were present. Every third observational period, I spent fifteen minutes waiting outside with guests (12:45-1:00 p.m.) before going in to help the volunteers. Clients waited a significant amount of time outside before entering the building when volunteers unlocked the doors at 2:00. I tried to gauge how they felt about me being outside with them and involved myself in a manner that felt appropriate. Some days I talked with the guests, other days I just sat at a table or leaned against the building and observed.

However, I spent the most time observing when both clients and volunteers were in the same space. When the meal began at 2:00, I either helped serve the meal (when necessary) or observed the space from different vantage points in the room. The number of volunteers each
week fluctuated, so it was hard to anticipate when they needed help or not. On most days the lead volunteer did not assign me a job because the group knew I was conducting research and they generally allowed me to dictate my own role in the space.

On the days when I was assigned a task, I focused my attention on the Breaking Bread volunteers. I talked with them about their experiences as a volunteer, their connections to other volunteers and clients of the meal, and their perceptions of food insecurity and food justice, the church community, and the broader community. I paid close attention to how volunteers talked with guests. During some meals, I shadowed volunteers to get a closer look at their individual interactions during the hour. Depending on the volunteer and their role in the space, I sometimes explicitly asked whether it was okay if I followed them during the meal. In other cases, I did my shadowing in a less obtrusive way, by asking if I could sit or stand next to them for the meal, to see how “things worked” at their station. I shadowed volunteers at the drink station, front desk, kitchen area, and food line on different occasions. For volunteers with more stationary positions (e.g., front door greeter, dishwasher), I was able to unobtrusively place myself in their general area and observe their interactions. Through this practice I was able to better see who was talking to different guests of the meal, what they were talking about, and ask follow up questions to elaborate on these observations.

On days when there were plenty of volunteers, I focused my attention on observing and engaging with clients. Starting at 2 p.m. when the meal started, I observed the space from different locations, such as the front of the room, the drink station, the welcoming desk, the stage, or a table. From 2:00-2:15 pm, I walked around the space, observing volunteers as they served and interacted, and the clients as they went through the food line. When the majority of people were seated at 2:15, I sat down at a table to talk with the people eating there. During the next 45 minutes, I often moved from table to table and talked with guests about their lives, their
relationships, their thoughts on the meal, their broader experiences in the community, and anything else they wanted to talk about.

*Breaking Bread Interviews*

I conducted nineteen interviews with people involved with Breaking Bread: nine volunteers, nine clients, and the community minister who founded the program. While interviews varied based on the participant’s role, interviews were guided by the questions in the interview script provided in Appendix A.

I selected the nine volunteers based on my observations of the meal. There were between six to twelve volunteers each week, with the number fluctuating regularly. Some volunteers came consistently every week unless they had an unavoidable scheduling conflict. I considered these volunteers as the “core” volunteers and tried to interview all of them. I was unable to interview some of them in a more formalized setting because of their health or job schedule. Of the eleven volunteers who I categorized as “core” I was only able to interview nine. Since I had no control over the limited number of volunteers who volunteered regularly, I was not be able to aim for much variation in terms of age, race, gender, or sexuality. All of the interviews happened at coffee shops chosen by the volunteers. Interviews lasted between one to two hours. I audio recorded each interview with a handheld recorder, while simultaneously taking notes about other aspects of the interview like tone and body language. I wrote detailed thumbnails immediately following each interview.

I interviewed nine clients of the meal, though I talked informally with many more during observations. During observations I worked to develop relationships in the space and eventually asked a variety of clients to participate in a more structured, formal interview beyond the informal interviews conducted during participant observations. I tried to select guests
purposively, aiming for variation in race, age, sexuality, and gender. I offered to meet participants at a location of their choosing, including a public space like a library or coffee shop. Despite my efforts, no clients were willing to meet me to do an interview outside of the church meal. Some clients outright said no to interviews, even those who were happy to talk to me more informally during the meal. Others cited that they had busy schedules, relied on the bus, and did not have money or time to meet me somewhere to talk. I often offered to meet them somewhere before or after the meal, but many said the bus schedule did not allow them much time to spare before or after the meal. I ended up conducting all of the interviews during the church meal itself, often on the spot when I asked someone if they were willing to let me ask them some more specific questions. Even when I tried to stick to the interview guide (in Appendix A), clients were much more likely than volunteers to go off topic and talk about different things than what I asked them about. These interviews often lasted between 20 and 40 minutes.

Some circumstances hindered my ability to interview clients. For example, I asked Alexis if she would be willing to do a short interview for my project, and she agreed to do it on the spot. I started asking her questions from the interview guide, and she went into great detail about what she liked and did not like about Breaking Bread. She started to discuss her life as a pregnant woman experiencing homeless in her car the previous summer, then quickly realized she had to leave to catch the bus. Although Alexis said she had been a regular client of the meal for a few years, her presence was never consistent. I did not see her again at the meal after the interview and was unable to ask her the rest of the questions on the interview guide. However, despite some challenges in conducting these more formal interviews with clients, I believe that I was able to gain much of their perspectives from observations and informal interviews. If anything, I learned that my questions did not always resonate with them, and I learned to let them tell me what was important to their experiences.
**Participant Observation at Unity Cafe**

I completed approximately 150 hours of observation at Unity Cafe between January and August 2018. Including preliminary observations and attendance of events and meetings outside of the cafe, I conducted over a total of 225 hours of observation. Unity Cafe had a more varied structure and more diverse options for data collection than Breaking Bread, so the timing and nature of my observations varied more. As with my observations at Breaking Bread, I used my cell phone to take notes during the observations in which I volunteered at Unity Cafe. I was able to keep my phone in my pocket, making it much easier to take out when I took notes. I used a small physical notebook when I sat at the community table, because I was mostly stationary for the entirety of the observation. When I sat at other tables, observing the community table or other parts of the cafe, I took notes on my laptop. I was able to type faster than I could write by hand, so this method worked well for jottings and allowed me to capture more dialogue.

The first portion of data collection occurred before the cafe storefront opened. Starting in March 2017, I attended monthly pop-up meals (at varying restaurants), either as a volunteer for Unity Cafe or as a patron of the restaurant and event, as preliminary research. I also attended pay-what-you-can meals approximately once a month, sponsored by the Community Advisory Board (CAB). The CAB held these events at community centers and churches, and the food was prepared by the CAB itself, rather than being catered or cooked by a restaurant. Additionally, I observed Unity Cafe board meetings and community advisory board meetings. I was only able to observe four board meetings, as the board asked me to stop attending. Amanda, the executive director, told me that they were no longer allowing outside observers to participate in the meetings. She gave me this directive after I attended a board meeting with a very tense discussion of her salary. The community advisory board was made up of individuals in the cafes target community: people who were experiencing or had previously experienced homelessness.
and individuals who worked closely with this community. I went to the monthly community advisory board meetings, which last approximately one and a half hours, each month from April 2017 to December 2018. There were also occasionally public events such as volunteer meet and greets and happy hour events that I also observed.

Observations in the actual café took place between January 2018 to August 2018. Once the café opened, I conducted observations in the café three times a week, as a volunteer or a patron. One day a week I volunteered as a “routine volunteer.” I signed up for a weekly shift at the café that involved helping out with anything they needed. I bussed tables, delivered food, worked on the register, cleaned, rolled silverware and talked to people during these volunteer shifts. My volunteer shift was from 6:30 to 9:30 a.m. on Wednesdays. This allowed me to stay up-to-date with café operations from an insider’s perspective, as well as build rapport with other volunteers. This also meant that I was included on all e-mail communication to routine volunteers. I often stayed until 10:30 or 11:00 a.m. during these volunteer shifts, eating in the café or hanging around for an hour or two after my shift ended so I could observe without having to engage in volunteer work.

Additionally, I spent time observing the café as a diner. Two days a week I went to the café during breakfast hours (8:00 – 10:00 a.m.), lunch hours (12:00 – 2:00 p.m.) or “off” hours (10:00 – 12:00 p.m.), alternating the time of my observation frequently. During these observations I ordered a meal, snack, or drink, and sat in the café. I varied where I sat; sometimes sitting at the community table or at an individual table. While sitting at an individual table, I often sat close enough to the community table so that I could observe how people interacted at it without me physically sitting there with them. I also varied how I paid for the meal. Most observations I paid full price. On some weekend observations, I volunteered for my
meal. On a few occasions, I paid half-price. Field notes were completed within 48 hours of the observation.

I also collected a small amount of online content that I analyze and discuss in Chapter 4. This comprised of information available to me as a routine volunteer and through social media. I saved and coded e-mails sent to all routine volunteers. I subscribed to the café newsletter and included this as part of my data, in addition to social media posts on their Facebook page. I downloaded the photos available via the café’s Instagram and Facebook pages for the period of time the café was open and I was observing (January to August 2018). I uploaded these photos into NVivo and coded them for emergent themes.

Unity Café Interviews

I conducted a total of twenty-four interviews with people involved in some way at Unity Café: ten trade volunteers, eight routine volunteers, three community advisory board member (two of which were also board members), the executive director, and two regular diners who came in frequently. I interviewed the executive director twice, once in March 2017 and again in August 2018. Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two hours and depended on the openness of the participant and their relation to the organization. Interviews happened at local coffee shops or Unity Café. I tried to get participants to meet me outside of the café, but many insisted we meet there. I worked hard to make sure we were in a space in the café that was not around other people. In addition, I conducted many informal interviews during my observations with staff, routine volunteers, trade volunteers, and diners.

During the first two months of café operations, I worked to identify possible interview participants. Consistent with my interviews at Breaking Bread, I focused on interviewing guests who I identified as “regulars.” After I identified diners and trade volunteers who seemed to be
“regulars,” categorized by their frequent and consistent patronage of the café, I asked if they would be interested and willing to participate in an interview. I aimed for variation in terms of volunteers’ interactions with others. I interviewed volunteers who talked a lot when they were in the space and others who rarely talked at all while volunteering. I also talked with people who came regularly to the café but did not volunteer in any capacity.

Unlike the clients at Breaking Bread, the trade volunteers I interviewed at Unity Café were easier to access, in part because they had more time to hang out in the café. Many of the trade volunteers spent long periods of time in the café, sometimes from opening until closing. Therefore, they were willing to be interviewed if I was willing to do it in the café while they were there. However, there were some trade volunteers who I was unable to interview for the same reasons as the clients at Breaking Bread. With a few in particular, I tried on multiple occasions to set up a time but was not successful. I set up all of my interviews with trade volunteers myself, with one exception: Kate. In a conversation with the executive director, I asked about the gender demographics of trade volunteers, because I had seen so few women trade volunteers. She confirmed there were not many but mentioned Kate, who volunteered regularly as a trade volunteer, but I had not met. She sent a group text to both me and Kate, introducing Kate to me and telling her I might want to interview her. I texted back and forth with Kate privately and she agreed to meet me at the café for an interview during one of her volunteer shifts.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data for this project came directly from the previously described interviews and participant observation. Data consisted of text from interviews, ethnographic field notes, and some online content. I analyzed field notes and interview transcripts with qualitative methods,
specifically grounded theory, to develop a more accurate and complete picture of the interactions. I constantly moved between collecting and analyzing data, to allow for constant comparison and tried to remain reflexive and open throughout the entire process of data analysis (Charmaz 2014).

Interviews

I recorded interviews with an audio recorder, while also taking notes throughout the interview on aspects of the situation that were not captured by the recorder (e.g., facial expressions, body language). I transcribed the interviews after I completed each one. I continued with initial line-by-line coding of the transcribed interviews by hand. During line-by-line, or “open coding,” I began to develop coding concepts. I then developed a codebook and continued with focus coding. I used NVivo, a qualitative analysis software program, to aid in the focus coding process. I also wrote detailed thumbnails at the earliest opportunity. These thumbnails included a brief description of the interview, emerging themes, and details about the participants tone, body language, and demeanor. I wrote memos throughout data collection and analysis that aided in the process of generating concepts and categories.

Throughout data collection, memoing and interviewing happened simultaneously. I adapted my interview style and questions to better suit the interviews as they progress. After the first initial interviews, I changed some of the questions on the interview guide that were not working well. In particular, the original interview guide included a question about the participants friends and family outside of the organizations that I ended up cutting, because it did not resonate with participants and were no longer relevant to my research questions. I also started asking more detailed questions about the meaning of community within the sites as this started to emerge as an important theme.
Observations

Throughout data collection and post data collection, I engaged in open and focused coding of field notes. Coding is the “pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data” (Charmaz 2014:113). Through a detailed coding process, qualitative researchers are able to develop emergent codes and theories that help explain their data in significant ways. Coding helps researchers categorize, summarize, and account for each piece of data; codes “show how [researchers] select, separate, and sort data and begin an analytic account of them” (Charmaz 2014: 111). I coded by hand initially, using a line-by-line process. I used action words to ensure that these initial codes were grounded in data. Importantly, during this line-by-line coding phase, I remained open to all possible theoretical directions.

During initial coding, some codes stood out as especially significant. For example, during this early stage of coding, I began seeing patterns that I coded as “caring for others” and “touching bodies.” I used these focused codes to then sift through and analyze the rest of my field notes. I also wrote memos about these codes to help me better understand what they meant and under what conditions they occurred. Memo-writing provided me with a space to actively engage with my materials, develop ideas, fine-tune subsequent data gathering, and engage in critical reflection (Charmaz 2011). These codes and memos became the base of the analysis in Chapter 5.

Given my preliminary research and the amount of sociological literature already conducted on food and relationships, I had some frameworks that guided my coding. For example, given that research on food and inequality has consistently found that women tend to have more responsibility for food and care work (DeVault 1990), I paid close attention to the gendered division of labor within the spaces. I thus used both pre-existing and emergent themes to guide coding.
While I approached this project inductively, I was drawn to these sites with both professional and personal curiosities based on my previous experiences as both a volunteer at anti-hunger organizations and a scholar who studied food insecurity. Although I did have expectations and ideas as to how I would analyze the data, my observations and interviews yielded results I had not accounted for. I remained very open about the data obtained in these interviews and observations and allowed for themes and ideas to present themselves.

Ethical Considerations and Positionality

I took several steps to ensure the ethical treatment of research subjects. The first step was submitting my study proposal to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research at NC State, and I received IRB approval. Interviews were confidential and I provided anonymity for participants, though some of the clients at Breaking Bread talked about how they wouldn’t mind if I used their real names. I created pseudonyms for each participant, both those who were interviewed formally and those who I talked to informally or observed, and no directly identifiable information is included in the analysis. I took care to conceal other identifying information when applicable, such as some volunteers’ occupations that were distinguishable. I immediately uploaded all recordings and observation jottings to my password-locked computer.

I used a consent form to minimize potential risk. I also carried information sheets during observations to offer to anyone who wanted more information. As much as possible, I remained open about my intentions and purpose of the study. I tried to make clear the potential gains and possible risks of participation. In addition to these more concrete ways of ensuring ethical treatment of subjects, I tried to remain consciously aware of participants’ emotional state during interviews to ensure that they felt comfortable and safe. For example, I stopped asking Liza
questions off the interview guide halfway through the interview because she became emotionally distraught. We talked for an additional forty minutes about her life and experiences, though I did not continue to use questions from the guide. She wanted to continue to talk, but was clearly upset, so I let her guide what we talked about.

My identity provided to be both an asset and a challenge at different points in the data collection process. Feminist researchers have discussed positionality somewhat frequently and consistently in feminist qualitative methods (Nencel 2014; Smith 1993). I define positionality as aspects of identity such as class, gender, race, sexuality, and other attributes that mark an individual’s position in society, either fixed or acquired. While researchers do acknowledge their positionality, as scholars, we often relegate these topics to footnotes and epilogues. This downplays the fact that the repercussions of researcher’s identity on data collection can be problematic and pose unique challenges.

During data collection at Breaking Bread, there were a series of encounters that hindered my progress and were directly connected to my identity as a young white woman. Specifically, some men objectified and harassed me on variety of different levels and occasions. Throughout my time collecting data, there were incidents in which men made comments that made me feel objectified and uncomfortable. I also experienced unwanted physical contact, ranging from men putting their hands on my lower back to one man trying to kiss me on the mouth. Men also frequently interrupted me while I was talking to another research participant and demanded my attention.

These experiences shaped how I felt and moved about the space in Breaking Bread. In particular, after an especially upsetting observation in which a man kissed me and tried to continue to touch me despite my attempts to pull away, I had a difficult time writing the field notes and motivating myself to go back. I purposefully shadowed other volunteers in the weeks
following this encounter to try to mitigate my anxiety. While shadowing was always part of my data collection plan, I structured when I did it based in part by these events rather than other considerations. The emotional energy I put into picking out outfits I thought would not attract attention, deciding to wear make-up or to not wear make-up, to wear my hair up or down, and thinking about how I physically moved my body around the space occupied mind space that could have been used more effectively and productively.

I also tried to remain open and aware of my emotions during interviews and in the field, as emotions can be an important aspect of collection and analysis (Kleinman and Copp 1993). Two of the participants that I became close with throughout my time in the field died due to health complications related to inadequate health care access and prolonged periods of homelessness. I struggled to deal with the grief of their deaths while trying to simultaneously convince myself that as a researcher, I needed to create analytical distance. These experiences made me consider critically the catch-22 of qualitative research described by Kleinman and Copp (1993), “We allow ourselves to have particular feelings, such as closeness with participants, and try to deny or get rid of emotions we deem inappropriate. Fieldworkers, then, do emotion work, molding their feelings to meet others’ expectations” (pg. 2). Grief felt like too personal and deep an emotion to bear during dissertation data collection, yet ultimately had an important impact on the way I collected data after their deaths.

Together, these experiences made me think critically about my privilege in the space as a middle-class white woman who is food-secure and did not need these services, had access to health care. I thought about how my responsibility was to tell these people’s stories in both a thoughtful and critical way. Furthermore, it shaped how I approached subsequent research project and research questions. After men harassed me at Breaking Bread, I started to ask other women (and eventually men) about their feelings of safety within free meal providers.
Unsurprisingly, many of the people I talked to also experienced similar things, and these experiences became the starting point for a new research project I am currently working on about safety and harassment at emergency food providers.
TABLE 2.1: Demographic Information for Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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<th>Race</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tr>
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<td>UC</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>/Routine Volunteer</td>
</tr>
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<td>John</td>
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Chapter 3: Intentionality and Boundaries in the Process of Creating Social Ties

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists have studied social connections for the entirety of the discipline. There are many terms and theories researchers use to describe the type, strength, and variety of connections people have with one another, including: strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973), organic and mechanical solidarity (Durkheim [1893] 1933), social capital (Bourdieu 1986), and embeddedness (Polanyi 1957). Many argue that these connections, by whatever name, are a foundational component of the social structure. Part of this subfield of sociology also includes discussions of whether or not social connectedness is in decline in the US, with some arguing that people are in fact less connected than in previous generations (McPherson et al. 2006; Putnam 2000), and others suggesting that relationships are just changing and evolving (Fischer 2011a; Julier 2013). While social research has investigated the repercussions of social ties in great detail, few have examined the process from which these ties arise (Small 2009).

Many people are drawn to the idea that communal eating can be a means of connecting with others. Some scholars even suggest that food has the potential to create and foster relationships across relatively rigid social boundaries (Douglas 1984; Julier 2013). The aim of this project is to better understand the process behind how people make social ties, particularly between people from different socio-economic positions. In this chapter, I focus on the processes and consequences of the work of two anti-hunger organizations that are explicitly trying to build social ties between diverse groups. I draw on ethnographic data from both cases over an 18-month period of time and supplementary interviews with 40 individuals across both sites, some who are involved with both organizations. In this chapter, I examine how individuals build social ties, what factors impede or facilitate that process, and how food can play a role in the creation of
social capital. Through this exploration, I focus on answering the following driving research question: What conditions and factors facilitate or impede the cultivation of social capital?

I argue that in order for people to make relationships in both spaces, they needed to intentionally break established social norms about how strangers interact. I find that the physical space of the organizations, and the role of commensality are important factors in the facilitation and impediment of creating social capital. In making these claims, I show how people can inadvertently reaffirm class boundaries and how these boundaries can inhibit the creation of social ties.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL TIES

Scholars have offered several different definitions of social capital (Coleman 1988; Putman 2000). Perhaps most notably, Bourdieu defines it as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition…which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital” (1986, pg. 51). He explains that “collectively-owned capital” can include both material and symbolic benefits. Individuals can use their membership in a group to access material benefits that are only available to the group, as well as the “symbolic profit” of being able to associate themselves with a high-status group.

Coleman (1988) offers an alternative definition. He builds upon Bourdieu’s definition, laying the groundwork for how sociologists most commonly use the concept in sociological research today. Coleman explains that social capital can “make possible the achievement of certain ends”—for example, he describes that a mother with strong social ties in a community can let a child go to the park by itself, whereas that would not be possible in a neighborhood where she knew no one (1988, pg. S98). Coleman’s and Bourdieu’s focus on the economic realm, centered on individuals and small groups (Portes 2000), set the tone for social capital
research over the decades that followed. Many of these studies use the concept of social capital to quantitatively measure social networks and focus on the exchange and use value of these relationships (Martin et al. 2004).

Other scholars have developed more community-based understandings of social capital (Flora and Flora 2013; Julier 2013; Portes 2000; Putnam 2000). Focusing on community-level social capital, Putnam defines social capital as social networks that have value and that social ties can affect the productivity of individuals and groups. Others argue that social capital can refer to the positives that comes from relationships, including the information they are willing to share with one another, and helping each other to feel less alone (Small 2009).

In this project, I define social capital as the benefits that accrue from relationships in the spaces, either tangible or immaterial, that help individuals or communities. Importantly, I conceptualize value slightly differently than Coleman and Bourdieu to include non-monetary outcomes. While their definitions provide an important foundation for understanding how social ties operate in a capitalist society, I believe that it is also important to examine “goods” that may not have a direct, monetary exchange or use-value. These outcomes, like empathy, may not have a price tag like other goods available because of networks but do have value. Ostensibly, empathy could lead to increased use or exchange value in the realm of charitable giving. Furthermore, increased knowledge, empathy, and trust can benefit communities and facilitate cooperation for social benefits (Putnam 2000).

Researchers utilize the concept of social capital across community- and individual-level assessments, in both quantitative and qualitative studies, and to explain everything from how people get jobs to whom people invite over for dinner. Scholars use social capital to explain the success of some housing programs in some communities and not others, who lives and dies in a

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9 This definition is based, in part, on the work of many of the previously mentioned scholars
natural disaster, and even the economic development and government efficiency of cities (Klienberg 2002; Portes 2000). Studies consistently show that social capital matters for individuals and communities: those with higher levels of social capital are associated with many other positive outcomes (Coleman 1988; Flora and Flora 2013).

Sociologists have also applied the concept of social capital to the study of food consumption. Some find, using quantitative analyses, that higher levels of social and cultural capital within a community are positively associated with a community’s ability to address food insecurity (Crowe and Smith 2013; Irwin et al. 2008; Martin et al. 2004). Others look at the crucial role of social capital in the creation and continued viability of alternative food organizations (Blay-Palmer, Sonnino and Custot 2016; Pretty and Hine 2001).

Some researchers adopt a community capital framework, focusing on how social capital operates at a community level (Keating and Gasteyer 2012; Pigg et al. 2013; Stofferahn 2012). Within community capital literature, research focuses on the different uses of bonding and bridging social capital. Both can influence and interact with one another to create different community relations and opportunities for change (Flora and Flora 2016) but, similar to Granovetter’s conception of strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973), each refers to different levels and uses of social ties. Bonding social capital refers to social ties among individuals and groups with similar social backgrounds, such as class, race, gender, and kinship (Flora and Flora 2016). Bridging social capital is conceptualized as cross-cutting ties that span across diverse groups within a community, these ties can help connect people with different information, resources, and opportunities (Narayan 1999). Flora and Flora explain, “Bridging social capital fosters diversity of ideas and brings together diverse people” (167).

Existing research offers substantial evidence of how individual- and community-level social capital can contribute to positive outcomes, including outcomes related to food and eating,
like a communities ability to reduce hunger and food insecurity. Most studies measure social
capital at fixed points in time, yet theoretically, social capital develops through engagement in
social relationships (Jarrett et al. 2005). Researchers have spent less time analyzing the actual
process by which people meet and develop relationships with people who are dissimilar from
themselves, especially cross-class relationships (Jarrett et al. 2005). In order to better understand
why some communities and individuals have access to social capital that can change their
circumstances, we need to better understand how and why people create trusted relationships.
While quantitative assessments of social capital are important, they do not adequately address
how people form these essential relationships and the repercussions for those involved (Torres
2019). The questions used in quantitative studies to evaluate relationships do always resonate
with participants, and do not provide a completely accurate picture of their social networks
(Torres 2019). As Putnam explains, “creating (or re-creating) social capital is no simple
task…Actions by individuals are not sufficient to restore community, but they are necessary”
(402-3). Specifically, these cases allow us to examine intentional attempts to build social capital,
in spaces where the organizers have this deliberate purpose in mind.

Scholars argue that people create social capital in the workplace, faith communities,
through arts and culture, organizations, and politics. However, researchers less frequently
examine the actual mechanics and processes of how people build (or don’t build) social capital
within a community (Putnam 2000). Some research investigates how bonding social capital can
occur and be fostered within communities (Heinze et al 2016), but few examine organizations
and individuals who are intentionally engaging in explicit efforts to foster bridging social capital
(Freeman and Dodson 2014). Moreover, some argue that social capital functions differently for
low-income communities and that bonding social capital can be less beneficial than bridging
social capital, despite it being more difficult to create and sustain (Dominquez and Watkins
2003; Freeman and Dodson 2014; Putnam 2000). Desmond (2012) found that people living in high-poverty areas relied heavily on “disposable ties” for food, childcare, and shelter; ties that provide high support but are fleeting and unstable. Others argue that programs intended to help low-income communities should incorporate opportunities to foster bridging social capital to enhance the program’s effectiveness (Freeman and Dodson 2014). Others argue that cross-class engagement, at places like homeless shelters, can ameliorate or reproduce class boundaries (Rogers 2017).

This chapter furthers our understanding of the process behind building social ties, while also examining how class boundaries are reinforced even when organizations are trying to break them down. Furthermore, these two cases can show how physical environments, and how people respond to them, can be an important factor in how people interact and make relationships. How people served and ate food within the spaces was also an important factor in understanding the effect of both the physical and symbolic boundaries that worked to dismantle or reproduce social boundaries.

SITE DETAILS

I focus on two cases in this chapter: Breaking Bread, a free meal program operated by a church and Unity Café, a pay-what-you-can cafe. Both sites have mission statements that invoke the idea that people of all backgrounds could build stronger social capital, although neither explicitly uses that term. Below, I trace some key moments related to the missions of both organizations that help contextualize the process behind how relationships were or were not built in both organizations during my time observing. I begin with brief histories that illustrate important moments of evolution for both organizations. I found that the organizations’ mission statements, and the way people interpreted them in the spaces, were important contextual factors.
in understanding the process of how social ties were (or were not) made. The people in charge of the organizations formed the mission statements and those around them both supported and challenged their goals with important repercussions for how the organizations operated.

*Social Capital Mission Statements: Breaking Bread*

Key Dates:

2001 – Initial outreach program begins
2009 – Community minister changes model to focus on “community”
2010-2015 – Clients are welcomed inside church, no hot meal served
2015-2018 – Volunteers prepare full meals to serve

Breaking Bread has gone through a series of important ideological and structural changes since 2001, when its predecessor, a community outreach program, began. For its first 8 years, the program focused on handing out free or reduced-cost bus passes and snack packs of granola bars, crackers, Vienna sausages, and juice boxes to clients from the back door of the church. The program was set up so that the people came to the church door to pick up a bag of goods, rather than coming into the building to eat or socialize. Beyond exchanging a few perfunctory words, volunteers and clients rarely communicated. Breaking Bread started in 2009 after Jacob, then the community minister, went to an urban ministry conference and discussed the church’s outreach program. He explained to me during our interview, “I left that conference thinking we could change what we were doing. I realized you know just giving somebody a bus pass and a few granola bars is not going to solve their problems.” Inspired, Jacob pushed for important changes to both the structure and ideology of the program in response. He explained:

So what could we do? I thought finding ways to connect with people and build more substantive relationships was the best starting point. It was a thing we could do with the resources we already had, it could be one way to provide some more substantial support for a lot of the people that we were serving, to offer some real relational help. To give them a space to be welcome, to be included, and to have a chance to sit down and get to talk and share a conversation with other people who they probably wouldn't meet otherwise [emphasis added].
The mission of the meal changed dramatically with this ideological shift. With relationships as the aim, Jacob opened up the community hall in the church and allowed people to come in and sit in the space for an hour, hoping to build connections between volunteers and clients. The program structure shifted from handing out resources to encouraging people to come in and sit down, spend time in the space, and talk. Jacob explicitly aimed to build cross-class social ties. Jacob told me the switch was a success; as time went on, he saw volunteers doing what he had set out to do: talking to people and making connections.

When I started my observations, Breaking Bread had been running for seven years, and Jacob had taken a new job at the church. The food offered had changed over time. During Jacob’s leadership, volunteers served coffee, water, and pastries, along with reduced-cost bus passes and snack packs. By the time I started coming to the meal, volunteers were serving a full meal served buffet style, which generally included three or four full tables of food. Holly, a white, middle-class, retired volunteer, was appointed as “team leader” during this phase. She was the team leader for the entire period of time I observed. She explained the changes she had observed in the few years since she started volunteering:

They opened up the hall because in the winter it's a warm place, in the summer it's a cool place. They started offering the coffee, the water, the [snack] bag and eventually they started getting other stuff from [the bakery]. That's all we were doing when I started. Then about 6 months after that is when we started getting, [food donated from many different places] - so we have been planning this up and down trying to figure out how we are going to get our food.

I began observing during this phase of Breaking Bread, when Holly and others were working to come up with a system that would provide food on a regular and consistent basis for clients. Planning, preparing, and serving the food was a time extensive task. Holly was predominately in charge of this, not the new community minister who had replaced Jacob.
Even as this shift to offering more food happened, the mission statement of building relationships and community remained prominent during my observations. Paul, the new community minister, described it during one of my observations:

The program was founded on the idea of no questions asked and community. Community is why we do what we do. We are really about sitting around, building community and focusing on the reality that we are all people. We let anyone through that door, no questions asked – getting to know people’s names, their stories, joys, hopes, the things that make us all human (field notes, 4.18.18).

Here, we see that the mission articulated by Paul is very similar to Jacob’s but focuses more on an abstract idea of “community.” Building community could mean building relationships to the volunteers, but it did not necessarily have to. I further analyze this subjective aspect of the nature of community in Chapter 5.

Importantly, when new volunteers were introduced into the program (which happened frequently), no one explicitly directed them to talk to the clients. High turnover of volunteers is not uncommon in non-profits (Hustinx 2010). I watched many volunteers come in and out of the meal, volunteering for a week or a month before moving on. When I asked volunteers what they thought the aim of the meal was, they often talked about feeding people and providing them a safe space to hang out. Some articulated a vague idea of strengthening community. I observed that new volunteers were not always socialized into the relational mission of Breaking Bread. This was in contrast to Jacob’s leadership approach, in which he had explicitly told volunteers that the mission was for them to sit down and talk to people. This lack of socialization had repercussions for how volunteers moved and acted in the space. Additionally, some continuing volunteers who had been invested in Jacob’s way of thinking stopped attending because of personal or health-related issues. The result was that almost all the volunteers who had actively worked to talk to people across socioeconomic boundaries stopped volunteering regularly, and none of the new volunteers picked up the practice.
Jacob had created a program that explicitly worked to develop cross-class relationships. However, over time, Breaking Bread’s vision of creating relationships was overshadowed by the food served. The analysis that follows details the processes I observed in how some people did or did not create social ties.

Social Capital Mission Statements: Unity Café

2014 – Amanda (Executive Director) files paperwork to establish the non-profit
2016-2018 – After failed attempts to open storefront, organization starts hosting “pop up” meals
September 2017 – Storefront location is secured
January 2018 – Café opens

When I met Amanda, the executive director of Unity Café, in February 2017, the café had not opened yet. She had been working on it for three years at that point. Amanda’s vision for the café was firmly rooted in her dream of creating a space that was a “welcoming community” for people who were unhoused and living in poverty. Amanda’s explained to me that she had become interested in opening a pay-what-you-can café when she saw “a piece missing” from the structure of social services in the city. Amanda had worked as a manager at a day shelter for three years. She described that through her interactions with people experiencing homelessness at the shelter, she heard a lot of “awesome stories” and met “wonderful people” who she wished other people could meet, too. She emphatically told me, “We need a place that all people can come together at a table.” Amanda stated, “Community is our number one. Healthy food is our tool towards creating community.” For Amanda, food was a means to an end.

There were two main reasons why Unity Café had such a difficult time opening a storefront location: property owners’ perceptions of homeless people and challenges with finding and securing a site. Amanda’s commitment to a community ideology also drove her and the café board to make decisions about where and how to open the café. The biggest initial barrier was
their inability to find a space that met their needs and was willing to allow the non-profit to rent there. Unity Café had the money for rent but was unable to find a landlord that would rent to them. Amanda, and other board members, believed that this was due to prejudice against the “kind of clients” that would come to the café: homeless people. During a board meeting, one of the board members told the rest of the group about why their recent attempt to rent had failed, “The landlord of the whole building said that homeless people are not allowed anywhere near the building or in the building at all, they can’t use the bathrooms and they can’t hang around.”

Members of the board and community advisory board believed stereotypes about the homeless population pervaded the minds of many of the landlords that they tried to rent with. Amanda’s commitment to trying to create an inclusive community made it harder for her to open the café, because outside of her support network, the people with power were not very excited about having homeless people around.

Amanda was also unwilling to put the café in a location that would make it hard for low-income people to get there, which she argued was part of her commitment to making a space that would welcome people from variable identity categories and social locations. She explained, “The [middle-class people] will come all day long, they love our concept. It’s been awesome, we are thankful for their support, but getting the people who can’t pay has been hard.” Given this understanding, she would only pick a location that was on a bus line and close to neighborhoods that low-income and unhoused people lived and worked in.

During the year before the café opened, I watched Amanda, board members, and volunteers struggle to maintain the core ideology of the mission and open up a café. During a board meeting in April 2017 the group struggled to find a balance between appeasing a potential landlord and maintaining the core ideology of community. A board member tried to raise the spirits of the group after another rejection from a site, stating, “We keep going because we all
believe in creating community.” Some of the board members thought that the menu they were presenting to the leasing company was “too intimidating” and would keep the low-income people out. Corrinne, another board member, rationalized this decision, “This is what [landlords] want to see, that we can attract business to the area, that we can have hip, cool food...This is how we need to market ourselves if we want to get the location.” Two other board members argued that approach was not aligned with the community ideology and pushed back. Another board member backed up Corrine, “We have to gear towards [middle class people] for us to be sustainable and to get the space. But we know the [low-income people] for the most part, we have met them, that’s who we invite here. We ask them to bring their friends, we reach them by word of mouth.” Ultimately, they ended up in this space, and at the next board meeting people talked about how they thought it was because they used a hip, middle-class menu. This space used to be a coffee shop and was located next to bus stops and in a convenient, centralized location within walking distance of many social service organizations, including multiple homeless shelters.

Throughout my time observing, including both before and after the café space actually opened, people talked about the mission statement habitually. During board meetings, CAB meetings, and events from February 2017 to January 2018, there was vocal and vehement support for creating a welcoming community for all people, in order to “hear other stories that may be different from them, to cross the barriers that exist that society has put up” (Amanda, 2.24.17). Moreover, the mission statement of a “community for all” was plastered all over the actual café space, their website, and their promotion materials once it officially opened. Volunteers were heavily socialized into this ideology when they came into the space. Whether they took up the ideology as their own or not was less straight-forward.
Amanda had a vision for a community café, and while she encountered a lot of pushback, she was eventually successful in opening a pay-what-you-can café. Amanda’s vision for the café was firmly rooted in her dream of creating a space that was a “welcoming community” for people who were unhoused and living in poverty. However, as detailed in the following chapters, this vision was almost exclusively held up by only a small group of people who persistently pushed to make it so. Relationships were tenuous when I left the field in August 2018, and wholly dependent on a small group of women volunteers and Amanda.

FINDINGS

In the following analysis, I articulate the prominent factors contributing to how and why people made (or did not make) social ties. In order for people to actually create cross-class social ties in these spaces, they needed to be intentional. There was potential in both spaces for people to make cross-class social ties, but without people explicitly going out of their way to do so, they rarely talked to others who were different from them. My analysis of the individual, intentional aspect of how people made social ties furthers our understanding of the role of individuals in the creation and distribution of social capital. Furthermore, the ways people used the physical space in both organizations created or broke down symbolic boundaries that acted as deterrents in creating relationships. Analyzing the physical structure and food served at both spaces contributes to a clearer understanding of how important some physical divides are in maintaining social divides and how people’s networks are effected by organizational conditions (Small 2009).
**Intentionality**

In both spaces, some people were successful at creating cross-class social ties, while others were not. People who made connections explicitly talked about their intentions to do so. Intentionality in creating social ties was vitally important. Some scholars argue that in the past few decades, the way Americans socialize has shifted: from public to private sociability (Fischer 2005). Evidence of this shift includes a change in how people meet romantic partners, moving from meeting in real life to finding matches online, as well as a broader reliance on non-face-to-face means of communication, including through social media and texting (Fischer 2011).

I argue that interacting with strangers during a meal is breaking a tacit social rule. I observed that both spaces had all the necessary “ingredients” to create social ties, but those ingredients did not always come together to create a “product” of social capital. To break these social norms, it required deliberate, intentional efforts. Both spaces had the potential for people to create cross-class social ties, illustrated by the few who did so, but just because there was potential did not mean it actually happened.

In the café, people engaged in intentional conversations to create social ties at the community table. The community table was the embodiment of the community ideology in the café, which stated that all were welcome and it was a place to “build community.” The community table included eight chairs at a long, rectangular table and was located in the most centralized location in the café space. A sign on top of the table invited anyone to sit down and start talking to the people who were sitting there. I often sat or hovered at the community table to better understand what happened when people sat together. This was how I met and learned about many of the people who regularly came to Unity Café.

I observed that the community table only seemed to work in creating social ties when someone was intentionally “working” it. In the first few weeks after the café opened, some
volunteers began their intentional efforts to build relationships by using the community table in a specific way. Alice, a routine volunteer, invited me to sit with her at the community table and told me, “My plan is to come in and just sit at the community table and try to get people to join me and sit and chat.” I often watched Alice wave over people who came in and ask if they would like to join her. Some did; some did not. When Alice was sitting at the community table, often for 4-6 hour stretches at a time, Amanda would use this as an opportunity to create a connection. She would bring someone over, introduce them to Alice, and Alice would then introduce herself and the rest of the people (if any) at the table.

These efforts were sometimes successful in creating dialogue between new people, and Amanda tried to use the table deliberately, imploring others to do this work. She explained during a CAB meeting, “For me, it really helps having someone at the community table sitting there who I can bring people to and set it up. Having Alice there is perfect because then I have someone there to connect them with. If anyone is interested in doing that, on the days that Alice can’t, please do – it would be really helpful.” However, I never observed anyone take up this call as consistently as Alice did, even though in my observations Alice was only somewhat successful in creating social ties.

Alice’s actions at the community table were the epitome of intentionality; the way she inhabited the space and talked to others were all associated with her vision to get new people to talk to her. Alice sat at the community table with what she called her “props” (coloring books, knitting needs, crochet hooks, card games) during at least one of my observations each week. She once described to the CAB her approach to trying to get people to talk to her, “You don’t have to have something like a coloring book or yarn or anything, just a cup of coffee and a welcoming face that sort of says you want people to join you. You can’t have a book open or a laptop up” (field notes, 4.13.18). Alice recognized that our social norms about socializing in
coffee shops revolved around individuality and worked to break those ideas through intentional, inviting body language.

When Alice was at the community table, she not only intentionally used welcoming body language, she also explicitly invited people to join her. Sometimes people declined her invitation; I mostly observed that people in groups declined more often than people who were alone. On one observation day, I came in and ordered a coffee that I planned to sip while I observed the community table from an adjacent table. As I walked away from the register, Alice waved to me and asked me to sit with her at the community table. I agreed and she asked me how my week was going, citing that she saw the recent negative attention my research was getting. Alice often worked diligently to pick up conversations where she left them (like she did with me), a conservational device that indicated she remembered you, had thought about you, and cared about what she discussed with you before. Soon after I sat down, Amanda came over with an older white woman whom she introduced to us to as Gretta. “Gretta is going to join y’all,” Amanda said, with her hand on Gretta’s shoulder. Gretta looked reluctant, telling us as she sat down, “I normally like to sit alone, but Amanda thought I might want to sit at the community table today.” Alice and I both introduced ourselves and Alice exclaimed, “Let’s communicate!” After some introductory chit-chat, Gretta started to talk about how she recently moved to the city. She did not know many people, but she knew Amanda from her church. She sighed, “That’s why she invited me to come to the café and I think that’s why she encouraged me to sit here, because I’ve been feeling isolated.” Alice and Gretta continued to talk about mutual acquaintances they had met at the café and other information about some trade volunteers, including updates on a trade volunteer’s new job.
Alice’s intentional efforts to get Gretta to talk at the community table were representative of many of the conversations I heard Alice engage in. These conversations often revolved around sharing stories. Alice discussed her goal for the community table with me during our interview:

Let's say there's ten of us sitting at the [community] table, there could be no community happening there. So what would make community at that table is - I am engaging, I am connecting. Somehow, someway, I am sharing space actively.

Alice’s intentionality was an important factor in fostering an environment at the community table where people actually shared. On days when Alice was not there, I noticed that often no one sat at the community table. Beyond Alice’s intentional engagement, the success of the community table was limited.

Sometimes material resources were shared at the community table even when Alice was not present. On several occasions, I watched others share information with one another at the community table about social resources, such as where to find help with housing and food assistance (1.23.18; 10.17.17), meditation techniques (4.6.18), dental care (8.14.18), college majors (4.4.18), and free concert tickets (6.5.18). Trade volunteers shared some of these resources (like referrals to places to find housing assistance) with each other. Diners and volunteers shared information with trade volunteers on other occasions, like information about food pantries or where to get affordable dental care. Thus, some people who came into the café and sat at the community table were able to draw on the resources of others. These social ties thus produced “goods” that they may not have had otherwise. However, most people who came into the café sat at tables with people they knew, like they would have at any other restaurant. I observed that the people who sat at the community table (and used it differently than just a regular table) most frequently were on the community advisory board: Amanda, Alice, Corrine, or Linda, or they were volunteers who had come in to volunteer for a meal and so were often alone.
Social ties were made in the café, but only when people directly and intentionally worked to create them. It was much more common for people to come into the café and not interact with new people. This intentionality was also highly related to a gendered division of labor I observed in the café. I provide more examples of how women volunteers intentionally engaged with people to create social ties and the use of the community table in Chapter 5.

At Breaking Bread, there were also volunteers who intentionally engaged with people in the space of the church, but their approach differed slightly from the use of the community table at the café. The intentionality that fostered relationships at Breaking Bread manifested as volunteers who felt that their “job” for the meal was to meet people. They saw themselves as playing an important role in the meal program, and when they were not on the food line, they explicitly chose assignments in order to move about the space and interact with others.

Intentionality in the church manifested as people choosing the job of “a talker.” Harold, a retired white man who smiled almost constantly, was one of the volunteers at the church meal who believed that his job was to connect to people. His efforts resulted in social connections and social capital for those with whom he interacted. After watching Harold interact with a client, I asked him if he met other people during the meal and he replied, as he nodded, “Well, my job is just to talk to people. That’s what [the church minister in 2015] asked me to do. Just go around and talk to people.” Harold conceptualized his role and identity in the space with this fictitious but meaningful “job.” He did things in the space that confirmed and bolstered this identity, using a variety of intentional tactics. Harold did not come early to help set up as many volunteers did, serve food, or help clean up. Instead, Harold talked to people. I frequently observed that Harold talked to people as they came into the building and were waiting in line for food, or when they were done eating and getting up to leave. He often sat down at the table when he talked to someone. I also watched him on several occasions take clients to other parts of the church,
explaining, “I don’t know the answer to that, but I know someone who does.” When I asked him about these instances, he explained that he did not know that much about social resources but knew that there were plenty of people at the church who did, and he was happy to connect people. Harold frequently drew on the collectively-owned capital possessed by church members to extend that knowledge to the clients of the meal.

Harold not only drew on the resources of the church, but offered his own thoughts and material resources to some clients. On the first day I met Harold, I watched him talk to a variety of people during the meal, much more than I observed others doing. I asked Harold about one of a people he had talked to for about 20 minutes; he told me he had known Vincent, a middle-aged black man, for three years, and that he had met him at the church meal. Harold called Vincent his friend and described hiring him to do odd jobs around his house when he was out of work, giving him advice on how to interact with his boss at his new job, and having him over for dinner on Sunday nights. In fact, I witnessed Harold invite Vincent over for dinner at this observation. (Vincent said yes). While Harold told me he frequently invited Vincent over for dinner, I never heard of him inviting other clients over for dinner. Vincent’s relationship with Harold translated into material resources, such as being hired for odd jobs and invited to Sunday dinners with Harold and his family. Harold’s intentional efforts in the space to be a talker resulted in shared resources for people like Vincent.

Other volunteers also intentionally worked to create relationships in the space and were similarly successful in sharing material resources through these ties. Linda, another regular volunteer, also took on the explicit role of “talker.” She often discussed with me, and others, that she started volunteering at Breaking Bread because of their emphasis on using direct conversation to build community. A centering moment that I observed is illustrative of Linda’s intentionality:
Francine recited a prayer about kindness and community while all the volunteers sat around a table and listened. Everyone said “amen” at the end. Francine then said, “We don’t have a lot of food today so we probably only need 4 people on the line, who would like to do it?” Four women raised their hands. Linda stated loudly, “I’m going to talk.”

Unless she was specifically asked to work on the food line, Linda took her job as a talker seriously. It was through this intentionality that she met Franco, who was able to navigate a difficult, complicated health care system with the help of Linda and her husband.

One day, I asked Linda if I could shadow her during the church meal. She enthusiastically said yes. On this day, we were both asked to serve food because there were not many volunteers. Linda agreed, but said during the centering activity with other volunteers that she would step away from serving at 2:30, when things slowed down, so she could talk to people. At 2:30, she took off her gloves and asked me, “Where is Franco?” She turned to look around the room and continued to talk, “The look on his face makes me think he was upset. I want to find him so we can talk.” I pointed to Franco, who was sitting at a table with a group of other Latino men. Linda walked over and asked him if he wanted to talk. He nodded and asked to talk “in private.” Linda pointed to a deserted hallway and they all walked over. Linda told Franco I was shadowing her for a project, and I explained and got consent from him to listen in on their conversation. Linda asked him what was wrong, and the following conversation ensued:

Franco, exasperated, eyes wide and shaking his head: A collection agency is calling me multiple times a day. I called [local social service agency] and they say that I never told them about my knee surgery.

Linda shakes her head, too: That’s not right. I have a whole folder of documentation about this. You are not paying for anything. I knew you looked worried. We are going to figure this out.

Franco: I was on the phone all morning with a woman at the social services center.

Linda: Let me call. We can figure this out (11.28.17).

They walked into the kitchen so Linda could get her bag with all of Franco’s documentation. I watched as Linda then called the agency, spoke to the same woman, cleared up the confusion,
and explained to Franco that they needed to go to the hospital to clear up the rest. She told him that she and her husband would go with him this weekend. He sighed and agreed, thanking her. Later, Linda told me that she had worked with the social service agency and hospital for months to get Franco a knee surgery he desperately needed, especially because his main form of transportation was walking.

Linda’s emotional responses to Franco’s life and experiences was an important aspect of their relationship. Granovetter (1973) argues that emotional intensity is a feature of strong ties. Linda, on several occasions, became emotionally distraught over Franco losing his space in the shelter. During another observation at Breaking Bread, I watched as Linda and Franco talked quietly in the corner of the room. As they continued to talk, Linda became more and more visibly upset. She walked away crying and came up to me and a few other volunteers to explain that Franco was now living under a bridge because he had lost his spot at the local shelter. Linda’s attachment to Franco was well-illustrated by her emotional responses to his misfortunes.

Linda’s middle-class social capital helped Franco navigate his medical care. She drew on her resources, like that of her husband who worked in the medical field and her friend who worked at social service agency, to help Franco access health care. She helped him set up the doctor’s appointments and brought him to the surgery. When he was having issues with collection agencies, she was ready with clarifying information. She told me later that she kept the documentation because she suspected this might happen, saying that she was astonished how people treated Franco in the hospital and doctor’s offices when they saw he did not have a home address.

Linda’s shifting experience at Breaking Bread also illustrated the organizational shift towards prioritizing food over talk. During late 2017, the organizers began asking her to work on
the food line more frequently, because there was more food to serve. She stopped volunteering in the winter of 2017. When I asked her why she stopped volunteering, she explained:

What sold me on the church meal was when Paul explained it to me as, “We don’t hand out food, we sit at the table and look people in the eye and talk to them.” But…it wasn’t as much of that anymore, it was more, “You have to serve.” I didn’t like that and so I haven’t gone back. It would be one thing if I could go and just serve and talk with my friends but it’s not. (field notes, 1.9.18)

Linda had engaged in actionable and intentional steps to meet people and help them while she was a volunteer at Breaking Bread. She was one of the few people throughout my time in the space that would regularly sit down at the table while she talked to the clients who came in. She left when she could no longer do that.

Linda and Harold were exceptions; as in the café, the majority of people at Breaking Bread were not making cross-class social ties. Most frequently, volunteers focusing on serving food and greeting people as they walked through the line, without further conversation. Cheryl, a regular volunteer, explained that she felt her role was “to serve and to share. Whether talking to or feeding them. I think I’d feel a little bit more comfortable if Holly [lead volunteer] said to me, ‘Walk around and talk.’ I would be okay with it, but no one has ever told me.” Cheryl and others were there to serve food and “build community” but their conceptualization of what actions actually created a “community” and what constituted a “good community” were less clear and intentional than Harold’s and Linda’s, with meaningful repercussions for the work they did as volunteers. I further discuss volunteers’ conception of community and how community ideologies impacted how they interacted with others in the space in the following chapter.

**Physical and Symbolic Boundaries**

In both spaces, I observed that physical and symbolic boundaries both facilitated and impeded the formation of social ties. In fact, many of the physical boundaries in place doubled as
symbolic boundaries that relayed important messages about expectations, norms, and limitations. Symbolic boundaries are “cultural distinctions that we make to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space” (Lamont 1992, p.9). In the church space, there were prominent and important cultural distinctions that created clear divisions between the “in-group” of volunteers and the “out-group” of clients (Zerubavel 1996). Importantly, these symbolic boundaries had important concrete repercussions for access to resources, power, and status (Swarts 2011). The ways volunteers utilized the physical space of Breaking Bread impeded the creation of meaningful cross-class social ties. In the café, there were also important physical and symbolic boundaries, but their repercussions were less severe. While the space and the spatial patterning of food serving and consumption in the church impeded the creation of social ties, in some situations the symbolic act of eating together facilitated the building of social ties that included shared resources at Unity Café.

Volunteers and staff at Breaking Bread utilized the physical space in ways that emphasized the symbolic boundaries between the volunteers and clients. The building wall that separated the outside world from the inside room was made of glass and completely transparent. Clients lined up along the outside of the wall as early as an hour before the meal began. Through the glass wall, each group could see the other fully, but there was a barrier that prevented meaningful interaction and relationship development. On one occasion, there was a commotion outside of the glass wall during the centering activity, where volunteers were organizing themselves before the meal. Volunteers heard the muffled yells of people outside, and two of the men went out to see what was happening. When they opened the door, the words filtered in – two people, a black man and woman, yelling at each other. I recognized the woman, Tasha, who I had met on a previous occasion. Later, when she came through the food line (where I was serving), her make-up was smudged from crying. I asked her if she was okay and she shook her
head. “No.” The volunteer next to me, Renee, turned to me after Tasha moved farther down the line and said, “Was she the one acting ugly outside?” I told her that I was not sure what happened, because I could not hear what they were yelling, and she nodded. When the food line died down, I stepped away to talk to Tasha. Tasha told me that the guy behind her outside had started calling her fat, over and over again. She had turned around and asked him to stop, but he just kept doing it. She banged on the door to ask for help from the volunteers. There were never any protocols or discussions, that I was aware of, about how volunteers were expected to deal with disruptions in the space. Tasha said, “[The volunteers] said just turn your back and ignore it but it’s hard. He just kept doing it. And it hurts my feelings, he doesn’t even know me, why is he saying this to me?” She started to cry again and asked Mariana, another client, who was sitting next to her, to get her some napkins. “Everyone gets teased about their size,” Mariana told her, rubbing her arm. Tasha continued talking. “It’s hurtful, because he doesn’t know my life. I had steroids that made me gain so much weight and I’ve never been able to get it off.” In many cases, like this, I found that even though volunteers saw clients regularly at Breaking Bread, few fully understood their lives or troubles. The volunteers had seen what happened through the glass wall, and one even assumed that she was “acting ugly” out there. The physical space allowed people to see each other. Most volunteers reasoned that that was enough, to “be seen.” Renee, a retired white woman, rationalized this type of involvement in client’s life when she explained to me how she felt about a client, “I’ve taken a real interest in her, I don't really know her story, but in all of these people I see their soul.”

The space itself, a large open room, also emphasized this same symbolic and physical boundary – that volunteers and clients saw each other but often did not frequently create strong social ties or share information. The room was set up so that the food line was along the back wall, facing towards all of the tables that the clients sat at to eat. During the actual meal,
volunteers would stand behind the tables and look out over the rest of the room, where the clients were sitting and eating. When I sat at the tables with the clients, they often shared with each other information on resources and life events that volunteers were unaware of. For example, Lucia and Mariana discussed Lucia’s son’s depression diagnosis over the course of months, including talking about where to get him his medicine and how to get him to eat healthier. When I brought this up to some volunteers who were talking about Lucia, they had no idea that her son had been diagnosed and that she was struggling to deal with getting him adequate care. On another occasion, I was sitting with Franco. A few other clients came up and asked him if he was okay after “what happened last week.” He nodded his head, and I asked what happened. He explained that the police had tried to arrest him at the bus stop after leaving Breaking Bread, and that they had claimed that he had drunkenly attacked a woman on the nearby college campus. Many clients of Breaking Bread wait at this bus stop after the meal, so they were able to back up his story that he could not have been the perpetrator because he was at the meal. When I brought this up during centering the following week, to ask if anyone knew about it, none of the volunteers did. Volunteers knew and saw Lucia and Franco almost every week, but did not understand what was going on in their lives, because they often only said hello when they came through the food line and did not sit down at the tables with them.

Atypical circumstances within organizations can provide important areas of analysis, and additional examples of how symbolic and physical boundaries in a space can help us understand the process of how people create (or do not create) social ties. On some occasions – when it was raining or extraordinarily hot – volunteers let patrons inside before the 2 p.m. “opening” time. During the 18-month period of my observations, this only happened three times. When patrons were let inside, they were asked to stand in a line along the wall to wait for the space to officially “open.” They were inside, but distinctly separated. These transgressions of the routine were
important in illustrating that the decision to not let people in early was a decision that was not based in necessity or logistics. Volunteers only used a very small portion of the space while cooking and setting up the meal. The majority of the room was empty and unused during the set-up time. This was especially salient because part of the original aim of the church meal, articulated by both Jacob and Holly, was to get people inside and out of the elements. On all three occasions, there were no issues with people being in the space early; no one tried to cut in line, get food early, or made any other disruptions. The only problem, from my perspective, was the awkwardness of being in the same space, but so clearly separate. No one talked or interacted with the patrons until 2:00 p.m., except for a few moments in which a volunteer told them to stay in line.

The structure of how volunteers served the meal was another important example of how physical boundaries hindered people’s ability to create cross-class social ties. Volunteers stood on one side of the food table, stationary, handing out food as clients went through the line single-file, like a cafeteria buffet. This way of serving food created few opportunities for people to interact during the exchange. In an interview, one of the volunteers explained to me, “In the food line, I've had to fill in when they are busy, you can kind of smile, but you literally are so busy and your eyes are on the food, on the plate. I mean there's not nearly as much actual time to be interacting.” As the aims of the meal shifted to serving more food, more volunteers were needed to serve. Jacob predicted this in his interview, when he told me:

One of my goals at first was to not make it like just another soup kitchen. There's a place to do that already downtown and I didn't want to compete with that. And I also knew it can be tempting for our volunteers to become very busy doing the work of preparing and serving food. And then you use your busyness to avoid sitting down and sharing a conversation and opening up and being vulnerable and building a relationship with people, which was the goal.

The space and time in which Breaking Bread took place and how volunteers and clients used the space had important implications for how the meal operated.
The actual act of sitting down and eating with someone else was that of crossing an important symbolic boundary in the church. A few volunteers at Breaking Bread were originally clients that Holly or Paul, the community minister, had asked to become volunteers. Jacob explained this to me as a way for church members to share ownership of the program with those it served. There were usually only one to three of these particular volunteers each week, and their behavior around eating further illustrated how eating together served as a means of boundary work. Most volunteers did not eat. But these individuals, who were members of both groups, ate the food – in the kitchen, away from others. They did not serve on the food line or sit at the tables with other clients. They stayed in the kitchen cleaning or finishing food preparation. They would regularly go through the food line before the doors opened to the rest of the clients and return to the kitchen to eat their food or take it in a to-go container. This act further accentuated the symbolic boundary that these client-turned-volunteers created between “us” and “them” through food consumption. These volunteers needed the food but did not want to make this visible to other volunteers and clients, and so they separated themselves from those eating in the large room. Moreover, these volunteers did not participate in the centering activity as did middle-class volunteers. They sometimes skipped it all together, staying in the kitchen to wash dishes, cook, or eat. Other times, after Holly asked them multiple times to join, they would sit on the periphery of the activity: sitting at a neighboring table so they were there and listening, but not actually part of the circle. Holly’s insistence that they join indicated that this was a choice they made not to participate, rather than a decision made by those in charge.

There were other important symbolic meanings of food consumption within the space that reflected social boundaries between the volunteers and clients. Eating meals together can have positive health and social benefits, create intimacy, and help develop functional relationships, and eating together can be an important way for people to create or sustain
relationships (Fischer 2011b). I never witnessed any of the middle-class volunteers ever sit down and eat a meal with the clients of Breaking Bread. While some volunteers likely ate before or after the meal, I also heard others talk about being hungry but still chose not to eat. Some volunteers, like Linda and Harold, would sit down at a table while clients were eating, but they never ate food themselves. On various occasions, volunteers did eat, but they deliberately avoided sitting with meal clients. Some volunteers would bring food of their own or eat some of the prepared food for clients before the doors opened at 2:00 p.m. One volunteer often brought prepared sushi to eat while he sat at the front table handing out bus tickets. Once I asked him why he did not eat at a table with other people, and he said he “didn’t want to make people uncomfortable” because he was eating something other than the food that was provided. Sushi, often labeled as an elite food (Johnston and Baumann 2015), provides an important example of how food itself can have symbolic repercussions for those who eat it. In a space in which people are trying to downplay their socioeconomic differences, eating food that was different from what was served, and more symbolically representative of elite foodways, accentuated the different statuses between the volunteer and the clients. Recognizing it as such, the volunteer hid his consumption rather than engage in collective eating. Not only did he eat separately, even though between 70 and 100 people were eating in the same room at the same time, he kept his sushi out of sight, on a chair beside him, rather than in plain view on the desk that he sat at. On other occasions, volunteers would eat before the meal started during centering, or in the kitchen before the meal started. There was almost always some food left over at the end of the meal, with varying amounts depending on how many clients came and how much they ate. On one of my final observations at Breaking Bread, a local food recovery program had donated an excess amount of food, so there was more food than could be eaten by the clients alone, and some volunteers made a plate. However, they ate the food standing up, behind their stations. I watched
as no one moved from behind their “stations” (food serving, drink serving, and bus ticket table) to interact with the people in the room eating. They remained firmly planted behind the objects that separated them from those “in need.”

Volunteers’ discussions of the quality of food served during the meal also accentuated the underlying differences they created between themselves and the clients. During a period of time in which the FDA recalled romaine lettuce across the country, there were multiple donations of it. As the volunteers prepared the lettuce before the meal, they talked amongst themselves about how, “I would never eat lettuce right now.” Another volunteer joked, “This is why we have so much, because no one is buying it!” They all laughed. The volunteers brushed off the consumption of lettuce as something that they themselves were not going to do but did not express reservations about giving it to the clients, which reflected an underlying assumption about much of the food served at Breaking Bread: that something was better than nothing. To the contrary, many clients had very strong feelings about the food served. A regular client told me specifically about the salad served that day, “We like fresh, healthy, food, but if it is not safe, we do not want it. How am I supposed to know if it is safe or not? I’ve been places [like the soup kitchen downtown] where I’ve eaten a salad and gotten sick.” There was still a disconnect over what mattered to the volunteers in terms of food quality, safety, and preference, and what they presumed mattered to the clients.

Importantly, some of the clients also used particular strategies to deter people from talking to them. During my first months of observations, I tried to talk to everyone who came into Breaking Bread. I would approach individuals alone and in groups by sitting down and asking to join them. Almost everyone said yes, though it became clear that some who said yes did not actually want to talk to me. Clients articulated this through body language. On a few occasions, I sat down with women sitting alone, and even though they said yes when I asked to
sit, they immediately turned their bodies away from me and avoided making eye contact. During one of these situations, I said, “I can go somewhere else if you want to be alone.” The client replied, “Yes, thank you.” I realized that, over time, I fell into patterns of reading these signs and not approaching people who used them. When walking around the room, if a person shifted when I walked by to put their back to me, or deliberately looked away – I did not approach them. In these ways, clients were able to create their own boundaries of what type of involvement they wanted. While not many clients behaved in this way, it was a boundary created in the space that I learned meant they did not want to talk, and I observed other volunteers react in the same way.

Body language was an important marker of social and symbolic boundaries for both clients and volunteers. I observed that even when people did talk to each other cross-class, their bodies were often in a position that symbolically demonstrated class inequality (though likely not on purpose). When people conversed, the client was almost always sitting, because they were eating, while the middle-class person was standing at the table beside them. The middle-class person was literally looking down on the low-income person. While this may seem like a subtle, unintentional movement of bodies, within the context of the space and combined with other factors, it became an important indicator of status. The two exceptions to this were Linda and Harold, who regularly sat down with the people they talked with.

Together, all of these symbolic and physical boundaries created a space in which people had to work diligently and intentionally to create relationships, but many did not do the work. During my time observing, I watched as food increasingly took attention away from Jacob’s original mission of social connection. Planning and serving food became a time-consuming task that required much effort than just putting out coffee and pastries. These efforts took away from the mission of building relationships. People made more connections and relationships during my first eight months of observation, when the transition was still in its beginning phases, than
during the latter portion of my observations in 2018. At the months went by, the idea of relationships and community was still prominent, but the actions that would facilitate them were not. By the end of my observational period, it would be difficult for anyone who came to Breaking Bread to see any difference between it and any other soup kitchen in the city. What I found throughout my time in the space that as time passed, Jacob’s vision of creating and sustaining meaningful relationships evolved into a more watered down, generic ideology of “creating community” that allowed volunteers and church members to create their own boundaries, rules, and efforts in the space that did not often align with what the original mission intended.

At the café, physical and symbolic boundaries were less obvious and had a different impact on how relationships were or were not made. The way people moved and used the physical space was an important aspect in understanding the process of how people met others in the café space and their ability or willingness to create social ties.

Eating the same food together was an important aspect of how people facilitated social ties in the café. While volunteers never ate the same food at the clients at the church, at the café everyone ate the same food off the same menu, and everyone ate at the same tables. Part of what made people eating the same food so compelling in the café was that it sometimes provided a very easy way to start a conversation. On one occasion at the community table, I was sitting with a mix of middle-class and food-insecure people who were struggling to find a topic of conversation. They had all chosen to sit at the community table to eat, despite there being other tables available. We all sat in relative silence, which felt awkward even to me as a researcher who was used to sitting silently and watching. When we got our food, the conversation immediately took off as people asked questions like, “How is yours?” and “I’ve never had that dish, is it spicy?” However, it is important to note that is not just the food that made the
facilitation of relationships possible; other factors happened in congruence with eating together. Everyone eats, and when you eat the same thing together, conversations can build from this shared experience, especially in situations where they may be few other topics that people believe they have in common to discuss. Food is a “safe” small talk topic, like the weather (Coupland 2000).

Trade volunteers at the café sometimes specifically talked about the role of food (and the community table) in their ability to meet new people. Kate, who volunteered for her meal twice a week, told me during an interview that the community aspect of the café meant a lot to her. I asked Kate if she sat at the community table and she said yes, and explained how she interacted with people there:

I ask people a handful of the same questions to try to start conversations. I asked them if they've been here before, I ask them what they're getting to eat, “Oh do you like that? Have you tried that before?” Try to stir up conversation. Food is a good conversation piece. People like talking about food. That usually will get people talking to where they're comfortable with you. Then they might go off on this whole thing of their life.

Conversations about food sometimes did end up as conversations about a “whole thing of people’s lives” – but also sometimes they focused just on the food. Kate was both a trade and a routine volunteer. She volunteered for her meal but set up a schedule to come in for three-hour shifts on the same two days a week to do it. Kate had grown up middle-class, going to the same church that many of the middle-class routine volunteers went to. She lost her job and apartment as an adult and had a falling out with her family. She described her lowest point as walking into the women’s shelter and someone telling her that they did not have any beds available. When I met Kate, she was living in a precarious situation. She did not have her own place, but did have a regular and consistent place to stay and was in school at the local community college. Kate’s dress, speak, and demeanor suggested that she was middle-class, yet she regularly had to go to the food pantry. She told me that coming into the café was the best part of her week and that the
relationships she made there were some of the strongest in her life. Linda and Kate become fast friends, and Linda often drove her places and invited her over to her house. They both made intentional efforts to meet for a meal at the café.

On some occasions, I saw conversations that started out as about food shift into an exchange of resources, like emotional support, career advice, and material gifts. Calvin, a middle-aged black man who worked at a local fast-food chain while working towards an undergraduate degree online, was a regular at the café. He almost always sat at the community table to eat, unless he was working on homework. When I asked him about why he ate at the community table, he explained:

I noticed there that's where everybody shares their stories, your name, and you get to know people. I never came to a place where people do that, normally you just go to a restaurant and sit down. It's not like that. That's how I met Christine, we just talked and talked. She said, “Well I'm here on Wednesdays” and so I make it my business to come on Wednesday. So I've definitely developed new friends since I've been here. I've been conversating with different customers that come in, like Frank.

Importantly, Calvin was also very intentional about his approach to meeting people and cultivating relationships within the café space. I was at the café on both of the days when Calvin met Frank and Christine at the community table. He met Christine in April 2018 and Frank in August 2018. Both of these initial interactions began as a conversation about food. Christine and Calvin talked about the different kinds of things they both liked to bake, as they both ate breakfast together at the community table. As Calvin explained later in the interview, they became friends, and he would come in to eat breakfast with Christine often. Christine bought Calvin a chess set for his birthday because he often talked about missing his friends who he used to play with in the parks of New York.

Calvin’s conversations about food with Frank also led to the sharing of information. Calvin met Frank, a white, middle-class lawyer, while eating breakfast at the community one morning. Calvin started asking Frank questions about the yogurt bowl he was eating, remarking
that he had never tried it before. He almost always ordered waffles (although the next time he came in, he tried the yogurt bowl and liked it). What started off as a conversation about a yogurt bowl turned into a conversation about Frank’s job at a law firm and a discussion of what Calvin might want to do with his IT degree when he finished. Frank gave Calvin some advice about what kind of IT jobs “were out there” and assured him that it was a good degree to have right now because people were looking for IT professionals. Calvin explained why he came to the café instead of the library to do his homework. “If I get stuck, someone here can help me. Especially Amanda’s dad, he helps me every time he is here; he’s like my tutor.” Many of Calvin’s relationships in the café space had started as conversations over food at the community table, and, as he described, had a positive impact on his life and granted him access to help he would have not had otherwise.

Talk about food at the community table was not always about the café food. Sometimes it revolved around food in a more general sense. On one occasion I watched as Alice invited different people to sit with her, including four trade volunteers and two routine volunteers. They were all playing a card game and talking about their favorite fruits and vegetables. A young white boy in high school sat with the group and listed all the different fruits he had never tried. The trade volunteers, all of whom were men (both black and white) currently unhoused and going through rehab at a local facility, couldn’t stop laughing. The young man said, “I’ve never even had a blueberry,” and the table erupted into laughter. While the conversation never went past the seemingly hilarious discussion of fruit, the laughter filled the café space and likely provided a rare moment of solace for the men at the table who were going through what they often described as a difficult process of recovery.

Moreover, trade volunteers frequently told me they did not feel welcome at other places, especially coffee shops and cafes (even McDonald’s). Coffee shop staff, and even fast-food staff,
often asked to them leave places even when they had the money to pay for a cup of coffee. Many people treat unhoused individuals as invisible and stigmatized. Trade volunteers told me they felt comfortable and welcome in the café. Their inclusion in this middle-class space could make them feel less isolated and more visible. The ability to sit, laugh, talk loudly, and enjoy time was not a regular occurrence for many of the people I spoke with who were experiencing homelessness. They were told to stay quiet in the library, and people treated them as if they were invisible on the streets. Many of the trade volunteers described a world in which they felt unwelcome, and cherished that they could be in a space during the day and not get kicked out.

DISCUSSION

There were some interesting, informative, and complicated cross-class relationships made in my research sites. There were also many people who came to both spaces who never talked to someone different than themselves. Many people came to the café and took a picture in front of the signs saying, “pay what you can,” and frequently talked about how cool the concept was. Likely many people came to the café because of the novelty of the design, and that they could engage in a necessary task (eat a meal) and also feel like they supported a good cause. By analyzing the processes people used to reaffirm or challenge social class reproduction, we can better understand the actual mechanisms of how people create social ties.

Fieldworkers’ emotions can be an important element in understanding and interpreting data; self-awareness can be an important tool for sociological analysis (Kleinman and Copp 1993). In fact, an awareness of the process by which we construct our understandings can only strengthen our critical reflections (Lumsden 2009). My emotions were an important tool in

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10 I found that there were important markers that I came to understand and associate with people experiencing homelessness, like having a huge backpack or rolling suitcase. This, and other body markers we tend to associate with homeless bodies, can mark these individuals in this category.
developing and understanding this analysis. In some moments, I was surprised by the empathetic capacity of Linda in her relationship with Franco. Other moments, I was disheartened by some of the volunteers’ actions. In particular, on the first day that volunteers invited Breaking Bread clients inside before 2 p.m., I had a difficult time understanding why I was feeling uneasy and awkward. After examining and memoing about these emotions, I realized I felt uncomfortable because I wanted the volunteers to engage with the clients in a way I thought was appropriate. I wanted them to invite the clients to sit because it felt unpleasant to me to sit down while the clients were required to stand in a uniform line. On this day, the vast majority of people in the line were people of color. While the racial demographics of the actual meal were often less stark, there was clearly a racial pattern on this day. The all-white volunteer group sat while some volunteers policed the majority black group to stand in a line against the wall. While I wrote my field notes that day, I felt trapped in sympathy for the volunteers. In my mind, they were good people trying to do a good thing, and I did not want to think about the inequality they were unintentionally creating in the space. This experience made me also deeply sympathetic to the clients who I felt were being mistreated. It took time for me to move past this and see that volunteers, in both spaces, unconsciously reproduced inequalities. Volunteers perpetuated symbolic boundaries because they were socialized in cultural system that consistently, persistently demonizes poor people. In order for this to change, we have to actively push against these norms. At the end of the day, the people in these spaces were constrained by living in a capitalist society with limited opportunities, a city with inadequate affordable housing, and interactions with others who are prejudice (like the landlords Amanda encountered).

Even in the best cases, the relationships made in these spaces had important limitations. Overall, the social capital I saw generated in both locations was limited and often only had short-term repercussions. These outcomes – like Franco’s ability to get a knee replacement, the advice
that Harold gave Vincent, and Calvin’s friendships – had some repercussions for people’s lives. Unfortunately, however, people can only do so much within these spaces without with the addition of more sustained, institutionalized change. People must also be willing to bring these relationships outside of these particular spaces. The café hired two trade volunteers as kitchen staff during my study, and paid them $15 an hour, much more than they would likely get in a similar position with their background and skill set. However, there were at least twenty other people I talked to who wanted and had tried to get a job at the café. This scenario is a microcosm of the labor market. There were just too many people trying to get the same job, and there are only so many jobs for people living in poverty that actually pay a living wage. Importantly, however, the people who did get the jobs at the café were white men who had relationships with the other white men in the kitchen. This is another example of how even in a seemingly progressive space, inequality can still persist. Relationships like these are evidence of the importance of social ties and how they can privilege already privileged groups. The two white men who got jobs in the kitchen likely had an easier time developing relationships with the white men in the kitchen because of shared identity traits based in race and gender. Historically, the popular conception of a “chef” is someone who is white and performs traditional, hegemonic masculinity (Druckman 2012). This conception, that white men are more naturally suited to a workplace kitchen (as opposed to a home kitchen), may have also contributed to their ability to get the job over some of the other people I spoke with who had wanted the job and applied (including Mariana, a church client, and Kate, a trade volunteer).

CONCLUSION

Many ethnographic instances in both spaces revealed important ways that social capital mattered for the individuals in the spaces and how it could only reach so far in groups and
structures steeped in inequality. Social ties were created in the spaces, but only enough to have marginal repercussions and benefits for a few.

While the focus of this chapter is on the process of how people made social ties in the spaces, there were also some interesting findings regarding the impacts of these social ties. However, the impacts were mostly short-term, with immediate, tangible effects. At both locations, when clients and trade volunteers had stronger bonds with middle-class volunteers, they often received more food or better food. At the café, it mostly happened through people’s ability to have a larger meal than organizational rules allowed. Relationships at Breaking Bread also afforded some people more and better food. There were also a handful of regular clients who came frequently enough and talked to volunteers enough that volunteers learned their favorite foods and would set it aside for them, give them extra, or put extra in a Tupperware container for them to take home. This evidence is an important starting point to understanding how cross-class social ties may influence food consumption patterns in non-profit spaces, which should be explored in future research.

Overall, this chapter tells a story of how and why people created social ties in these organizations, and what barriers prevented them from doing so. The story of social ties is complicated and multi-faceted, and while the following chapters ask more explicit research questions about the social construction of community and gendered carework, they also build upon this chapter to create a more complex, thorough understanding of why and how social capital matters.
Chapter 4: Creating a “Community” and Competing Ideologies

INTRODUCTION

Researchers have long tried to explain how people construct ideas of “community,”\(^1\) and use these ideas to create romanticized versions of social connection and human interaction (Alkon 2012; Brint 2001). Since Putnam’s influential study (2000) claiming that America’s civic engagement and social capital were in deep decline, there has been much debate over whether people in the US still have strong “communities.”

If we look closely, we see that a wide range of people invoke the notion of “community” in very different ways: activists like Audre Lorde (1984), who wrote “Without community, there is no liberation” in her famous essay, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” to politicians like Paul Ryan, who stated, “Every successful individual knows that his or her achievement depends on a community of people working together.”\(^2\) In both the public sphere and academic world of sociology, there is considerable debate over what the term community actually entails and means to people (Flora and Flora 2013). Community is a subjective concept and often invokes positive feelings for those who use it, even among people in the food justice world. Yet, we know little about how people maintain and sustain community ideologies, and how people account for transgressions. In this chapter, I argue that participants’ “community talk” works to create a collective identity of good people working towards social change and bolster positive individual and organizational images, even when ideals are contradicted in practice. I also show how conceptions of “community” help explain why some people make social ties and others do not.

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\(^1\) I put the term community in air quotes to help create analytical distance with the concept and help me understand it as a symbolic resource rather than a universally understood concept. This approach was derived from advice in Kleinman and Copp (2011).

\(^2\) This quote is attributed to Paul Ryan across the internet, but when he originally said it is unclear.
The driving research questions guiding the following analyses are: How do food organizations construct community ideologies, and what are the implications of their construction and use within the spaces? How do people’s conceptions of community facilitate or impede the creation of social ties within the spaces? How do these organizations’ uses of community ideologies reproduce (or sustain) class inequality, while simultaneously claiming to challenge it? I utilize ethnographic and interview data collected from both sites to answer these questions, as well as supplementary online content from Unity Café.

I find that both organizations use “community talk” to create collective identities based in community ideologies. I define community talk as the verbal affirmations people used to create positive identities rooted in the community ideology they created. Community talk is the discourse, narratives, and discussions people used in the spaces to build shared understanding of what community meant. While this community talk differed across spaces, it was an important aspect of how people constructed and sustained the concept of community. Furthermore, I find that participants drew on the community ideology to point to their success in breaking down barriers of class inequality, while simultaneously using achievement ideology to rationalize away their failures.

This analysis helps further understandings of how cross-class social capital and social ties are (or are not) created, by illustrating how people conceptualize their identities in shared spaces and rationalize their actions. Volunteers and staff at both organizations use their constructed community ideologies to claim success in challenging class boundaries. They also use achievement ideology to justify challenges to their goals of an accepting community, drawing on a ubiquitous cultural norm gives their accounts more conviction.
COMMUNITY

The concept of community has a rich history in sociology, tracing back to Toennies’ (1887 [1957]) and Durkheim’s (1897 [1951]) approaches and analyses. Toennies and Durkheim have different approaches to the study and definition of community, yet both have had an important impact on how sociologists study and explain the concept. Some argue that Toennies’ approach, in which he attempted to identify the dominant features of each type of community, invites confusion about how to define community, leading to researchers who tried to romanticize or debunk communities rather than fostering a more analytical approach (Brint 2001). Durkheim’s approach, on the other hand, defined six structural and cultural variables of community, focusing on the properties of communities rather than the contexts in which they are found (Brint 2001).

Researchers continue to argue over the meaning of the term “community,” but most agree that it is rooted in the general idea that a community is a group of people (Flora and Flora 2016). While there is great variation in what constitutes a community, there is a general consensus that communities can be built around a shared space, social system (an organization or set of organizations), or sense of identity (Flora and Flora 2016). Despite the lack of a concrete sociological definition of what a “community” entails, there is a rich history of community studies that have provided us with important, interesting, and complicated stories of urban, suburban, and rural life (Brint 2001). Researchers have used the notion of community to explain morality (Homans 1995), recruitment into collective action (Gould 1995), trust (Putnam 2000), and other outcomes (Brint 2001).

There have been important historical shifts in how people construct communities as well as engage with the concept. For much of US history, communities were considered geographically bound spaces that tied individuals together because of close proximity; this is no
longer exactly the case (Flora and Flora 2016). While some still do construct communities based on shared space, improved transportation and changing structures of work and technology has created opportunities for people to create “community” beyond just those in their immediate vicinity. People now are more likely to create communities based on shared interests, such as interests in food issues like hunger, local food, and changing the food system. Studies detailing the ways community has changed are in response, in part, to Putnam’s (2000) claim that social capital and community was in decline. While some agree with Putnam’s claim, others argue that communities and sociability are not in decline; rather they are just changing and look different than they did in the past (Fischer 2010). My analysis further contributes to this discussion, showing how people construct community and how this shapes how people form social ties. People are still striving to create community, although their strategies are not necessarily as straightforward as in the past.

This analysis also contributes to a growing understanding of how people conceptualize community in the domain of food organizations and the changing structure of charity organizations aimed at alleviating food insecurity. Among those who study food organizations and food activism, the concept of community can be an important analytical tool. Researchers find that definitions of community, especially within alternative food spaces, can be imbued with racialized, classed, and gendered meanings that affect whether people feel entitled or welcome to join a community (Alkon 2012; Hinrichs 2000; Slocum 2007). As Alkon (2012) notes, “Claims of community cannot be taken for granted and must be deconstructed to reveal the multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings that can contradict explicit definitions” (121). Individuals and food groups have tried to create stronger, more diverse ties through practices like urban agriculture and promoting local food consumption. These efforts have been critiqued by researchers for excluding minorities because of a lack of common understanding, goals, and
missions of what community means (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Kato 2013). Furthermore, researchers call for a better understanding of why and how some food projects take hold (Guthman 2008); my investigation into the construction of community ideologies can help explain why these programs attract volunteers.

While many studies have examined specific aspects of communities and how people create meaning around community, few have used an “accounts” framework to explain how people talk about community to justify their actions. Talk is the fundamental material of human relations (Scott and Lyman 1968). Individuals socially construct their performances of self, often to maintain established social identities with others (Goffman 1959). Part of this performance of self culminates as “accounts.” An account is a statement someone makes to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior (Scott and Lyman 1968). Accounts, stories, and narratives represent ways people organize views about themselves, others, and the social world (Orbuch 1997). Justifications are an important element of accounts and refer to a person using a socially approved vocabulary that neutralizes an act or its consequences when called into question, asserting its positive value in the face of a claim to the contrary (Scott and Lyman 1968). Within both organizations in my study, volunteers accounted for their behavior that did not align with their definitions of “community” through justifications that called upon deeply seated beliefs rooted in achievement ideology and meritocracy.

While the foundational approach to the concept of accounts was oriented towards explaining deviance, researchers have since taken a more social psychological approach that also examines the larger story of a person’s life as an important context in understanding their accounts (Orbuch 1997). People often develop accounts to explain and understand something that has happened to them, particularly in situations where a relationship ended (Weiss 1975). Since the mission statements of both organizations included strong narratives about building
relationships and social ties, people used accounts to explain why relationships ended or were never created in the first place.

We can best understand accounts in the context of individuals and their social settings, interactions, and audiences (Blumer 1969; Mills 1963). Furthermore, “The concept is useful for gaining insight into the human experience and arriving at meanings or collective understandings of...groups” (Orbuch 1997, 474). The ethnographic approach to accounts, which I utilize, focuses on how people construct meaning to make sense of their selves and their social worlds. Researchers suggest that we should pay more attention to how people socially create stories about what happened in the past in order to suit their present-day social interests (LaRossa 1995). In particular, researchers argue that we should examine the reasons behind how people create these accounts rather than the accounts themselves (Orbuch 1997). Researchers have used the accounts framework to explain a wide variety of social situations and how people deal with them, such as focusing on people’s relationships with strong ties like romantic partners (Orbuch 1997). What remains less clear is how people utilize accounts in less common relationship types, such as relationships between people who are from very divergent class statuses, or between people who are volunteering together.

In light of these lingering questions, I seek to examine how people construct community ideologies and the repercussions of this work. How do people use the idea of community to create individual and organizational identities? What happens when something happens that does not align with the created community norms; how do people account for failures in creating social ties in spaces in which that is the aim?

Answering this question allows me to better understand how people still utilize and try to build “community” in a society in which the definition of community has changed, especially given claims by some that community, writ large, is in decline (Putnam 2000). Specifically
addressing concerns over how people share food, Putnam claimed that because the communal meal was in decline, so was social connectedness. My analysis of these organizations can tell us how people attempt to use food to keep community alive, and the challenges they face. Importantly, we also can see how they justify actions and thoughts that do not align with their individual or organizational aims to build a community that is welcoming to all.

FINDINGS

I found no common threads, across or between sites, in how people invoked the idea of community. For example, according to Cheryl, a retired white woman who volunteered for almost the entire 18 months I observed at Breaking Bread, community was “knowing someone is there for you even if you are not in a personal relationship and you are there for someone too.” Her ideology drew on a shared sense of responsibility, with less attention to the tangible aspects of what people in a community actually did with one another. Meanwhile, Audre, a young black woman on the community advisory board at Unity Café, said, “[Community is] making sure that everyone who walks through the door feels valued as a human being.” Audre’s definition was more centered as community as a place, albeit a place with certain guiding principles. Although I found no evidence of a common definition of community, the majority of volunteers at both sites, as well as the CAB and board members for Unity Café, talked about community as the primary principle motivating their work. In both spaces, people constructed a community ideology to make meaning for themselves and others in the space, through what I call “community talk.” Ultimately, I found that community talk distracted from the fact that people were not always addressing systemic inequalities, creating relationships, and welcoming others without judgement. People grappled with competing ideologies in the spaces – they worked hard to construct a sense of community that was welcoming to all, but they also grappled with the
dominant ideologies in the US that try to convince us all that people are only worth their productivity and labor.

**Building Community Ideologies at Both Organizations**

Volunteers in each organization created community-oriented ideologies that centered on ideas of welcomeness, non-judgment, and cross-class engagement. They created and maintained these ideologies through different kinds of “community talk.” Examining community talk can help us better understand how people socially construct ideas of what defines or characterizes a community. People used community talk to create and sustain their identities in the space and reaffirm the organizational goals.

Breaking Bread volunteers created a community ideology predominately through community talk amongst themselves. This talk often happened during “centering” – which occurred before the actual meal started and involved volunteers sitting around a table together and talking. While Holly, the lead volunteer, regularly referred to the activity as centering, she also sometimes called it “gathering” or “devotion” because she sometimes read religious texts during the activity. Despite its varying names, someone almost always used the time to present information that worked to further centralize and communicate organizational goals of community and togetherness.

The community minister, along with the volunteers, worked together to construct a sense of community in the space that helped them create positive social identities for themselves and the organization. Paul, the community minister, used the term community to help create a vision for the program. He often discussed with volunteers and clients alike how he felt about Breaking Bread. For example, during one observation, he told the volunteers:

I just want to thank you all [volunteers]. You don’t hear thank you a lot but I am grateful for all of you being here and doing what you do. I go to church on Sundays but really,
this is my church. This is where I feel the most connected, this is where I feel I make community (field notes, 5.23.17).

He created an idea of community within the space that revolved around everyone feeling connected and welcome, including the clients who came in. Paul once used the story of Noah’s Ark during the centering activity to bolster the community ideology. The group was talking about a recent mass shooting and sharing their feelings around the table. Paul explained, “Violence cannot be solved with violence, that is what I interpret the rainbow as at the end of the story [of Noah’s Ark]…I think that Breaking Bread is part of the answer. Building community, opening the doors to people and really seeing them.” Others nodded their heads to this sentiment and added their own comments that bolstered the ideology. Mark, a middle-aged white man who regularly volunteered, added, “Listen to their stories and tell them to other people.” Holly nodded her head, “This is their [the clients] place.” Mark replied, “They do think this is their place; they say it.” Paul’s talk helped create a community ideology that the volunteers felt good about. When community or togetherness came up (as it so frequently did), people rallied around the term and reinforced their commitment to it. They often tried to provide evidence, as Mark did, to back up the claim.

Specific community talk among volunteers that highlighted their feelings of what community was, and how they envisioned the program, was an important part of creating a community ideology at Breaking Bread. For example, the reading Holly chose one day well-articulated the kind of talk they engaged in and the purpose it served. While she did not specifically use the word community, I picked this particular quote because of the sentiment, which was very connected to the community ideology they constructed. Holly stated:

Some people can write beautiful things like this but I have a hard time, so I just read what other people write. This is from Brian McClaren’s book: “Fellowship is a kind of belonging that isn’t based on status, achievement, or gender, but instead based on a deep belief that everyone matters, everyone is welcome, and everyone is loved, no conditions,
“Talk” is an important part of how people construct and perform their identities (Scott and Lyman 1986). Holly’s speech during centering helped bolster the identities of the volunteers, telling them that the program (which they were a part of) created a community rich with diversity, love, and dignity. Therefore, what they were doing in the space was good and they were good. Volunteers were able to use community talk to create a positive sense of self and identity as a group and as individuals. A regular volunteer, Abby, read a passage during centering from a Brene Brown book about the power of building relationships with people who are different from yourself. After she read the passage, Abby explained:

I picked that passage because I think it illustrates what I love so much about here. That we give people a place to belong that they might not have anywhere else - a place to belong and to be seen (field notes, 10.3.17).

After the reading, other volunteers described how they felt that was true in the space, nodding their heads. Martha, a retired white woman volunteer, told the others a story about how she ran into a client at the bus station downtown and how nice it was to see her outside of Breaking Bread, though she could not remember the client’s name. Abby’s conception of “community” was very centered on the ideas of “being seen” and “bringing people together” (interview, 3.1.18). Through this talk, she was able to create a positive sense of self and community. Abby also never stepped out from behind the serving table, so her actions well mirrored her definition of community. She saw people in the space and they were physically together, but she did not engage with clients beyond that.

Additionally, volunteers discussed the perceived successes in creating “community” among the volunteers, and sometimes between volunteers and clients, to help bolster the community ideology. Through this talk, volunteers created an ideology of community that allowed them to avoid engaging the clients in their discussion. By pointing to successes rather
than analyzing when things went wrong, they were able to continue to think about community and approach how to build it in the same way. This was somewhat problematic because while community was central to volunteers’ involvement in the space, it was less important for many of the clients of the meal. The volunteer’s community ideology was based in ideas of universalism – the idea that the values of the volunteers were widely shared by all in the space.

When I talked to clients about their experiences in the space, they talked more about the food and other tangible resources that the church provided as what mattered to them in the space. When I asked clients what community meant to them, they often responded with ambivalence, illustrated here:

Mari Kate: So what does community mean to you?
Franco, Breaking Bread client: [throws his hands in the air, waves them around, shrugs] Being together, sharing.
Lucia, another client: [shrugs, pauses, waves her hand as to brush the question away] I don’t know.

Other clients who I interviewed also rarely had much to say about community, the idea of it or the actuality of what they thought it could be. When asked about their experiences, they frequently talked about how the more tangible aspects of the program were important to them – such as having fresh food that they knew would not make them sick, the discounted bus passes, access to a shower, or being in a space that they felt comfortable.

While the community ideology was an identity the volunteers used to claim a positive sense of self, community talk did not serve the same type of function for the clients. This divergence further accentuates how volunteers used community to construct an identity. Many of the clients I talked to said that Breaking Bread was one of the best places to get food in the area, but rarely said that community was the reason why. That is not to say that they did not have a
sense of community in the space, but their understanding of what community was did not align with the volunteers.

At the café, Amanda and the volunteers created a community ideology through similar means as the volunteers at Breaking Bread, with some important variation of how people in the space constructed and maintained it. Like the church, those in charge mostly created the ideology through explicit talk that bolstered claims of a welcoming, diverse community. Unlike the church, this work happened in a more systematic way. Amanda and volunteers constructed the community ideology in the café through various in-person and online expressions of community talk.

Amanda and the Unity Café volunteers created a community ideology through community talk in the café, social media posts, and e-mail correspondence between volunteers and staff. By doing this, Amanda created a community ideology that projected the belief that everyone was welcome in the café, there was a large group of people who were collectively working toward a common goal, and everyone was making cross-class relationships. While the community ideology at the café projected the idea that all were welcome, some people were unable to maintain this ideology of non-judgment when others were not willing to engage in the space in a certain way.

Amanda used community talk to create a community ideology in the café and evoke a certain kind of organizational image. For example, Amanda deflected statements about how she ran the café in order to bolster the sense of “community.” Once, I watched a café diner tell her that she was the backbone of the organization. She replied with a hand on the man’s shoulder and an emphatic: “The café works because of us all!” The reality, that Amanda and a few others drove the community aspect of the café, was at odds with the café ideology that it was a collective, community success.
Amanda also used social media posts to deflect her individual contributions and emphasized how people connected in the café space. Amanda talked and projected the idea that the community was a success because people were working together and that through this, they were also making important connections with others. These statements, in newsletters and on social media, often sounded like this:

This year has only been possible because of YOU! We are so thankful for all you’ve done to build this community cafe that is life-changing, life-giving, and incredibly rare. Together, we did it! Date

Amanda’s dialogue, e-mails, and social media posts were a type of “community talk” that bridged the expectations of a successful community and the reality of what was actually happening in the space. Many of the monthly newsletters, sent to everyone, on the café mailing list and promoted via social media, read something like this:

All people's lives are changing from being in the cafe and simply having a conversation with someone with which they normally wouldn't. My friend sat down with someone at the community table. In the thirty minutes they talked and volunteered together, they realized many things about each other, including that they can be friends even among their differences. This is what we are doing at the café. Meals are being shared, hugs are being passed, and all are being welcomed. Community is happening (April, 2018).

Along with these messages of a united, seamless community, these monthly newsletters almost always included a story about people meeting in the café. These stories centered on diners, routine volunteers, and trade volunteers who felt involved, connected, and “changed” for the better by their experiences in the café. However, as my observations and discussions with people in the space articulated, most people who came in were not part of this celebrated group of people who were “making community.”

Sometimes, Amanda used the community ideology to try to get volunteers to alter their behavior, which underscores the centrality of this ideology. Amanda constantly reminded volunteers working the register to use the same script for everyone who walked in the door, to make sure that everyone knew the methods for payment. Yet, few volunteers consistently
explained to all customers—particularly, customers who looked and acted white and middle-class—that they could choose to pay less or volunteer for their food. When I observed as a diner and purchased something, the cashier rarely offered me the different options to pay. This became a problem, as anonymous “tips”\(^\text{13}\) started to show up in the suggestion jar and via e-mail saying that people felt uncomfortable telling the cashier they could not pay, or wanted to pay half the suggested price, when the cashier did not offer it to them directly. Kate, a regular trade volunteer, told me this had happened to her, and she assumed it was because she was a white woman that they assumed she could pay. Amanda, trying to address this by emailing all the volunteers to explain why this was so important, “The core of what we do is offer this place where \textit{all feel welcome} and the first encounter with people is at the register. We must give them all the options to pay!” Amanda and others socially constructed an ideology that put togetherness, non-judgement, and engagement with diverse people as the key aim. When things happened that challenged this aim, she drew on the community ideology to remind people of what the mission was and try to get them to act in certain ways.

The demographics of café diners often contradicted the community ideology. The space of the café was coded middle-class and white. Especially on weekends, the café was often filled with almost all white people. While the ideals of healthy food and alternative food spaces are not intrinsically white, the objectives, tendencies, and strategies in community food organizations can make them seem to be (Slocum 2007). Researchers find that comfort with gourmet food, concern for the environment, and a belief in cultural diversity all point to a liberal, white, affluent food space (Alkon and McCullen 2011). The majority of the food at the café—for example poached eggs, scones, quinoa salad, and quiche—was aligned with middle-class norms of food consumption. All of these factors combined to create a space that evoked whiteness.

\(^{13}\) There was a suggestion jar at the café where people could leave notes about their experiences. Amanda would read them and often relay to volunteers what they said, like in this case, to try to help solve problems.
Amanda and others also tried to strategically use community talk to rationalize a mostly white space. Race in the cafe explicitly came up once during a community advisory board meeting, during a discussion of how to get more trade volunteers into the cafe. Jada, a black woman in her 40s, offered her take on why people were not coming in:

You know it’s just that people are unfamiliar and probably afraid. That’s why we talked about having more recognizable food. You know I was talking to George [a white board member] on Friday night and he told me that he was meeting a friend at the cafe for lunch and on his way over he invited two men who were in the park to join them. When they got to the cafe, the two other guys decided they didn’t want to stay and eat. So I asked George - were the two guys African American? And he said yes. And I said, were there any other African Americans in the cafe at the time you all went in? He said no. So I think lack of diversity can be an issue. Not seeing anyone that looks like you can be scary.

Another CAB member, a white man, replied: I didn’t think about that. That’s hard. I don’t know how to address that, though.

Amanda interjects: I talked to the guys. One of them came back during the week and ate.

Corrine: He didn’t eat much, though. [Pause] I’ve been thinking maybe we should approach it from a marketing standpoint and try to get more trendsetters in here.

Trade volunteers were much more likely to come to the cafe during the week and during the early morning hours on the weekend, perhaps partly because they felt the atmosphere of the cafe on the weekends could be “scary,” as Jada suggested. Amanda and others also accounted for the all-white space by claiming that “one could never know who was a trade volunteer, who was not paying for their meal.” By utilizing this account, Amanda and staff are able to justify an all-white space. Amanda explained to me that this type of account was meant to help destigmatize people living in poverty by suggesting it could happen to anyone. “There is no face of poverty,” she said. While this helps normalize the reality that there are many poor white people in the US, it is also removing poverty from historical and material context that is highly racialized, especially in urban areas.
Amanda and the staff also used specific “community images” to project a community ideology based in togetherness and diverse social ties, despite being in a space that evoked whiteness and was often filled with white people. I define community images as pictures that displayed cross-race, cross-class engagement in the cafe space or through their social media posts. These images worked in tangent with community talk as a means of socially constructing a community ideology in the café space. Importantly, research finds that images, and photographs in particular, play an important role in the creation of ideology (Oestreicher 1985).

The café was filled with large photos on the walls depicting idealized moments of cross-class (and cross-race) engagement in the café. These photos were used to construct and maintain the community ideology based in a celebration of diversity. The photos on the wall depicted people who look different from each other eating together, working together, and talking together at the café and other café events. For example, one photo featured a glossy image of a middle-aged black man and middle-aged white woman leaning together and smiling as they washed dishes together. Another displayed a prominent local white woman and an unhoused black man sitting across from each other at a table, talking animatedly. A photo of the CAB—which includes a mix of people from different races, genders, and ages—was also displayed prominently. There was no photo of the café’s board of directors, which is almost exclusively made up of white people. While a picture of the community advisory board bolstered the community ideology, a photo of the all-white, all middle-class board would not. This further accentuates the work these photos were doing in the space and their role in the creation of a community ideology. By displaying these photos prominently in the space, the staff and board used specific images to construct the community ideology. Furthermore, these photos could act as a means of justification in the space when the community ideology was not apparent in the

14 For the majority of my observations, the board was made up of all white people. During 2017 there was one member of color who stopped coming to meetings by 2018.
present moment. When the café was filled with all white people eating eggs benedict, these photos proved that more was happening here, that people were engaging with people different from themselves – just not at that moment.

Similarly, many of the photos posted on the café’s social media pages also depicted an idealized version of “community” that helped bolster and maintain the community ideology. For example, a post about a new food item or beverage often included a picture of a routine and trade volunteer leaning in close and smiling. In many of these photos, it was a white woman and a black man. Another common type of photo posted included people working in the dish room. These photos almost always included both white and people of color working together in the small space. People of color were featured in many of the pictures posted on their social media page, often in conversation with the white people next to them. Importantly, I did observe some cross-class and cross-race engagement in the café; I am not suggesting that staff wholly manufactured these pictures. However, the way that staff utilized these images to project an image of the café as diverse is important in understanding how the community ideology was sustained despite contradictions.

Competing Ideologies, Justifications, and Changing Relationships

Achievement ideology in the US is the socially constructed belief that people reach success because of their hard work and dedication to a goal. Researchers often use it to explain how Americans perceive educational opportunity gaps (MacLeod 2009), but it can also help us frame and understand some of the attitudes and actions that occurred in both Breaking Bread and Unity Café. A reliance on achievement ideology obscures the many other social, historical, and cultural factors that contribute to people’s ability to achieve occupational and economic success in the US. Achievement ideology is highly related to idea of “The American Dream” and
meritocracy: the belief that people get what they have based on talent and effort. This perspective tends to ignore how gender, race, sexuality, and other social identity categories structure opportunities for success.

At both Breaking Bread and Unity Café, volunteers talked about building a strong, welcoming community but their actions often reflected deep seated ideas of meritocracy and achievement ideology. Even when actively trying to promote a transgressive community ideology, people still often reverted to the ideologies in which they have been deeply socialized. Inevitably, things happened in both spaces that did not easily align with people’s definitions and expectations for a “good” community and challenged the community ideology that volunteers created. Achievement ideology is a socially approved cultural norm that volunteers used to justify actions that did not align with the constructed community ideology. By explaining transgressions using this type of account, they were able to neutralize an act or its consequences. These instances of contradiction proved very useful in understanding how the ideology of community did not always match the reality of what was happening in the spaces, and how people managed this. Volunteers’ accounts provided deeper insight into how people maintained or sustained boundaries, while still claiming they were breaking them down.

Volunteers at Breaking Bread used a variety of accounts to explain and justify their role in the space as it related to the community ideology. Many of the middle-class volunteers at Breaking Bread had issues with patrons who would not listen to their advice and would then “give up” on them because of their perceived unwillingness to change, framing these actions within the language of achievement ideology. Mariana’s experiences at Breaking Bread was an important example of how “community” only reached so far, and how volunteer’s judgements about poor people’s actions influenced their relationships. Mariana was in her 40s, Latina, and a full-time mother until she went back to school in 2017. She had been a regular client at the
church meal for three years when I arrived. She was friendly with many of the volunteers in a way that I rarely saw. She asked volunteers about their vacations, friended them on Facebook, and texted them on holidays. When I first started observing, Mariana had access to additional resources that originated from her relationships with volunteers. Linda often gave her rides places because she did not have a car, Martha gave her a living room set when she bought new set for herself, and other volunteers always packed a bag full of pastries to bring home for her son because of his sweet tooth.

Things changed as time progressed and Mariana made choices the volunteers did not approve of. Mariana had dropped out of college when she got pregnant and had a baby at 18. Her son had a developmental disability, and she had cared for him full-time for the past 25 years. When Mariana started talking about going back to school to work towards her dream of becoming a fashion designer, the volunteers were excited and tried to help her. Linda and Martha helped her with applications to schools, and everyone celebrated when she was accepted at her first choice. The trouble started when Mariana received her financial aid package and was going to have to take out a $22,000 loan per semester to cover her tuition costs. Volunteers urged her not to go to this school, which only offered a certificate in fashion merchandising and design, and to instead pursue an associate or bachelor’s degree at a state school. I witnessed multiple conversations as Linda, Martha, Paul, and other volunteers tried to get Mariana to consider the local community college instead. Mariana was adamant that she did not want a generic degree. I heard volunteers talking about Mariana’s school situation frequently; they were convinced they needed to get her to choose a different path. Many of the conversations sounded like this:

Linda asked Paul if he has any news about Mariana’s “school situation.” Paul cuts in, “I’m going to take care of it.” He explains to another volunteer that Mariana wants to go to an art school for fashion management but that it is a bad loan deal and he is going to “work with her.” Linda replies, “Was she sad when you said she shouldn’t go? She said she has already started doing a lot of the orientation modules. I am going to take her to the community college to look around” (field notes, 3.28.17).
However, Mariana decided, against the volunteer’s guidance and advice, to go to the fashion school. When I asked her about it, she explained:

I mean this is what I want to do, I know it costs a lot of money, but I want to be in the fashion industry. I didn’t want to go to [state school] because they said since I have been out of school for so long, I would have to take all of the gen ed requirements again and that would take years. This is going to take years too but at least I’ll have what I want at the end (field notes, 4.11.17).

When Mariana told the volunteers she was going to accept the position at the fashion school, they were not happy and tried to talk her out of it even after she started classes. Volunteers claimed a moral superiority over Mariana’s choices; because they had gone to college themselves, and worked hard to get to where they were, they assumed they knew what was better for her life.

Mariana’s relationships in the church deteriorated because of her unwillingness to follow the volunteers’ advice and go to the community college. The volunteers would often talk about her, with grim expressions, saying they were worried about the loans she took out and criticizing her choice. Linda remarked, “She is going to be in so much debt and all she is going to get is a certificate, but the thing is, I can only give someone my advice, I can’t control whether they take it or not.” Linda is expressing concern here, she and the other volunteers also judged her. They did not realize that Mariana’s decision was not so different from many people who decide to pursue higher education at a huge cost.

The volunteers’ judgement of Mariana’s choices had an impact on the subsequent social capital she was able to access. I ran into Mariana in August 2018, and she said that she no longer went to the church meal because it felt different to her, because people did not talk to her in the same way as they used to. When Mariana did not conform to what they perceived as the best choice, she was no longer part of “the community.” While the volunteers projected a community
ideology that was accepting to all, there were important distinctions implicitly made about what actions and people they accepted.

Other clients also had experiences that did not easily align with the non-judgement, welcoming community that volunteers believed they were creating. Volunteers at Breaking Bread accounted for transgressions to the proclaimed community ideology by justifying their actions with culturally relevant scripts of achievement ideology. Most of the volunteers did not regularly talk to clients beyond a few perfunctory words like “hello” and “do you want some potato salad?” They accounted for this by referencing times when they tried in the past to engage more, to justify their actions in the space now. Some volunteers at Breaking Bread relayed stories about being “burned” in the past. They told me these stories as a means of showing that they had tried to create community and that it was not their fault when they were not successful. These volunteers explained that being burned prevented them from being as open with others again. Willa and Denise were two volunteers at Breaking Bread who would sometimes leave the food line to talk to clients, although though they were not consistent and volunteered for only a few months due to changes in their employment status. Both accounted for their decreased direct engagement with clients by offering accounts that relied on the logic of achievement ideology. Once in a conversation with Linda, Denise explained why she no longer talked to people as much. Linda told Denise and me that she was making an effort to talk to more people she does not already know each week. Denise, a white woman working full time and raising three children, replied:

Did you all ever meet Nathan? [We reply no] I took a real interest in Nathan. I really connected with him and was very committed to getting him on his feet. I was taking him places, bringing him to job interviews. He had been homeless for a long time and we finally got him a spot in a group home but they made you pay back the money to stay

15 Volunteers often talked about how other people usually ignored people experiencing homelessness when they encountered them on the street, and that the act of looking them in the eye and saying hello was a powerful alternative to being ignored. So in this way, they were being welcoming in comparison to how they viewed other interactions they assumed these people had regularly.
there once you got a job or were awarded government money and that was a deal breaker for him, he wouldn’t do it. Soon after that he decided to move and I haven’t heard from him since. It was the first time I really learned that you can try to lift people up but they need to want to do it too, you can’t force someone if they don’t want to change.

Denise realized that her lack of cross-class relationships in the space, and her unwillingness to reach out to people during the meal, did not align with what she believed of as “building community.” Therefore, she accounted for this behavior by basing her choices on one previous encounter that did not go the way she had intended. She placed blame on Nathan for not holding up his half of the relationship by working towards the change she thought was right for his life. These situations showed the contradictions between the constructed community ideology and the dominant cultural script of meritocracy. The dominant social perspective about American society is that it is open, fair, and full of potential – this system of thought convinces people that individuals are fully in charge of their own destiny and when they fail, it is because they did not try hard enough (MacLeod 2009). Here, Denise blames Nathan for his lack of motivation and his actions, rather than blaming a systemic inequality. Volunteers tried to create a community ideology that welcomed low-income people as they were, but when things did not turn out as volunteers wanted, they often reverted back to cultural scripts of meritocracy.

Volunteers sometimes became frustrated with clients who did not they did not think were trying hard enough, and this affected how they interacted with others in the space. Holly, a retired white woman volunteer, talked about trying to engage with clients but said that the clients did not always put in enough effort. She had a similar story that she relayed to me when I asked her about the different people she has met through the program. She explained that it was sometimes hard for her to reach out to people because of an incident that happened a few years ago. She explained:

A few years ago on Thanksgiving day I agreed to take someone to work because they needed the money. So I left my family to drive out and pick them up and bring them to work. When I got there, they weren’t at the location they told me they were going to be. I
waited for about 20 minutes, but I couldn’t get a hold of them. It made me quite sad to go through it all and miss that time with my family.

While I witnessed some relationships that challenged the status quo, some also reinforced it. Some volunteers tried to make connections and help others but believed their efforts were unsuccessful. Yet, they were not willing to stop going to the meal to serve food, but the level of involvement and how they reached out to new people shifted.

One of the clients-turned-volunteers was also subject to criticism from the middle-class volunteers that focused on her perceived unwillingness to work sufficiently. Patricia, a middle-aged black woman who experienced homelessness for periods of time during my data collection, was originally a client of Breaking Bread before she became a volunteer. She volunteered in a way that was different than the middle-class women, and she often received criticism for this. I was shadowing the front desk, where bus passes were handed out, when this conversation happened:

Linda came over to Paul and Mark who were sitting at the table, with pursed lips she said, “I hate to be a tattle tale, I don’t want to but [pause] Patricia is sitting in the kitchen eating a plate of food while other people do the dishes. And that is why Renee’s son won’t come back.” Paul said, “Well, okay, she can’t ask me for two bus tickets and just sit in the kitchen and eat the whole time. That’s not how this works.” Linda replied, “Isn’t doing the dishes kind of her job?” Mark, with a more serious face than Paul and Linda, replied, “Well we all share jobs.” Linda and Paul continue to talk about Patricia, while Mark gets up and goes into the kitchen.

Patricia’s case illustrates how Breaking Bread’s community ideology of non-judgement sometimes faltered when it conflicted with social norms of productivity and worthiness. Volunteers would occasionally complain that Patricia did not do enough work as a volunteer, beyond just this instance. Being a volunteer afforded people privileges (like a free bus pass), and volunteers believed people earned those privileges by working hard. When volunteers evaluated Patricia’s productivity, they did not account for the reality that Patricia traveled far to get to the meal, did not have a car, and frequently was living on the street. The social myth that poor
people in the US are lazy and have weak work ethics permeate dominant cultural narratives and does not reflect the reality of poor people’s lives (Gorski 2008). The cultural ubiquity of this myth makes it easy for volunteers to blame Patricia for not working hard enough to accept her as part of the community. When you do not fully understand someone’s circumstances, it is much easier to impose rigid, abstract expectations for their behavior based in cultural norms (Price 2018).

Volunteers are not immune from the social structure and culture in the US that places personal responsibility and labor as important aspects of full citizenship. When Mariana and others did not follow the directions of the volunteers, their ability to be a part of “the community” was jeopardized. The volunteers accounted for this by saying that it was the client’s fault for not taking their advice, implying that would still be a member of their community had they listened to them. As these examples showed, volunteers’ idealization of a place where (low income) people were seen and heard was predicated on them also being willing to engage in middle-class norms of acceptability.

These types of situations also happened at the café. “Community” was more contentious than Amanda, the staff, and volunteers projected. Although the mission of the café stated that “all are welcome,” there were exceptions to this ideology. As at Breaking Break, volunteers and staff at Unity Café accounted for their transgressions to the community ideology by drawing on cultural scripts of achievement ideology.

Volunteers and staff used the rules of the café to justify actions that did not align with the community ideology. Marcus was a regular trade volunteer for many months before he stopped coming. He was young, black, and often talked about his goal as a member of the café community: to network with people in the café to help the business he was trying to start. Marcus often wanted more than the $10 food maximum allowed for trade volunteers and tried to get it by
asking routine volunteers who he knew if they would give him extra food. Some people did this, but others chastised him, he eventually stopped coming to the café. I also witnessed, on several occasions, routine volunteers telling Marcus to do more work. This instance here was an example of how this happened:

I was sitting at a table when Marcus came over to me, he asked, “Hi Mari Kate. How are you? Do you need anything?” I smiled and told him I was fine. He was carrying a binder and his cell phone, and I asked him what he was up to, “Just networking. Talking to people, you know I’m trying to make connections for my business. I’ve met people in almost all 50 states so far.” I nodded and he walked away to another portion of the café (field notes, 6.9.18).

Marcus often treated his volunteering time as an opportunity to network. To me, this seemed reasonable, given the café’s stated mission of creating a welcoming space for people to talk to one another. Yet staff and middle-class, routine volunteers did not always accept networking as adequate labor. The following happened shortly after he left my table:

Heather approached Marcus and said, “Are you volunteering?” He said yes. She replied, “Then put your phone down and wash your hands. You need to put your phone away and your other stuff. You can’t be touching your phone the whole time.” He looked a bit taken aback (eyes wide, eyebrows up) but agreed and followed her into the office to leave his stuff. She had the office key on her neck, a marker that sometimes distinguished a “lead” volunteer. When they walked back out, she continued talking to him, “It’s about health and cleanliness. Amanda relies on me to help make sure everything is up to the right standards. Research says that phones are dirty and you can’t argue with science. You just have to follow the rules” (field notes, 6.9.18).

Marcus was not performing his role as trade volunteer in a way that those in charge deemed appropriate “labor,” and Heather asked him to change his behavior to be more productive. Heather was a retired white women with a heavy southern accent who often took the role of “lead volunteer.” Heather wore the office key around her neck, signaling to other volunteers that she was in charge. She could have carried the key in her pocket or placed on the register (like some other lead volunteers did), her decision to wear it visibly promoted a sense of hierarchy and power. A few minutes after talking to Marcus, Heather called over to Marcus again and instructed him to carry a bin of dishes to the dish room. In general, the café rules about working,
productivity, and labor felt contentious with the community ideology of a place where people could feel welcome, dignified, and comfortable. By August 2018, Marcus had stopped coming to the café because, “he kept getting in trouble” for wanting more food and not doing enough work.

Importantly, these types of conflicts seemed to only happen for trade volunteers, not routine volunteers. In fact, I volunteered during one of the early pop-up events and spent the entire time walking around trying to get to know people and hear their stories, just like Marcus. I did very little “productive” labor on that occasion, but other routine volunteers commended me for making efforts toward building relationships. Cultural depictions in the US of the idealized worker are raced, classed, and gendered and had repercussions for how trade and routine volunteered were treated and perceived in the café space. Free labor, performed by predominately black men, in exchange for food in the south cannot be divorced from the history of slavery. Heather, a middle-class white woman, with a heavy southern accent telling Marcus he needed to volunteer more and harder was steeped in not only achievement ideology, but historical realities of race relations in the south.

Malik, another trade volunteer, also was subject to a contentious community in the café; and his experiences can also show us how people constructed and challenged the community ideology. Malik, a black man in his late 40s, was one of the first trade volunteers to regularly volunteer for his meal in the first few months of the café opening. When I asked him about his experiences in the café about two months after the café opened, he told me:

You can meet different people here from all different backgrounds. All different races, all different jobs – it’s a very good atmosphere. Nobody judges you, nobody looks at you funny. It’s an atmosphere of love.

Importantly, Malik did not just have a strong feeling of connection to the café and its diners and volunteers. He came to the café because he was able to access the rewards of social capital in the space. Malik was able to secure a new job through his connections at the café after his employer
laid him off. One of the board members then hired him to be a dishwasher at his restaurant after seeing him in the dish room at the café, although he quit that job after only one month, deeming it too physically demanding. He then stopped wanting to volunteer for his meal.

Malik explained, to me and others, that he did not believe poor people should have to volunteer if they did not want to and that if they were tired or upset, they should be able to get a meal for free without having to put in an hour of labor. Some other routine volunteers also expressed that they did not think that trade volunteers should always have to work if they did not want to, arguing that living in poverty or experiencing homelessness was difficult and sometimes people just needed space to rest and eat. However, the rules of the café dictated that trade volunteers had to work for an hour to receive a meal, and staff reinforced this rule. This resulted in people having to grapple with the competing ideologies of everyone being welcome, but only if they adhered to dominant narratives about the worthy citizen-worker.

Malik’s experiences at the café during the period of time when he did not want to volunteer but still wanted food was tense. The staff instructed cashiers (including me, on a day I was volunteering) not to give him food when he came in and to get the manager or Amanda to deal with it. Given the financial security of the café, the decision was clearly based in judgement of Malik’s actions; if he was not willing to work like a “worthy” citizen, he was not welcome anymore. This change was likely particularly jarring for Malik, who had so wholeheartedly described the café as a place where he did not feel judged. Soon after that, he stopped coming to the café regularly.

Once the café “community” became unaccepting of Malik, there were repercussions in his life. I ran into Malik at a different free meal program a few months after he had stopped coming to the café regularly, and his demeanor (and life circumstances) were dramatically different from when I had met him in early 2018. He was working in a low-paid, precarious
position that had nothing to do with his training as a certified nursing assistant that he had done for many years and was proud of. His experiences in the café had changed too. Based on the interview I did with Malik in February 2018, if I had surveyed Malik about the strength of his relationships at the same time, he likely would have reported that he had great relationships at the café that afforded him important resources. Just eight months later, he stopped going to the café because he did not have the money to pay and did not want to work. When I asked volunteers about Malik, after he stopped coming, no one had heard from him – suggesting his relationships deteriorated because of his experiences. Most Americans believe that when someone “fails” (like being homeless or jobless), they only have themselves to blame and just need to work harder (MacLeod 2009). Despite the proclaimed community ideology that all were welcome in the café, achievement ideology proved to have a more concrete, lasting influence in many people’s minds. Malik was not willing to work, and so he was no longer welcomed into the community that was “welcoming to all.” This contradiction proved an important part of understanding why and how people made (or did not ) relationships that afforded them access to resources.

Volunteers and staff explicitly acknowledged that the café was only for productive people, although they justified this in pragmatic ways by referencing rules and socially accepted norms that prioritize profit. When I talked to middle-class volunteers, board members, and staff it became clearer that not everyone was always welcome, as suggested through the café’s community ideology. There were rules that contributed to an ideology of not only a “community” but a productive community that celebrated achievement ideology. Corinne, a routine volunteer and member of the board, explained to me:

We have so many people that come in for a meal and do work their time. Then I started to see there are a few people that they always have an excuse why they can't work. So, I've learned that if they've done that a couple of times it's time to say, you have to work for an hour for a meal here or you need to go someplace else. That's hard for me. If somebody I
really can't work, like a mom with kids, fine. But somebody who's just trying to use us. We need to handle that appropriately. Because we can't exist if we allow people to take advantage of us.

These rules reflected dominant capitalist ideology in the US that people are only as valuable as their productivity and labor. (What does Weber say??) Importantly, people in the US have frequently used this logic to demoralize and demonize people living in poverty. I asked about this rule on multiple occasions, because to my understanding, it did not actually matter financially for the café if people volunteered or not. Staff and board members consistently told me over and over again that the café was financially stable and doing well, which contradicted this common fear of volunteers “taking advantage” and hurting the café in the process. The café was all about community, as long as it did not jeopardize the bottom line. Moreover, they had an excess of people paying an extra $10 to cover someone’s meal. Almost everyone who came in and paid full price “tipped” on the price of their meal which counted as a donation towards the café. The café also had a grant for 2018 that covered twenty free meals per day, regardless of whether or not the person volunteered or not. There were also many people who bought a $10 token that covered the meal of someone else, whether the trade volunteers volunteered their time or not. Moreover, for the first few months they were not giving away a full twenty free meals that was covered by the grant. Seth, the café manager, told me when I asked how things were going in February 2018, “I suggested that we give away box meals at the end of the day if we don’t give away 20 free meals, but people weren’t happy with that idea because they think it doesn’t go along with the focus on community.” The concept of community and what it entailed certainly had some positive repercussions in the café, but it also created situations like this – in which other important aspects of helping food insecure people (like giving them food), fell to the wayside. Amanda told me that food was secondary to community for the café goals, and it
remained so despite it sometimes coming with the cost of not providing more food to people experiencing food insecurity.

DISCUSSION

Both sites constructed a version of a community ideology that fostered positive identities primarily for both the organization and the middle-class volunteers. These community ideologies drew people in, but also kept people out. People used the constructed community ideologies to bolster claims of acceptance and diversity, which helped them create a positive identity for themselves and the organizations they were a part of.

We can understand the volunteers’ adherence to achievement ideology in both spaces as a means of protecting their identities as helpful, engaged citizens committed to their organizations’. By blaming individuals for not wanting to work in a certain way, volunteers diverted attention away from any systematic flaws inside the organization or the larger social and cultural landscape. If relationships can’t work to change the situation of poor people, then their reasoning for doing the work is less clear and their success at being “good people” along with it. They justify their efforts with accounts that draw on the well-established, socially approved vocabulary of achievement ideology.

Volunteers created community ideologies to legitimate their positions and roles in the organization. In the café, the reality that Amanda and a few others were so directly responsible for the success of the mission of the café, was at odds with their self-purported community ideology. Therefore, Amanda (in particular) and others worked hard to create a community ideology that maintained the harmony of the café, while distracting from the reality of how the space and the people in it operated. In Hochschild and Machung’s (1989) study of the double burden working mothers face in the home sphere, the researchers found that heterosexual couples
often accounted for their unequal divisions of labor by drawing on “family myths.” These family myths worked to distract away from the reality of the couple’s circumstances and maintain harmony. The community ideology, in some ways, also acted as a “community myth.” How they explained community – what it meant and how they built it – allowed them to see their actions as good and successful, despite underlying contradictions.

CONCLUSION

In both sites, community was supported in the abstract, but the reality of what it actually entailed was much more complicated. How people created an idea of community influenced their actions in the space, including whether or not they made relationships or not. It also influenced who they made relationships with, and whether they lasted. Volunteer’s conception of community (especially at Breaking Bread) helped them establish what they were willing to do in the space. If people conceptualized community as something abstract, with less tangible aims, they did not have to actually work to create relationships in the space to feel successful and create a positive social identity.

My analysis gives insight into not only how ties are (or are not) formed, but why they sometimes fall apart. The relationships in both sites changed over time, something that we cannot fully comprehend with quantitative studies of social capital. One of the most important aspects of analyzing social capital in these spaces was how frequently relationships changed and the repercussions of these changes. Malik, Mariana, and the others featured in this chapter can serve as exemplar cases of how complicated establishing and maintaining cross-class social ties can be.
Chapter 5: Carework Makes the Dream Work: Gendered Labor at Unity Cafe

INTRODUCTION

We have deep cultural norms and expectations in the US about who is meant and expected to care for whom. Women are thought to be “natural” caretakers and expected to care for their family, friends, and colleagues though housework, foodwork, and other types of family labor. Sociologists conceptualize carework as activities focused on caring for others, often unpaid or poorly compensated labor, predominately done by women (England 2005). Women, historically and presently, comprise the majority of caregivers in the US – both formally through paid work positions in care-heavy jobs and informally through laboring for children, food, and family (Hook 2004). Carework is a feminized practice in the US, with repercussions for women and men who engage (or do not) in this type of labor. As a society we have come to think of carework, both inside and outside of the home, as something that women do a “quintessentially feminine-identified activity” (England 2005). Cooking, cleaning, childcare, and eldercare are just a few examples of carework that we are socialized to believe women are “supposed” to do. Sociologists have studied emotional labor in the work place and carework in households, but few have looked at the how care and emotion work happens in the volunteer realm (Hooks 2004). The pay-what-you-can café, Unity Café, is an ideal site to deconstruct how carework happens in a volunteer organization.

In this chapter I ask: what kind of carework is happening in the volunteer world, and does it conform to the gendered expectations and performances of how people perform carework in other spheres? I primarily use field notes from observations at Unity Café and the events leading up to its storefront café opening in order to answer this question. I also draw on the interviews done with volunteers and the executive director of the café to help illustrate not only what I
observed as gendered patterns within the space, but also how actors themselves think about and make sense of their roles in the café.

I find that the carework done in this volunteer space is comparable to other types of carework examined by sociologists. I find that volunteers engage in three distinct but related ways of performing carework: (1) expressions of inclusion; (2) embodied welcome work; and (3) interactional bodywork. I argue that this carework is still conceptualized and practiced in a highly feminized way that reflects our cultural expectations for white, middle-class femininity but is celebrated in a way that is often not associated with invisible carework. Similar to the carework women perform at work and in the home, this carework is vital to the success of the organization. Furthermore, cultural expectations of hegemonic masculinity, in part, explain why the men in the café space do not engage in the same carework even when explicitly asked to do so. We expect women to care for others, while men have the option to (Gerstel 2000).

From other studies of carework we know that cross-class and cross-race aspects of these relationships have important and distinct meanings to those involved (Kang 2010). In the discussion that follows, I show that women are sorted into the position of doing the unpaid carework associated with building community relationships. While they are actively choosing to volunteer in this way, we can see how their decisions and actions are steeped in social norms and expectations of femininity. While individuals in the café space may not be consciously engaging in sexist ideology that places women in the role of caretaker, there is still a prominent and important pattern of gendered work in the space that reflects a larger, structural pattern of gender inequality. I find that women engage in various types of carework in order to create a food space that feels welcoming and safe for customers and other volunteers. I argue that they use aspects of femininity to cross race, class, and gendered boundaries. My analysis broadens our understanding of how performances of carework are gendered and classed and the repercussions
for those who perform and benefit from it. Studying gendered divisions of labor in volunteer work can deepen our understanding of how we create and sustain gender divisions in everyday life. Moreover, this analysis proves how deeply connected carework, volunteering, and gender can be, challenging previous assertions that volunteering and carework are distinctly different (Wilson 2000).

CAREWORK, EMOTIONAL LABOR AND BODYWORK

In the US, we construct women’s domestic work as activities that directly relate to caring for others: cooking dinner, cleaning the house, buying groceries, packing school lunches, resolving hurt feelings. Our social expectations around gendered divisions of labor have important implications for how individuals, families, workplaces, and society at large operate. Gender is not something we as individuals possess, rather is it distinctly social and something that we “do” and that we accomplish and produce through actions (West and Zimmerman 1987). In interactions with others, we hold individuals accountable for correct performances of gender; certain activities, emotions, and appearances become associated with one gender or the other through socialization, often resulting in binaries that restrict “suitable” behavior for both men and women (West and Zimmerman 2009). Not only do women still predominately do most of the care and food work in the home, it is also one of the most prominent ways women “do” gender. People also often display gender through physical bodies and embodied practices (Cairns and Johnston 2015).

Within the realm of food, multiple studies have investigated the ways in which women care for others through food work (DeVault 1991, Cairns et al. 2013; Cairns and Johnston 2015; Carney 2015; Wills et al. 2011). DeVault (1991) articulated the realm of carework that encapsulates food making it to the dinner table, finding that there are all sorts of invisible work
done by women that allows cooking, shopping, and family meals to go smoothly. Moreover, women often manage their husbands’ emotions through food and carework (DeVault 1991). Women have long been held responsible for “feeding the family” inside their homes. Whether or not women enjoy this work or despise it, fully engage or try to mitigate their involvement, there is still a strong and deep cultural tie between women and food work (Cairns and Johnston 2015). Studies show that women often feel deeply responsible for their children’s well-being; part of what our society depicts as a “good mother” is highly connected to their role as food providers. Middle class mothers, especially, are held responsible (including by themselves) not only for their children’s health, but for creating good future consumers with “good taste” (Cairns et al. 2013; Elliott and Bowen 2018; Fielding-Singh and Wang 2017). Maternal identities are often tied intimately to food and carework and whether mothers accept or reject it, our cultural expectations and depictions of mothers and food reflect this association (Cairns and Johnston 2015).

Outside of the home, researchers have found that women often perform carework that mirrors the gendered division of labor within the home. Community food-work tends to be dominated by women, but the policy realm of the food world and higher paid and prestigious positions continue to be dominated by men (Cairns and Johnston 2015). Women also engage in community food work through purchasing organic, fair-trade, and more sustainable food options (even though scholars debate the effectiveness of this strategy for producing real change). Similarly, women are more likely to participate in community gardens, food co-ops, and other local initiatives that can help people feel like they are working towards changing a troubled food system (Cairns and Johnson 2015).

Carework is a highly gendered activity in our culture, and it is often deeply connected to emotional labor. Emotional labor, as defined by sociologists, refers to how some employers
require their employees to include a manipulation of emotions as part of their job (Wharton 2009). Emotions are not only shaped by cultural norms and expectations but can be regulated by employers seeking to manage the emotions displayed by their employees. When looking at the repercussions of emotion work, research finds that people feel emotional exhaustion most frequently by workers who experience emotional dissonance—when the emotions they are expected to display are at odds with what they genuinely feel (Morris and Feldman 1997; Wharton 2009). While emotional labor does not directly apply to the volunteers at the café, it is relevant to the experiences of the employees at the café. Emotional labor can also include elements of bodywork, going beyond just the maintenance of people’s feelings and emotions to include aspects of caring for and working on the physical bodies of oneself and others.

Not only are women held responsible for caring for other’s emotions, they are often similarly held responsible for caring for the bodies and wellbeing of others—both through their overrepresentation in paid positions like nursing and elementary education, and through the more physical aspects of childrearing. In the past few decades, there has been a widespread and renewed interest in the subject of bodies in sociology (Gimlin 2007). Miliann Kang introduced the conception of “body labor” to articulate “the provision of body-related services and the management of both feelings and bodies that companies it” (3). Furthering the conceptualization of emotional labor, body labor includes the physical, bodily aspects that some employers expect service workers to perform. Body labor is highly gendered, classed, raced, and cultured and highly dependent on the circumstances, space, and the identities of those involved in the interactions (Kang 2010). Previous literature on bodywork focuses almost exclusively on the bodywork that individuals do to their own bodies or within paid jobs (Gimlin 2007). This study focuses on the bodywork people do voluntarily, in the public sphere, with people who are not kin. For some, the care and food our bodies need are taken for granted aspects of our lives that
we do without much thought – putting on clothes that make sense for the weather, brushing our teeth, washing our faces, eating a meal. For others, like the people who come into the café for a free meal, this bodywork is not as easy because of their limited resources.

Beyond these established connections between food and gender in private households, we know less about what role gender and carework plays in the non-profit food world, inhabited by mostly volunteer labor. Others have found that volunteer labor within other realms (like children’s recreational sport teams) follows similar patterns of gender divisions found in the family and the workplace; people often devalue women’s care labor in the same way housework and childcare labor are devalued in the home (Hooks 2004; Messner and Bozada-Deas 2009). A deeper understanding of the gender division of labor within volunteer labor is an important step in understanding how carework is performed and understood outside of the home, while still not for pay. Some suggest that without a clearer understanding of who does what volunteer work and how volunteer work is divided by gender, we have an incomplete picture gender and labor stratification (Hook 2004). Labor is more than just paid work and unpaid domestic work.

Especially given approximately half of the population reports doing some volunteer work and the rate of volunteering in the US has remained stagnant or rising for many years (Wilson 2000). People are now volunteering for different types of volunteer organizations – more people are volunteering for grassroots organizations and other community causes, rather than older era clubs and organizations (Wilson 2000). Importantly, studies find that women are more likely to get involved in community food work than policy work and that this division of labor has important implications for how gender and power operate within the realm of food advocacy (Cairns and Johnston 2015).

In this chapter, I seek to examine how volunteers divide carework (both emotional and physical) in a volunteer organization that seeks to create cross-class relationships. How do
gendered assumptions influence who engages in carework, and what are the repercussions? How does volunteer carework differ from carework done for pay in occupational settings and in the home between family/friends? Answering these questions allows me to show the important ways gender and class influence how women perform carework differently in a volunteer setting, and how this both reaffirms our gendered assumptions about carework and challenges our cultural depictions of carework as invisible and devalued.

FINDINGS

Carework and volunteerism in Unity Café were deeply gendered, which had important implications for the success of the café mission. In the analysis that follows, I introduce three similar, yet distinct, ways that volunteers engaged in carework in Unity Café. Carework is one of the ways in which women do gender, and here, I show that volunteering can be a fruitful area in exploring how public carework happens, and how it challenges and reaffirms previous conceptions of how women and men do gender.

To describe the carework I observed in the café and detail its nuances, I developed three key terms through my coding processes. While all three terms are highly connected and together encapsulate a more comprehensive understanding how carework operated in the café, each term illustrates an important and specific aspect of how volunteers performed carework. Expressions of inclusion refers to the carework done by volunteers to further the café mission of creating a space that is “welcoming to all.” This carework is highly related to embodied welcome work in that both aim to express the café’s community ideology. The main difference between these two forms of carework is that expressions of inclusion are predominately verbal and emotional, while embodied welcome work involves physical labor. Interactional bodywork is also a type of labor
that is prominent within the café, with somewhat similar aims. This kind of carework involves caring for the bodies of others, to induce comfort and meet cultural norms of appearance.

This analysis also points to the importance of understanding how race and class interact with the performance of gender. Below, I begin by giving definitions of the three types of carework I observed in Unity Café. Then, I provide exemplary examples of each and argue for its importance in understanding how carework happens in volunteer work. Finally, I show how this analysis furthers our understanding of people reproduced gender through volunteer food and organizational work.

*Expressions of Inclusion*

One of the prominent ways the community-centered ideals of the café were upheld in the space was through the emotional carework performed by women. The women volunteers in the café are who made it flourish, putting in many hours of unpaid volunteer and carework. Expressions of inclusion was one form of carework; those who performed this labor, consciously or not, promoted the community ideology described in the previous chapter. The ideology of the café revolved around the idea that creating community was just as, or more, important than serving food. Staff and volunteers articulated this repeatedly throughout my time observing and talking to people before the café opened and during its first eight months of operation.

The significance of this ideology for café staff and volunteers continued to build over the course of my observations. During one of the first events I attended for Unity Café, a board member addressed a group of potential volunteers meeting to discuss an upcoming event. A volunteer asked why the logo on the volunteer shirts had changed from what they had seen previously. Originally, the shirts had been emblazoned with the phrase “a café with good food and community” [paraphrased from café website]. The new motto was, “Build Community, Eat
Good Food” [paraphrased from café website]. The board member replied, “We actually changed the name so that the word community comes first, because we recognized that that is the most important thing, not the food necessarily. So, we changed the name to reflect that; we put community in front of good food – we switched them” (field notes, 3.17.17).

This community ideology drove (some) volunteers in the space to enact a style of volunteering and carework centered on making people feel welcome and accepted. Amanda, the executive director, modeled how expressions of inclusion operated. In August 2018, eight months after the café opened, I asked Amanda during an interview if she felt she had the support she needed. She told me:

It’s hard. I do. Honestly, I think I need to lean on people more…I need to get a better life balance; I need to pull away some; I need to trust that they're fine in the cafe. To be completely honest, I've never said this out loud, it's hard for me to walk away from the cafe because when I'm in there, and I come down and I see people waiting at the door and no one is being greeted, no one is being told the concept, it's hard for me to walk away - because that's our mission; we need to be doing that. (interview, 7.12.18)

Amanda understood the importance of creating a welcoming environment in order to reach the goal of the organization to feel like “a space where all people can feel welcome and eat tasty food, regardless of income” [mission statement paraphrased]. Through my observations, customers of the café (especially those who are not middle-class) felt more at ease when a volunteer personally greeted them and they were individually cared for upon entering the café. I have deemed these practices expressions of inclusion. I observed that middle-class people also enjoyed this aspect of the café, though I believe it was not as important to their experience. I regularly overheard comments by customers who were greeted at the door like: “everyone is so nice here” or “this is so cool.” Their ability to pay full price for their meal made exchanges at the register much smoother.

Frequently, I observed Amanda take charge of all aspects of the experience for meal volunteers who walked into the café. The pay-what-you-can and volunteering for a meal system
was not intuitive, as well as dissimilar to other restaurants or soup kitchens. Everyone who walked through the café doors had to be socialized into the system of payment, but the consequences of successful socialization into the process had varying repercussions based on class status. If someone was paying full price, socialization did not matter as much because when the cashier said, “Your suggested donation price is X amount of $,” middle-class people were able to hand over the suggested amount without much consideration. For low-income, food insecure, and unhoused patrons this process was wholly foreign.

During the first few months of operation I watched Amanda take careful and intentional steps to make sure that people who came in to volunteer were comfortable and socialized into the café process. This was part of a larger intentional effort by Amanda and the CAB to get low-income, food insecure, and unhoused people to come to the café. One of the main “tasks” of the CAB was to go out into these communities and serve a free meal, while explaining the concept of the café and personally inviting people to come. Reflecting the commitment to the cultural ideology of the café, Amanda and others continued to engage in intentional expressions of inclusion to make sure the café upheld its ideology. This example from the first week the café was open illustrated the expressions of inclusion Amanda (and others) engaged in:

Amanda was in a meeting at a table close to the café entrance when she saw Pete, an unhoused middle-aged black man, come through the front doors. He looked around nervously as he walked in. Amanda glanced over and saw him. She paused her meeting at a nearby table and went over to him and gave him a hug. She asked, “Are you eating with us today? Going to volunteer for your meal?” He said yes. She replied, “Good, what do you want?” He replied, “Grits” and she nodded and asked, “What else? How about some quiche?” He agreed. “Coffee?” she asked, and he said no. “Okay, how about some juice?” He agreed and she steered him to the register. When she got there, she introduced him to the two young women running it and said, “He’s going to have some grits, the bacon quiche and [looks at him] some orange juice?” He nodded his head. She steered him away after, “Do you want to eat first and then volunteer?” He said yes and she brought him to a table to sit (field notes 1.10.18).

Throughout my time observing and volunteering in the café, I saw a variety of similar tactics employed by Amanda and other routine volunteers that eased the potentially awkward or
uncomfortable moments of transaction between cashiers and meal volunteers. Unless Amanda was not present, or up in her office, she almost always greeted people at the door – especially when she knew those people were food insecure or unhoused. The example below illustrated this tactic:

One early morning a young black woman came into the café. Before she was able to approach the register, Amanda zoomed over, hugged her, and greeted her by name. [Later, Amanda told me that she knew her from her days working as the manager of a local day shelter.] Amanda asked her if she wanted to eat but the woman told her that she came over because it was chilly out and she was waiting for the thrift store across the street to open. Amanda got her a cup of coffee in a to-go cup and explained the café mission to her, including how she could come in to pay for a meal by volunteering. After she finished explaining the pay-what-you-can system, they continued to talk for about 5 minutes and after another hug, Amanda told the woman, “stay as long as you want, let me know if you want something to eat.” The woman sipped on her coffee in the café until the thrift store opened. (field notes, 5.2.18)

When Amanda was in the café, she remained highly aware of the front door and the people who walked through it. I often observed her take control of all aspects of a transaction, running outside to greet someone, bring them inside, help order their food, and bring them their food (field notes, 2.21.18). She often personally ordered for trade volunteers, stood next to them at the register while they ordered, or introduced the trade volunteer to the cashier with an explanation that they would be volunteering instead of paying before walking away.

I relay further examples of this type of carework below in conjunction with a discussion of the embodied welcome work involved in these interactions. While I have created these distinct terms to illustrate both of the important aspects of this process – the emotionality and the physicality – many of the examples for each involve both. These examples also point to the importance of intentionality in creating food spaces that are welcoming to people who are not white and middle-class, as discussed in Chapter 3. Previous critiques of food justice organizations challenge the ideas of universalism that often pervade these spaces: the assumption that the values held by those in charge (white people) are normal and widely shared by everyone
(Guthman 2011). Moreover, research has found that many alternative food spaces operate under colorblind ideology and suggest that their services and products are appealing to everyone, and thus it would be racist to purposefully target minority communities (Guthman 2011). The café was often filled with mostly white people, including a predominately white staff. Yet, the meal volunteers who came into the space, as explained by Amanda, were almost 90% black men, suggesting that the intentionality and use of expressions of inclusion was working to create a welcoming space, at least for some (interview, 7.12.18).

Importantly, Amanda explicitly asked other staff members to engage in this type of carework. While Amanda was an expert at this work and often made it looks easy and seamless, it was still work, and required practice and intentionality in order for café patrons to feel the benefits. While Amanda was quick to say that the café was her dream and she loved her job, she also explained to me on multiple occasions that she was working at an unsustainable pace that derailed important aspects of her personal life. I observed her chatting with volunteers one day, and their conversation illustrated Amanda’s struggle to continue to the work she does at the café and maintain a personal life.

Amanda came over at one point and a volunteer joked, ‘I heard you say to someone that you have no social life and I laughed so hard, you are the most social person I have ever met!’ Amanda shook her head, ‘no, I have no social life’ and another volunteer said, ‘if you are talking to people at your business about your business and that’s it, that’s not a social life, that’s work.’ And Amanda nodded her head, ‘exactly.’ (field notes, 3.4.18)

This interaction also further illustrated the importance of Amanda trying to get other staff members to engage in this type of work. Part of the reason Amanda fired the first chef of the café was because of his resistance to engage with customers and volunteers in this way. Amanda struggled to get the staff members, most of whom were white men, to engage meaningfully with people. This was a prominent theme during the first six months of café operations. This commonly came up during CAB meetings when Alice, a member of the community advisory
board, would ask, “How is the café doing in creating community?” Frequently, there were mixed opinions on how the staff was doing, as this example illustrated:

Amanda asked around the table to see if the staff has been interacting with CAB members and most people say no. Amanda asks three of the men on the CAB if they have been greeted by name when they come in and one says yes, by the café manager. Wycliff (a CAB member) says that he doesn’t really fault the kitchen guys for not interacting because he thinks they are busy. In response, Amanda and Alice argue that they aren’t busy all the time and they aren’t making an effort. Alice adds, “You know they’ve been making these sandwiches a million times, would it be that hard to just poke your head up over that sneeze guard and say hello when people walk in? We need to remind them that they are brought into both, not just making food but making community. That’s the job.”

(field notes, 2.26.2018)

The meal volunteers I talked to and interviewed said that the people who made them feel comfortable in the space were the women. When I asked them specifically who they had met at the café, and who had had an impact on their lives, the same names came up over and over again – Amanda, Alice (routine volunteer), Linda (routine volunteer), Christine (routine volunteer), and Jane (routine volunteer). These were the people who they said made the café feel like more than a soup kitchen. They were also the people who I observed engage in the most expressions of inclusion.

While I observed expressions of inclusion as predominately done by women, that is not to say that I never saw men engage with volunteers or talk about creating community. Many, in fact, did talk about how the mission of the café as a community space was why they wanted to get involved. Yet their engagement with others did not look the same as it did when women did it, and it did not have the same effect.

Cairns and Johnston (2015) argue, “While interest may be widely shared among environmentally and socially conscious individuals, the work of implementing these concerns into everyday food practices tends to be performed by women” (117). I observed many instances in which board members of the café articulated their absolute excitement and support about the café’s specific ideology of community, but I rarely, if ever, observed those men engaging in
similar types of carework explicitly turning the ideology into a practice. Men and women in the US are socialized to interact differently (West and Zimmerman 2009). Importantly, we are socialized to believe women are more emotionally engaged and caring, and this socializes them into behaviors that are easily transferred to creating and maintaining the activities that sustain the community ideology of Unity Café.

The more spaces in which we consciously or unconsciously reinforce traditional gender ideology, the more it seems ubiquitous, natural, and unchangeable. Whom the expressions of inclusion benefited—strangers, who were mostly black and low-income or unhoused men, gives us insight into the power of carework to reach people across race and class boundaries. Carework in the home is reserved for family, and carework previously articulated across race and class bounds has been studied through the lens of paid work—meaning it is not optional (Kang 2000). Here, women perform these expressions of inclusion across otherwise rigid social boundaries in the US voluntarily. Moreover, without this work (as I articulate more below), the café ideology would fail, and it would be just a regular café with no social justice mission. As a CAB member told me during our interview, when talking about making sure that people who come into the café are a mix of both food insecure and middle-class people, “Without either one, it’s not Unity Café. It might be a normal non-profit, but it’s not this.”

*Embodied Welcome Work*

Previously, sociologists have researched how bodywork happens in paid workplaces, such as nail salons (Kang 2010)\(^\text{16}\). I argue that that in volunteer work—especially when such an embodied activity like food consumption is happening—bodywork (in conjunction with emotional carework) can play an integral role in organizational success. The term I created to

\(^{16}\) The concept of body labor was introduced by Kang (2010).
capture this bodywork, *Embodied Welcome Work*, also directly relates to the community ideology of Unity Café. I define this concept as a type of bodywork in which (mostly) women use their bodies in specific ways to further the mission of the community ideology that drives the café culture. This type of bodywork is significant because it is highly gendered. When analyzing my observations in the café space, I started to realize that there was a lot more touching—material, physical contact—between bodies than I expected. Soon after this realization, I started to pay more attention to who was touching whom, and what effects these moments had.

This bodywork exemplifies how embodied practices are part of how we do gender. Embodied welcome work refers to the bodywork done that manages the emotions and feelings of café patrons – specifically in terms of making people feel welcome and comfortable. Embodied welcome work was an essential aspect of how volunteers and Amanda actualized a “welcoming” environment. Briefly, people engaged in embodied welcome work through hugs, hand holding, and other physical gestures that culturally represented comfort and care. Moreover, this bodywork took masculine and feminine forms. Below, I show how bodywork takes shape in the café and how these actions further drove the community ideology of the café.

Linda, a routine volunteer, began volunteering for the café soon after she retired from her position as a supervisor at a local daycare. While many routine volunteers, especially the middle-class white women, engaged in embodied welcome work, Linda was an exemplar case of how women used it, its effects, and its gendered implications. Linda started volunteering at Breaking Bread after being introduced to that program by Unity Café. She volunteered for about nine months before ultimately stopping because she felt burnt out and unappreciated. Ultimately, when the café opened its storefront, she stopped volunteering at the church meal because she felt that she was not able to talk to people and “build community,” which she explained to me on multiple occasions were the aspects of both organizations that she felt most drawn to. Linda’s
competing experiences help illustrate how important her expressions of carework were to her identity and how important her feeling appreciated was in continuing to do this work.

Linda’s engagement in embodied welcome work began even before the café doors opened. During a pop-up for the café, I watched as Linda hugged almost every person that came through the doors of the restaurant. Later during the event, I saw Linda sitting and holding hands with a black woman who I knew from other free meal programs. The woman often carried a large bag with her that I came to understand as a sign of either homelessness or precarious living; people with large bags, especially suitcases or oversized rucksacks, in public spaces often needed to carry all of their possession with them because they had nowhere to store them safely or reliably. Linda sat at her table for around five minutes, listening closely to what the woman was telling her, leaning in to listen to her soft voice while holding her hand (field notes, 4.8.17). While a small gesture, holding this woman’s hand signals the type of embodied welcome work done in the space that Linda and some routine volunteers utilized to comfort trade volunteers at the café and create a space of “community.” At another early event for the café, I watched again as Linda hugged almost everyone who walked through the doors.

Volunteers, employees, and board members in the café frequently made comments about how integral and seemingly natural Linda was at making people feel welcome in the café. During one observation, Linda came up to me and said, “You should put this in your project – how many come in here because they know me.” Before I could respond, she became distracted by people coming through the door and left my table to greet them and give hugs. The people she greeted were equally excited to see her and hugged her back. After they had ordered, she came back to my table with another volunteer, “Mari Kate you will like this” She said, “Jane just asked me if I wanted to stop talking and do some volunteering!” we all laughed, then Jane said, “I also think that the talking is helpful! It makes people feel more welcomed and comfortable because Linda
is greeting them and talking to them.” These examples point to an important aspect of the carework performed by volunteers, especially Linda. Whereas carework is often undervalued and invisible, in the café space it was encouraged and celebrated as part of the community ideology. Linda was able to perform an important part of her gendered identity and those around her recognized its importance and commended her for it.

There were many instances of women hugging other volunteers and café patrons who walked through the café doors. Multiple times I watched Linda run outside when she saw an unhoused or food insecure person she knew walking by on the street. During her time volunteering at the church meal, Linda became close to an unhoused, middle-aged, Latino man named Franco.17 He came to many of the café pop-up events before the storefront opened but did not come in regularly after the café opened its doors – which left Linda disheartened. On multiple occasions she went out of her way to bring him into the café for a meal. Once, while she was volunteering, she saw Franco walking on the other side of the street. She ran outside, hugged him, and guided him into the café with her hand on his shoulder reassuringly. She ordered for him, brought him his food, and sat with him while he ate. One day, she relayed to me that this has happened multiple times. “You won’t believe who came in yesterday. Franco,” she exclaimed. “You wouldn’t believe how fast I stood up and ran out when I saw him outside, because, you know, if he didn’t see me or Amanda when he walked by, he wouldn’t have come in; he wouldn’t have. And Amanda was in the back, so I knew I needed to run out, so he would come in” (field notes, 6.6.18). Franco himself underscored the importance of Linda’s carework in the café space. He once explained to me that the reason he went to the café was because Linda was there, and going there was a way for him to spend time with her. He told me that if she was not there, he would not go in (field notes, 6.12.18).

17 I discuss Linda and Franco’s relationship in more detail in Chapter 3.
In another instance, Linda saw a woman and her adult son at a thrift store across the street from the café and did almost the exact same series of motions. She ran outside to say hello, and then brought them inside and sat and had lunch with them (field notes, 1.28.18). This embodied welcome work done by Linda created a warm experience for the unhoused patrons. Importantly, Linda and Amanda were cognizant of how this type of carework helped food insecure and unhoused people feel like they were welcome in the café. Previous literature on community organizations suggests that blanket invitations do not create inclusiveness, personal invitations are necessary (Flora and Flora 2013).

There were many examples in my field notes of patrons who came in for a meal and whose experiences were not seamless or comfortable. In one instance, I watched as two men, a white man in his 40s and a black man in his 50s, paced back and forth in front of the café, peering inside. When the white man started to walk toward the front door, the black man pulled his arm back and shook his head. After a few moments of conversation in front of the entrance, the white man opened the door and asked without stepping inside, “Is Amanda here?” The café barista answered that she was not. The man hesitantly replied, “When will she be? We wanted to volunteer?” The barista told them they could come in and volunteer now, without Amanda being there. They agreed and ordered sandwiches at the register. After they placed their food order, the white man came up to me (since I had a volunteer name tag on this day) and asked in hushed tones, “Should we wait outside for our food?” I replied that they could sit wherever they wanted inside the café. Their eyes widened as they looked around. The only other people in the café at the time were a couple of people having coffee in business attire, presumably at a work meeting. I told them there was also seating upstairs, and they hurried to the empty area upstairs, where they waited for their food to arrive. They later volunteered to wash dishes.
Without labor to welcome people in, illustrated above, low-income people were less comfortable coming in for a meal. Considering that many people who came in to volunteer for their meal did not have regular or consistent access to food, not feeling welcome had important implications for their ability to get a meal and alleviate hunger. The café’s mission cannot be fulfilled unless people from the low-income, homeless, and food insecure community feel welcome and comfortable. Without their participation, the café is just a café like any other.

Alice, a middle-aged white woman who volunteered often and served on the board, told me during her interview that [patrons, especially those who volunteer for their meal] “come in for the hugs.” In response to my question, “what does community look like to you?” She said:

People who come here consistently because they know they are loved. They come for the hug. They come to connect. I mean, some of my favorite moments have been, it's been the hugs, the smiles, the card games, the coloring with the people…I think the cafe is successful because people come back not for the food; they come back for community. They come back for the hug; they come back because someone knows their name...Yes, the waffles are good but that is not the reason they keep coming back.

Middle-class people physically touching people experiencing homelessness challenges many of our cultural norms about the homeless as dirty, undeserving, and stigmatized (Meanwell 2012).

Similar to who engaged in expressions of inclusion, women in the café predominately engaged in this embodied welcome work. Again, it is not to say that men were not in the space and interacting with people, but their interactions were qualitatively different than those done by the women I observed. According to Amanda, part of the café manager’s job was to greet people, especially meal volunteers and get them situated in the space. I did observe him regularly assign the trade volunteers their jobs for the hour, but his demeanor and physicality was remarkably different than Amanda’s. He rarely smiled and often looked and sounded stressed. I was not the only one to notice this, as Linda and Amanda explained in a conversation with me:

Amanda asked me if [the manager] looked stressed on Sunday and I said that he looked like he always does. They exchanged a glance of annoyance and Linda said, ‘We’ve talked to him about this before. Even if he is stressed, he has to not show it so blatantly.’
Amanda replied, ‘Multiple people complained about how stressed he looked that day.’
(field notes, 3.28.18)

I had similar conversations with Amanda about this on multiple occasions: she would tell me the café manager did a good job getting people into their volunteer jobs and kept things running, but his inability to keep his stress off his face was a problem that he couldn’t seem to overcome. He ran the café sufficiently, but I observed that it took more emotional and physical interactional work to make sure that the café mission was achieved. Amanda explained well in her own words her issue with making sure the café was what she believed it could be:

I’ve said that so many times. I don't think the café needs me to run – I feel like it needs me to fulfill the mission, where people feel welcomed and loved. I think [the café manager] does a good job one-on-one with people, he loves on our meal volunteers, which is great. I need him to greet every single person that walks in. Everything that I just said is why I’m so hesitant to walk away, because if we lose that, we lose the café.
(interview, 7.12.18)

Discussing the difficulty of trying to get the staff to do this labor in another conversation, Amanda exasperatedly said: “It’s not like every day I want to be on and doing this, but I never let anyone see that maybe I’m not having a great day.” Amanda, ultimately, was in charge of the café, yet her directives to get the men to do the same type of labor she did was met with resistance. If the male staff members were to engage in this carework, particularly the more physical aspects, they would be challenging two important aspects of masculine performances. First, they would themselves have to perform more feminine coded emotions and movements. Second, the trade volunteers who came in were also predominately men, so they would also have had to be willing to also engage in this behavior with a man. Part of the reason male staff members may not have hugged the trade volunteers was because they assumed, perhaps correctly, that the trade volunteers did not want to be hugged by them.

For these reasons, the manager engaged with volunteers in a different way. Christine, a routine volunteer, articulated this when she said that the café manager did greet people, but not in
the same way that Amanda did. She described the way he approaches people as “more a man type style” and “masculine” (interview, 9.27.18). I observed what Christine described. The café manager did greet people, though in none of my field notes do I have any examples of him hugging a trade volunteer. That is not to say that he never did but given that I have so many examples of observing women hugging – it does suggest that he did embodied welcome work on a much smaller, different scale. A conversation with Amanda also confirmed my observations, that the manager was not someone who hugged people. I sometimes saw the café manager shake hands with trade volunteers, which could be conceptualized as “masculinized” embodied welcome work but as Alice states above – hugs were what they came for. A handshake and a hug did not have the same effect and required different levels of embodiment.

This is one of many examples of how gendered norms and expectations of bodies limit the expression of men. Our bodies are one of the main ways we perform gendered identity work. Contemporary performances of masculinity and expectations of men, especially heterosexual men, do not normally include the touching of bodies in public space the same way it does for women. Hand shaking is far less intimate than hugging and is culturally associated with masculinity. It is less culturally deviant when men touch women’s bodies (sometimes without the woman’s approval) because of how deeply connected performances of hegemonic masculinity is with heterosexuality (Connell 2005). Men touching men is much more culturally deviant. As Amanda said in our interview, the vast majority of routine volunteers were men, so for the staff (besides Amanda) to engage in embodied welcome work, they would have to engage in physical performances that did not easily align with contemporary performances of hegemonic masculinity.

Gendered bodywork, as described by Alice, and observed by me, was an integral aspect of the café’s creation of feelings of welcomeness. Yet, gendered expectations and norms limited
who was hugging, holding hands, and caring for others. Carework, including the care of bodies through bodywork, is deeply associated with performances of femininity, making it seem “natural” for women to care for others. Our social norms about how men are supposed to move and interact with others hinders their ability to engage in the same work. In the café, people, including themselves, often framed their work as personal responsibility or “just who they are.” Given this, women who engaged in this work made their own rules about who, what, and when to give support. While this worked well for some, it meant that others who did not (or were not able to) successfully engage with these few people were unable to reap the social, emotional, and physical benefits of these relationships. Women were doing this vital work without explicit direction because it so easily aligned with their performances of femininity, many of whom likely were expected to engage in other types of bodily carework for their families throughout their lives.

*Interactional Bodywork*

All societies require individuals to work on their bodies to transform them from their “natural” state into one that abides by cultural norms. Sociology has largely ignored the more mundane aspects of bodywork, including daily bathing, deodorizing, hairstyling, application of cosmetic, teeth cleaning, wearing proper clothing, etc. (Shilling 2003). Though the “intentional cultivation” of bodies has long been understood as a means by which individuals and groups distinguish themselves from others (Mason 2013). Bourdieu in fact argued that people see the “natural” body as less moral, devalued, and associated with a lower class status (1984). Importantly, in order to properly adhere to social norms, women are required to perform and engage in vastly more bodywork than men in order to appear, “appropriately feminine” – such as shaving, putting on make-up, styling long hair, wearing shape-wear, eating low-fat diets,
plucking eye-brows, and so much more. We assume that people are able to easily accomplish these tasks and therefore they are taken for granted. Yet, for the most marginalized populations in the US, especially those experiencing homelessness, these aspects of bodywork can be difficult to maintain and have important repercussions when they are not. For example, some argue that these aspects of bodywork can influence people’s experiences with employment (Twigg 2000; Twigg and Atkin 2006). I use the term *interactional bodywork* to refer to the carework done within the café *between people* that helped people adhere to cultural norms and feel more comfortable. While expressions of inclusion refer to how women cared for others’ mental and emotional health through their words, embodied welcome work and interactional bodywork refer to how women cared for other’s physical bodies.

This form of bodywork became an interactional component of gendered carework for the volunteers at the café. Routine volunteers, mostly women, engaged in this practice. It manifested as the gifting of things like face-wipes, shoes, clothing, and other items that helped make people’s appearances more socially acceptable. This body work was also facilitated by the café space, which allowed many of the trade volunteers to take care of their bodies themselves – often using the props given to them by routine volunteers. Liza’s case illustrated interactional bodywork and its repercussions.

One of the first meal volunteers to patron the café on a regular basis was a 52-year-old unhoused white woman, Liza, who had recently moved for a fresh start after her husband passed away. He had a terminal illness that required her to quit her job of twenty years to take care of him; his medical costs burned through their savings because he did not have insurance. Liza came into the café almost every morning during the first few months it was open, arriving as early as 7:00 a.m., and established a routine that almost all the morning volunteers came to recognize. She would ask for a cup of room temperature water with lemon, and explained to
anyone who asked that it helped dramatically with her digestion and that this was something she was unable to get at the shelter she was staying in. Liza often ordered coffee, grits, and an entrée, which varied, and then spent the next ten minutes in the café bathroom washing her face, brushing her teeth, combing her hair, and applying makeup. She told me how important this bodywork was to her. When I did an interview with her, she wouldn’t start the interview until she was done putting on her make-up. She also once recalled to me that when she lost her spot in the shelter, she did not come into the café because her hands and clothes were dirty and she did not want to be seen “looking dirty” (field notes, 6.8.18).

Liza became a somewhat constant presence in the café and one of the most prominent examples of how important mundane bodywork was to the trade volunteers. Some women routine volunteers, many of whom were also white women around Liza’s age, helped her perform this bodywork and became highly invested in her life and well-being. These women bought her face wipes, eye cream, and hand lotion; paid for her to get a haircut; brought her shoes and clothes for job interviews; brought her a camping cot when she lost her space in the shelter; hugged her; and generally rooted for her success. Liza’s body required extra work beyond just looking clean to accomplish an “appropriate” performance of femininity. One of the first complaints she made to me about living in the shelter was her inability to wash her face and put on her night and eye cream for preventing wrinkles.

According to Amanda, about 20% of the trade volunteers who came into the café for a meal were completely unhoused (living on the street); another 20% were living in a homeless shelter (interview, 7.12.18). These shelters were notoriously crowded, unclean, and poorly resourced. Liza told me that she would wake up at 5:45 a.m. to ensure that she would get at least five minutes in the communal bathroom, and that she was often interrupted before she had time to finish washing and getting ready for the day. As routine and trade volunteers got acquainted,
some routine volunteers came to a new understanding of the embodied aspects of homelessness, many of whom told me they had never realized how difficult it was for homeless people to feel comfortable, safe, and clean. Christine once told me, “It’s something I hadn’t thought of before, how tired people must be. Liza always has a story about how she wasn’t able to sleep well the night before [in the shelter or on the street] and always comes in so haggard. Then to have to wake up and try to look presentable to go out in the world and get a job? [shakes her head]” This realization spurred Christine and others to engage in the type of carework I call interactional bodywork.

Interactional bodywork also included when volunteers created or bought gifts that made trade volunteers more physically comfortable. A group of local women knitted scarves and hats during the winter months to give to those experiencing homelessness. This interaction showcases the effect these scarves had for some people:

Alice (a board member) got up and invited Terrel (a regular trade volunteer) to sit with us at the community table. Alice pulled out an orange wrapped present with a tag with Terrel’s name on it. She handed it to him and said, “I have this for you, Terrel.” He replied, “I think I know what it is” as he smiled. Alice replied with a laugh, “Well don’t say, just open it!” He opened it with a smile and pulled out an orange and brown scarf, “You made this, didn’t you?” he asked. Alice replied, “Yes, with the yarn you helped me put together.” He nodded, and wrapped it around his neck, “This is really nice, feels good.” For weeks I saw Terrel wearing the orange and brown scarf around his neck, whether he was inside or out (field notes, 2.9.18).

Some of the scarves made by this group of women were given in this type of one-on-one exchange, with similar gratefulness from the recipient. More frequently, the women donated the scarves anonymously, and people could take one as they pleased. For months I saw people at different emergency food providers and outside downtown wearing the scarves made by café volunteers.

In some cases, as with the scarves, the efforts and carework of routine volunteers created comfort beyond the walls of the café. Greg was an example of the extreme of this type of effort.
While his story was exceptional in that Greg received more care, attention, and gifts than most people received, it illustrates the possibilities and repercussions of interactional bodywork between the unhoused and middle-class volunteers. Greg was a regular meal volunteer, who started coming into the café in the spring of 2018 and thereafter became a regular presence. At first, he was homeless but later he secured a room in a boarding house that also provided job training. I heard from participants that it was a difficult program to get into. The series of events described below happened shortly after he moved in the boarding house:

Greg came in around 11:30 and ordered a sandwich, cinnamon roll, iced tea, and coffee and sat at the downstairs at the community table to eat. I went and sat down next to Greg and he started to tell me how he was feeling sick. He looked terrible, to put it mildly. Greg’s body is so thin his bones jut out from the oversized clothes he often wears. He didn’t smile or look at me when I sat down, but talked to me nonetheless. ‘My room at my boarding house has no air; it doesn’t even have a fan. I’m so hot in there I can’t sleep. It makes my stomach hurt. I don’t know how much longer I can take it.’ He ended up taking most of his food to go because he was still feeling so nauseated from the heat (field notes, 7.15.18)

Two weeks later, I was copied on an e-mail from Linda to a group of routine volunteers at the café, asking if anyone had a fan and/or a small dorm sized fridge for one of the trade volunteers who was struggling to deal with the summer heat in their new room. The initial e-mail did not indicate that Greg was the person in need; this became known later. Within two days, women volunteers donated both needed items to him. Greg started his job training program during the same week. Later, when I interviewed Linda, she talked about Greg when I asked her about the relationships she had made at the café:

I’ve watched him turn into someone – I mean I’m not going to lie, I told the manager one time – “He needs to leave. He’s gross, he’s throwing up in the bathroom.” I could hardly even talk to him and I felt guilty. Then this last three weeks he has been coming in he has been healthy. He looks better. He’s still skinny as a rail, but he looks better.

Linda’s comments articulated two important aspects of bodywork: the importance of bodily composure for people’s ability to move about in the world without being categorized or stigmatized, and the benefits of interactional bodywork. Our bodies carry a lot of social and
cultural significance, and homeless people are categorized as such through cues we read off their bodies. A big aspect of Greg being able to make a shift towards a healthier life was securing a boarding room and entering the attached job program. However, even after he moved into the new space he was clearly struggling because the space did not have air or a space for him to keep perishable food. Through his connections with the women in the café, Greg was able to secure the items necessary to improve his appearance, get rest, and feel reasonably comfortable. The weeks after he got the fan and fridge, Greg looked much better and I saw him smile for the first time since meeting him.

Interactional bodywork was just another piece of the carework puzzle in Unity Café. The acts of caring for the bodies of others was an important aspect of how the routine women volunteers in the café did gender. These women have been socialized to care for other’s emotions and bodies. While the women freely chose to engage in this carework, these choices were shaped by context. The reality was that few men, even those on staff, were willing to do the type of labor needed by trade volunteers.

DISCUSSION

The emotional and bodily carework I observed had both positive and negative consequences. It provided a meaning for the women who engaged in it, and it sometimes changed the lives of the most vulnerable café patrons. But at the same time, because this work largely befell women, it reinforced the ideas that carework is women’s domain and women are best suited for it. Men, in turn, were let off the hook for performing this necessary work. The café thus reproduced an unequal division of labor, mirroring what has been well documented in other spheres.
Men on staff were not engaging in the same way, even when Amanda directly told them to do so. This furthers our understanding of how devalued femininity is in our culture. Even when aspects of femininity, like emotional and physical carework, had positive benefits, men were still unable or unwilling to engage. This was especially important because of how important this labor was to the vitality of the café. While many of the routine volunteers were women, some were men. These men took on more “hands on” roles – like food expo, running food, and washing dishes. These jobs reflect cultural depictions of “men’s work” as work that is more physically demanding and less social and emotional than “women’s work.”

Ultimately, to fulfill the mission of fostering community, the café needed to recruit new trade volunteers. The café ideology and structure relied on a new trade volunteer coming in, eating, and being integrated into the space through volunteer work where they would meet and interact with other people in the café. The few “failed” cases I saw, in which someone came in and did not pay for their meal and left without volunteering, happened on days that Amanda was absent. Without participation from marginalized people, the café is not a pay-what-you-can café, because everyone is paying full price and it has no impact on those it claims to serve. I asked the café manager how frequently trade volunteers don’t pay and don’t volunteer. He said almost never, that it had happened only three times since the café opened seven months prior. Two of those three instances happened within the last few hours during a rare Sunday afternoon in which Amanda was not there. I witnessed one of these instances when a middle-aged black man came into the café and left without volunteering during this Sunday afternoon that Amanda was not in the café. No one greeted him when he walked into the café. His first point of contact was with the cashier, who did not explain the mission of the café or the options for paying. Without welcome and explanation, this person was not integrated into the café in a “successful” capacity. Later, the café manager attributed the fact that the man hadn’t volunteered as the man’s personal
failure, rather than acknowledge that he was perhaps uncomfortable, or unaware of the expectations of the café. Men’s resistance or ignorance of this aspect of volunteer work had important implications for the café’s success.

CONCLUSION

Given how much carework and emotional labor women are expected to do throughout their lives, it is remarkable that these women willfully and intentionally engage in more outside of the home, without pay. I believe one of the important reasons why these women were willing to engage in this work was because of the visibility and acclaim they got from others in the café space. Both from the trade volunteers they help, who I observed tell them on multiple occasions how much their friendship meant to them and from other volunteers and Amanda who regularly praise those who engaged in the café mission. It’s possible that given enough time, this praise and celebration of carework could make it easier for men to engage in it. In the US, femininity is devalued at every level of society – women deal with internalized misogyny, performances of femininity are associated with negative or weak connotations, portrayals of women in the media are often objectifying and problematic. Exposure to celebrated carework and expressions of femininity might change men’s ideas of how to engage with others in positive ways.

There was also an important element of structural inequality within the café that reflects broader understandings of gendered inequality on the institutional level. Shaking hands, rather than hugging or engaging in other “feminine” forms of bodywork, reaffirmed the image of men as professionals in work spaces, and women as something less than, or other. Despite the fact that Amanda was in charge in the space, her inability to get her employees to engage in emotional labor reflected inequality on a larger scale. Masculinity and authority are linked in our cultural imagination, so much so that studies find that men being men is enough to evoke a sense
of authority in a workplace (Kleinmann 1996). Amanda faced issues in transferring this labor, because men were not willing to give up authority in the workplace. Building relationships was the top priority, so someone had to do this labor. It’s not that Amanda couldn’t get people to do anything, but that she couldn’t get staff to do what she thought was the core, most essential aspect of the organization. This labor came at a cost, as Amanda notes herself; she was drained by all she has to do at the café. This engagement in emotional labor had important gendered implications. As Bartky (1990) notes of women’s carework, “Women fill men with their energies, thereby strengthening them and depleting themselves” (117).
Chapter 6: Conclusion, Final Thoughts

KEY FINDINGS

In this dissertation, I respond to calls to better understand the process of how people build social ties and how and why people are eating together in the 21st century (Fischer 2011a, Fischer 2011b, Sobal and Nelson 2003). Researchers consistently find that social ties and strong social networks matter considerably for individuals and communities; higher levels of social capital are associated with many positive outcomes (Coleman 1988; Flora and Flora 2016). While researchers are confident that social ties matter for individuals across a myriad of identity categories, they are less certain about the mechanisms behind how and why people build or fail to make connections.

This dissertation is an important step in demystifying the social processes behind how people build (and break) social ties, and how this process can both contribute to and challenge inequality. Furthermore, my analysis also provides important new understandings about how people engage in cross-class, communal eating in public spaces. My qualitative approach to studying commensality allows me to uncover important aspects of the mechanisms behind public, cross-class, communal eating. Finally, by looking at new approaches to food insecurity, that utilizes a community narrative and attempts to use social ties as a resource to combat hunger, my dissertation also tells an important story about how people approach and think about solutions to social problems.

Social Ties

At the most fundamental level, my dissertation examines the processes behind how people make social ties. While Chapter 3 most explicitly seeks to identify the factors that facilitate or impede the creation of social capital, all of my chapters, in some way, contribute to
answering this central question. Overall, my dissertation contributes to the social capital literature by providing evidence that building cross-class social ties is a complicated process that can both challenge social inequalities and solidify existing social boundaries.

In Chapter 3, I illuminate two important processes behind how people build social ties – intentionality and symbolic and physical boundaries. I find that only those who are intentional in the spaces and set out explicitly to make cross-class social ties, do so. These individuals made social ties because they broke social norms about how we often treat eating in public space with strangers and went out of their way to start conversations with those who were different from themselves. I also find that the symbolic and physical boundaries in both organizations worked to hinder the creation of social ties (like the literal and metaphorical meaning of the glass wall in the church). How or when people ate together, and what food they consumed, was also an important factor in understanding how symbolic and physical boundaries can contribute to our understanding of how people make ties.

Furthermore, I show the importance of a longitudinal, contextualized approach to understanding social ties. Few researchers study how social ties dissolve because this requires data on how associations change over time (McPherson et al. 2001). Qualitative studies of social ties (like that of Desmond 2017, Small 2008, and Torres 2019) can provide a deeper understanding of the processes behind building or ending relationships. My analysis contributes to a growing body of research that uses qualitative methods to examine social ties. Chapter 4, which details the process behind how relationships changed over time and how this affected people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity, is particularly relevant. I find that people created social ties in the spaces, and also lost them – it is not simply whether you have them or not. When the relationships changed, the marginalized lost the social capital gained from relationships built in the spaces. By tracing the process of how these changes unfolded, and the
role of achievement ideology in this process, I contribute to a better understanding of how even people who are trying to push towards positive social change can be caught in dominant social narratives about poverty and inequality.

Furthermore, other qualitative studies of social ties among marginalized or low-income people also find that their ties are less concrete than survey data can account for. Desmond (2012) finds that people living in high-poverty areas rely on “disposable ties” to meet their immediate needs. These ties, generally between acquaintances, were incredibly important in providing necessary resources but were fleeting and breakable (Desmond 2012). Similarly, Torres (2019) finds that among senior groups, their ties defy categorization between “strong” and “weak;” she argues that their ties are “elastic.” Seniors in her study are able to draw on informal social support when needed from these elastic ties, while still maintaining their distance and autonomy. In some ways, my research can add to this discussion by showing another case in which ties are not as easily categorized as typical survey data suggests. Though, social ties in my study differ from both of their analysis. People in my sites broke social ties in the spaces not because of necessity or desire from both parties, but because middle-class people were judging low-income people for their choices. In both the Desmond and Torres studies, social ties were predominately between people of the same socio-economic status. Here, it is clear that cross-class relationships and social ties are different in meaningful ways. Some ties in this study may be “elastic” or “disposable” in some ways, but they differ meaningfully because the low-income people involved in these ties had less control over when or if they were broken.

Commensality

Unsurprisingly, food mattered in the spaces. The actual act of eating together (or not) was an important aspect of understanding how and why people made social ties. This point of
comparison of the sites proved especially useful in understanding the symbolic and physical boundaries articulated in Chapter 3. I find that food provided an important conversation starter for some patrons of Unity Café, including those working to create cross-class ties. On the other hand, food created a barrier between volunteers and clients at Breaking Bread. At Breaking Bread, the consumption of food acted as a symbol of need, distancing the clients from the volunteers. My comparison of the differing roles of food at the new plays offers an important lens to study commensality and reaffirms one of the key findings in this field: that food has the power to both build and break down social boundaries.

Furthermore, few studies have examined the role of commensality among people experiencing homelessness or food insecurity (Fischer 2011b), and this project helps fill this gap. People shared meals together at both organizations, but in markedly different ways. At Breaking Bread, many clients engaged in communal eating, but never with volunteers. However, food did contribute to stronger bonds among clients, as they talked about their lives and shared information about local resources during the shared meals. When unhoused people are giving the opportunity to eat together, communal eating can have some of the same benefits articulated by previous research about middle-class people. However, opportunities for shared meals among this population is much more limited. They have less access to food, aren’t frequently able to go into restaurants (due to either economic reasons or discrimination), and don’t have homes to invite others to dinner. Studying commensality among unhoused people, in fact, can show how these individuals find ways to connect with others despite having significantly fewer opportunities to do so.
Gender Dynamics in Food Organizations

Gender socialization happens throughout individuals' lives. Family, friends, media, teachers, and many others unconsciously and consciously teach us what an ideal woman or man “is” and “does.” Individuals do gender in response to everyday messages, thus accomplishing and re-accomplishing gender over time. This dissertation is a piece of the gender socialization puzzle, specifically adding an important analysis of how women engage in food and carework in the volunteer realm.

Through the analysis in Chapter 5, I show how gender norms can have both positive and negative effects on individuals and organizations. I find that women volunteers at Unity Cafe performed gendered carework that was vitally important to the cafe. They also received positive feedback and praise for their carework, an aspect of femininity that we often overlook and devalue. In a society that constantly and consistently devalues performances of femininity, this is an important finding in understanding how we perform gender and its possible repercussions. On the other hand, I find that expectations of hegemonic masculinity hindered men in the space from fully engaging with trade volunteers in the same way the women did, which created an unequal division of labor. Furthermore, the concept of interactional bodywork contributes to our understanding of how cross-class, cross-racial bodywork happens and the repercussions. The interactional bodywork performed by volunteers that benefitted unhoused people at Unity Café had an important impact on their life. Whether making their bodies more socially acceptable or more comfortable, it affected their everyday lives.
LIMITATIONS

There were some important limitations to this dissertation that likely affected the analysis and story I was able to tell. Limited access to some clients at Breaking Bread and the cafe board of directors limited information available to me.

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, I faced some barriers in recruiting clients at Breaking Bread for interviews. Many clients did not have the time or resources to meet with me outside of the meal. Others simply did not want me to interview them. Others agreed to an interview but after many attempts to schedule, it never happened. While I did end up talking with many clients during the meal and asking them questions from the interview guide – I likely missed some information because of their inability or unwillingness to talk outside of the space for a longer period of time. This limits my ability to understand exactly how ties or the concept of “community” mattered to them.

I was also asked to stop attending board meetings at the cafe, which limited my ability to see how this group made decisions. During the meetings I was able to attend, I saw that members made important decisions and they discussed backstage, insider knowledge. It would have been beneficial to my analysis, especially in Chapter 4, to hear specifically about the cafe finances and how they framed why trade volunteers needed to work for their meal. While Amanda discussed the financial stability of the cafe during CAB meetings, it was not in the same type of specifics they discussed in the board meeting. Furthermore, not being in the board meetings meant that I was unable to compare the CAB and board meetings and could not fully understand how board members received input from the CAB. Given that many important decisions seemed to be made during these board meetings, it is likely I missed important information not being allowed to attend.
FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several important implications of this dissertation. Further research should examine the importance of safe spaces for addressing food insecurity and the potential significance of “third places” for unhoused people.

Safe Spaces

Safety came up during my data collection on a variety of occasions, and it is imperative that we as social researchers further explore the role of safety in understanding the creation of social ties, community, and addressing food insecurity.

Further research should look more systematically at the role of safety within emergency food providers like soup kitchens, community meal programs like Unity Café, and overnight shelters. Qualitative research, specifically ethnography and participant observation, asks us to go out into the world and interact with people and places to better understand the world around us. Physically being and interacting with people and communities is what drew me to qualitative research and sociology. As mentioned in Chapter 2, approximately a month into data collection, I started to experience varying levels of harassment that made it difficult for me fully engage emotionally and mentally in my research site. While this created some challenges for me, it also created an opening. My experiences prompted me to ask different questions. I started asking the women who came for the community meal if this was something they had also experienced too and if safety was part of their decision-making process. While this was not a line of inquiry I had initially, it emerged as part of the story. I learned some important information from both men and women during data collection about their feelings of safety, experiences of harassment, and reports of violence as unhoused and/or food insecure individuals and how this shaped the way they accessed food.
These stories led me to the following research question: What roles do perceptions of safety and experiences of harassment play in people’s ability to access food resources? While this question emerged from my qualitative framework, I believe that a more quantitative approach can provide a more complete and informative answer. Therefore, I believe that further research should explicitly examine instances of harassment and perceptions of safety for unhoused and food insecure individuals. Specifically, there is a need for research that systematically asks about people’s experiences of harassment and perceptions of spaces and whether or not these factors inhibit them from accessing resources. Do people stop going to some emergency food providers because they feel unsafe there? Do people who experience violence and harassment at these spaces still go because they have no other options, compounding their experiences of inequality?

Further research should also examine mother’s perceptions of safety within emergency food providers, specifically regarding their children. I started observing Breaking Bread in February 2017. I never observed any children at the meal, which I assumed was because school was in session and the timeframe of 2 – 3 p.m. wouldn’t allow them to come. When summer rolled around, I realized there were still no kids at the meal. I started to ask both volunteers and clients why there were no children, given that I knew that at least some of the clients had children that lived with them. Some volunteers brought their children to help serve during the summer, but I almost never (except for two occasions) saw a client bring in a child. I asked some clients specifically why they did not bring their kids, and for many months they told me their children did not want to come or were busy. At the end of my observational period, in summer 2018, I asked these questions again, since there were again no children at the meal. This time, some clients gave me different answers. I believe this was in part because I built trust in the space and over time clients became more open with me about their experiences (especially those
that were less socially desirable). Some themes started to emerge around motherhood and foodwork that I was unable to fully explore in this dissertation, but others should explore in future research. Some mothers in both spaces told me that they did not bring their children to Breaking Bread and the café because (1) they feared that someone would report them to social services for having a child they couldn’t feed and (2) that they tried to hide their food situation from their children and did not want to expose to them the tactics they employed to get sufficient food (see Elliott and Bowen 2018 for a related discussion).

These findings provide an important starting point for future research, further building upon studies examining low-income mothers foodwork (Elliott and Bowen 2018). Once at Breaking Bread, while I was sitting at a table with three other women, I heard a conversation that was incredibly thought provoking on this topic. The three women pointed to another woman they knew who had just walked in with her adult son, in his 20s. They all commented on how she must be doing really terribly if she was bringing her kid around, explaining, “I would never bring my kid, you have to hide it from them, they should never know what you do to get by.” While I have few other examples, this type of fear of judgement fits well with previous research about food, family, and motherhood: mothers are often unduly burdened with the task of foodwork and perceive shielding their kids from hunger as one of their key duties as parents (Bowen et al. 2019; Cairns et al. 2013; Cairns and Johnston 2015; Carney 2015; DeVault 1991; Elliott and Bowen 2018; Wills et al. 2011). Future research should further explore how mothers who frequent soup kitchens and other free meal programs navigate this process in relation to their children. Do they bring their children? How do they go without their children going with them? Do they hide that they go from their families? How do unhoused or women living in extreme poverty try shield children from their food situation, and how can we conceptualize this as a form of care or foodwork?
Oldenberg (2001) coined the term the “third place” to describe the places outside of the home and work that people frequent, are comfortable in, and foster positive interactions. He described these places as coffee shops, churches, hair salons, recreation centers, among others. Other scholars, like Putnam (2000), argued that these spaces are vitally important for healthy and positive social interaction. Yet, my research suggests that there needs to be more intersectional approaches to the study of “third spaces,” and this could be an important point of further inquiry. I found that Unity Café acted as a third space for many of the trade volunteers and that, compared to the middle-class patrons, it had a more important function for their lives.

Third spaces in the US are often times only reserved for the white middle-class customers who have the money to patronize these spaces and are welcomed by the staff. Third spaces in the US are also highly racialized, a fact that came to renewed light recently when a Starbucks staff member called the police on two black men who were sitting in the space waiting for another person to join them before ordering.\(^\text{18}\) This incident called attention to the many ways both institutions and individuals police black bodies, especially in public spaces that many consider to be “third places.” Further research should take a sociological approach to analyzing the racialized history and continued inequality that underlie access to third spaces.

Furthermore, researchers should investigate the possible importance of third spaces for unhoused people. When unhoused people are forced to spend their time predominantly on the street, they are clearly demarcated as homeless. Their placelessness marks them in a stigmatized category. Some unhoused participants explained that even if they had money, they were not allowed in spaces that let them shake that glaring red flag of identity. The difference between a

homeless person and a low-income person is a meaningful difference in our society, because a homeless identity is much more stigmatized. Unhoused people often have to carry everything they own with them because of insufficient or unsafe storage options, and these large bags can be an indicator that the person does not have a home. Furthermore, “unkept” bodies that don’t conform to socially constructed standards of acceptability are often associated with people experiencing homelessness. It’s possible that being able to enter third spaces like Unity Cafe could markedly improve unhoused people’s mental health and wellness. Anthony, an unhoused black man on the community advisory board, once told me a story about being kicked out of McDonald’s because he was making people “uncomfortable.” He had a rare $5 to eat there and was forced to leave by the staff. He told me this to underscore the fact that there were few physical spaces that were open to him, and that he appreciated being able to walk into Unity Café and know that he was not going to get kicked out. Physical spaces in cities are even often designed with this explicit aim – to discourage homeless people from having space.

Further research, especially within the realm of community studies and food justice, should further interrogate the privilege of third spaces. Who gets to inhabit “third spaces,” and what are the repercussions of those who are able to navigate them and those who are left outside?

FINAL THOUGHTS

The title of this dissertation, “Reaching Across the Table,” is meant to represent the aims of both organizations: using food as a means of reaching others who are on the proverbial “other side of the table” of social life. After spending time in these organizations and talking in-depth with many people who both believed whole-heartedly in the organization’s missions or were disenchanted, I am left wondering: should we reach across the table? While the answer to this question is less clear than I thought it would be at the end of this dissertation, I believe that reaching across the table is worthwhile.
One of my aims in undertaking this project was to better understand how new approaches to addressing food insecurity were working and to analyze their approach and outcomes. The community advisory board at Unity Café gave me hope that their approach would include the voices of those they served, which researchers have argued is a vitally important step in making sure that food justice efforts do not further exacerbate power imbalances between the middle-class people who often run charity food programs and the people they serve (Guthman 2011; Passidomo 2014). However, while the CAB did have some input in the cafe, the board of directors ultimately had more. This aspect of Unity Cafe, and many other aspects of both organizations, point to an important conclusion about these organizations and their role in the food justice movement: people are working towards change, and it will not always be perfect, but it is still worth trying.

While many of the people in these spaces did not interact across class groups or make a connection with someone who was different from them, there were some positive repercussions for those who did. At both sites there was some increased knowledge between people in cross-class relationships that was beneficial to both parties, in different ways. Some trade volunteers at the cafe learned important information about different jobs, health care services, and social support. Some clients at the church gained important knowledge about how to navigate health care and how to get a driver’s license without a home address. Some middle-class volunteers told me that they learned valuable information from the clients of Breaking Break and Unity Café, but the impacts of that knowledge was less clear. Regardless of whether or not this was a consistent, persistent pattern within the sites, even these few moments of realization had important impacts on how these volunteers thought about and treated people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity.
Oftentimes in social research about food justice and alternative food organizations, we come to the conclusion that because these organizations are not addressing structural inequalities, they are not successful. Ultimately, this is part of the conclusion I came to within these sites as well. Many of the clients and trade volunteers needed affordable housing and jobs that paid living wages, things that most of the middle-class volunteers could not give them in that moment.

However, these critiques miss something vitally important, especially in my sites: that the experience of people’s everyday lives can be made at least marginally better through deliberate, individual efforts, and that this is not something to overlook in making an argument for structural change. In the food world, we need both. We need programs like these, that are working towards change and doing some good (even if they are also creating some social boundaries), in the meantime. We need programs and people who are willing to work at making change, who are willing to fail or struggle, while also trying to push for more systematic changes that will have more enduring effects on inequality. After meeting Calvin and hearing his experiences, Christine started going to community mobilization meetings focused on providing more affordable housing in the area. She told me she did this because of the stories she heard from Calvin and others and it spurred her to try to use her voice to make change. Linda created a social group of other retired white women who worked on different projects based on the direct needs of people like Franco, including creating a network of these women who she connected with people who did not have cars to help them get to job interviews and other important meetings. While these were exceptions, not the rule, of interactions in the space, they have meaning, and they show that cross-class social ties can have meaningful repercussions.

The food system is ultimately created by people and changed by people. When working towards alleviating inequality, changing the system, and providing a better structure that allows
everyone to succeed, we cannot forget both sides of the issue. We need to work every day, in both little and big ways.
REFERENCES


New York: Oxford University Press.


APPENDIX
Appendix A

Interview Scripts

Unity Café Volunteer/Patron

- There are a lot of different outreach programs and organizations in [city name] and sponsored by the church, how did you decide to volunteer with/eat at Unity café?
- What do you think the goals of UC are? What do you think they should be?
  - Who do you think UC efforts are trying to reach? How do you think it is going?
  - What does building community mean to you?
    - How do you try to create relationships? (With what kinds of people? What makes it easier/harder?) How do you think it’s going?
    - Have you ever interacted without someone who you met at Unity Café outside of Unity Café? (what did you do together? How did you make plans?)
    - Who do you think is being reached? Do you think there are people who are being missed? Why?
- Did you ever attend one of the pop up meals?
  - If yes, how did you feel about the experience? Is there anything you particularly enjoyed or disliked? What did you notice?
  - Did you ever sit at one of the community tables? If yes, can you describe your experience? What did you notice? Did anything make you feel uncomfortable or more welcome? If no, why not?
  - How do you feel about the food you’ve eaten at Unity Café or any other event they’ve sponsored?
  - Can you think of a meal or an item you really enjoyed? Is there anything you would change about the food?
- Tell me about any relationships you’ve made at the cafe.
  - Do you think these relationships make your life easier or harder? Can you give an example?
  - (If applicable) Can you give a specific example of a relationship you’ve made through Food with Friends?
- How would you compare your experiences with UC to other volunteer organizations or food providers?
  - Are there places you feel more or less comfortable at? Why do you think that is? Can you give an example of an experience that either made you feel welcomed or unwelcome in a food space?

Unity Café Board and CAB Members

- How did you get involved with Unity Café? What drew you to it as an organization?
- What, in your opinion, is the main goal of UC? What should it be, if it was up to you?
  - What kind of people does UC target?
  - How do you think they are reaching those people? Are there people that are being missed? Why do you think that is?
• How do you see Unity Cafe fitting into the [city name] food scene?
  o In general, how do you think the first 6 months have gone? [here, ask specific questions regarding what I have observed]

• Can you describe your experience as a board member? What about your experience at events or in the café?
  o What do you like about it/what would you change?
  o How has the structure changed since you have been involved? How have the goals changed?
  o Were they any changes that had to be made? Why? What did you think about them?

• Did you ever attend one of the pop up meals?
  o If yes, how did you feel about the experience? Is there anything you particularly enjoyed or disliked?
  o Did you ever sit at one of the community tables? If yes, can you describe your experience? If no, why not?

• Can you tell me about any relationships you’ve made through Unity Cafe?
  o Do you think these relationships make your life easier or harder? Can you give an example?

• What do you see as the role of the community advisory board?
  o [CAB members only] Do you feel your input is valued in the organization? In what ways?

Food with Friends Volunteer

• There are a lot of different outreach programs and organizations in [city name] and sponsored by the church, how did you decide to volunteer with Food with Friends?
  o What is the goal of FwF? How has it changed over time? Have you seen any changes since you’ve been a volunteer?
  o How would you change it?

• Can you describe your experience at the Food with Friends? What do you notice/observe?
  o What kind of people does FwF target?
  o How do you think they are reaching those people? Are there people that are being missed? Why do you think that is?
  o What do you like about it? What would you change?

• Part of the vision for F&F is building community.
  o What does building community mean to you?
  o How do you try to create relationships? (With what kinds of people?) (What makes it easier/harder?) How do you think it is going?

• What do you think about the food served at Food with Friends? Is there anything you would change?

• What does faith mean to you? Does your faith play a role in your volunteer work at Food with Friends? How?

• Tell me about any relationships you’ve made at Food with Friends.
Have you ever interacted without someone who you met at Unity Café outside of Unity Café? (what did you do together? How did you make plans?)

Do you think these relationships make your life easier or harder? Can you give an example?

(If applicable) Can you give a specific example of a relationship you’ve made through Food with Friends?

- How would you compare your experiences with Food with friends to other volunteer organizations?

Food with Friends Patrons

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
- Why do you come here? What do you think about it?
  - What do you like about it? / What would you change?
  - How did you hear about Food with Friends?
- How do you feel about the food at Food with Friends?
  - Can you think of a meal you really enjoyed? What would you change?
- Tell me about any people you’ve met at Food with Friends.
  - Do you ever see them outside of the meal? How did it begin?
  - Do you think these relationships make your life easier or harder? Can you give an example?
- The meal is located in a church. How do you feel about that?
  - How have your experiences in the church gone?
  - Have you had different experiences in other churches?
  - Do you have any strong memories, experiences, or opinions about church?
- In general, do you feel like you have the support you need?
- How would you compare your experience at Food with Friends to other food organizations?
  - Are there places you feel more or less comfortable at? Why do you think that is? Can you give an example of an experience that either made you feel welcomed or unwelcome in a food space?