

All Mixed Up: Social Interaction and Social Ties in a Mixed-Income Public Housing
Community

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Abstract

All Mixed Up: Social Interaction and Social Ties in a Mixed-Income Public Housing Community

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What is the nature of residents' social interactions and social ties in a mixed-income public housing community and what are the processes producing these outcomes? This study examines the nature of social interaction and social ties between residents in Seattle's Rainer Vista Hope VI site using qualitative data taken from interviews and field observations. While there is some interaction between adult residents of different housing statuses and ethnicities, interaction is typically non-communicative in nature and results in few social ties. When social ties do occur, respondents describe these relationships as being more superficial than those they share with residents similar to themselves. Four processes producing this outcome are explored: language barriers and norms of communication, busyness, perceptions of others, and group-specific spaces or mechanisms of interaction.

Introduction

Following the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing's 1992 critical report on the state of public housing in the United States, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has worked to improve the quality of the nation's public housing stock and alleviate the social and economic isolation of the poor living in public housing communities. As part of their initiative, HUD created the Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere or Hope VI program. The program's purpose is to provide local housing authorities with grant funds to demolish existing, distressed public housing projects and replace them with mixed-income communities by building homeownership and condo units alongside publically assisted and at-market rental units.

One goal of the Hope VI initiative is the social integration of America's poor who frequently experience social as well as economic isolation (The Congress for New Urbanism and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Undated). Policy makers and urban sociologists attribute many disadvantages to social isolation including exclusion from opportunity networks, an absence of role models of legitimately obtained success, lower political clout, and a lack of exposure to mainstream cultural values and norms (Sampson and Wilson, 1995; Wilson, 1987; Kleit and Carnegie, 2011; Freeman, 2006). By increasing the proximity of the poor to wealthier people through the creation of mixed-income communities, the Hope VI initiative creates shared spaces in which people of all economic statuses can potentially interact and form social ties, decreasing the social isolation of the economically disadvantaged. However, it is unclear if putting people in close proximity with one another as in the case of a shared residential community is enough to make them have meaningful interactions and relationships.

Policy makers and social scientists need to ask what do social interactions and relationships in these communities look like and what are the mechanisms making them that way. To answer these questions, this research explores the nature of social interaction and social ties in Rainier Vista, a Hope VI community in Seattle, WA.

Background: Social Ties, Social Isolation, and the Proximity Hypothesis

A social tie is a linkage or relationship between two actors (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). More specifically in thinking about neighborhood effects, a social tie is a relationship between two residents of a residential community (Kleit 2005; Freeman, 2006). Social ties are resources which actors can leverage in order to gain access to information, material goods, and physical and/or emotional support. Actors' social networks are made up of their social ties to others. Because social networks are a resource actors can draw on, the nature of one's social network (the resourcefulness embedded in social ties, the "reach" of the network, the strength of the ties) can affect one's quality of life.

Social network and neighborhood effects theorists have hypothesized that social ties are a mechanism by which living in disadvantaged communities negatively impacts poor individuals. In *The Truly Disadvantaged, The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy (1987)*, urban sociologist William J. Wilson writes that a defining feature of many poor, inner-city communities of color is their social isolation from wealthier communities. Wilson defines social isolation as "a lack of contact or sustained interaction with individuals and institutions which represent mainstream society." Wilson argues this social isolation puts residents of poor communities at a disadvantage as lacking social ties to actors of a higher socioeconomic status

results in a lack of integration into more lucrative job networks, a lack of role models of legitimately obtained success, and distance from mainstream American culture and institutions (Wilson 1987). The social isolation of poor communities is thought to be particularly harmful to the poor as they are more likely to have spatially-constrained social networks; residential proximity is a greater determinant of who the poor interact with than it is for their wealthier counterparts (Kleit and Carnegie, 2011) In their 1995 article, Sampson and Wilson also argued concentrated disadvantage leaves communities with fragmented social networks as a repercussion of the high residential instability characteristic of many poor inner-city communities as well as deviant normative adaptations in the face of isolation and structural disadvantage (Sampson and Wilson, 1995).

In his 1998 paper, Xavier Briggs distinguishes between two types of social ties or social capital: those that help actors “get by” by providing social support and those that help actors “get ahead” by providing social leverage. Briggs writes that these two types of social capital can help us better understand how social isolation disadvantages the poor: residents of socially and economically isolated communities are likely to have social ties to people in similar circumstances. While these ties may help them “get by” by giving them access to things such as food assistance or child care, these ties are less likely to help them “get ahead” or become socially mobile as people who are similarly situated will also have poor connections to lucrative job networks, little experience with higher education, and similar distance from mainstream culture (Briggs, 1998; Freeman 2006).

This literature implies that transforming low-income communities into mixed income communities has the potential to alleviate the social problems caused by social isolation. By increasing their physical proximity, poor actors will have opportunities to interact and form

relationships with wealthier actors (Briggs, 1998; Kleit, 2005, 2008; Sampson et al., 2002; Sampson & Wilson, 1995; Wilson, 1987). Indeed, some urban sociologists hypothesize that physical proximity is the greatest determinant of social interaction and social tie formation (Kleit 2005, 2008; Wilson, 1987). The importance of proximity in causing social interaction is the underlying assumption of HUD's use of Hope VI to decrease the social isolation historically experienced by public housing residents. In *Principles for Inner City Neighborhood Design*, the Congress for the New Urbanism and HUD lay out the logic behind the Hope VI initiative. One guiding principle discussed is the importance of "diversity." Hope VI provides "a broad range of housing types and price levels to bring people of diverse ages, races, and incomes into daily interaction—strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an authentic community" (Congress for the New Urbanism and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, pp. 4). The expectation of the design then is that by increasing the diversity present in a community by bringing people of varying characteristics in close proximity to one another, residents will enjoy daily interaction with one another as well as resulting "bonds" or social ties.

For simplification, I have dubbed this argument made by urban sociologists and policy makers as "the proximity hypothesis" and have summarized it as follows: when physical proximity is increased, the amount of spaces which are shared by actors of different characteristics increases. When actors enter these spaces, they interact with one another. Through interactions, actors develop relationships or social ties. In forming relationships with actors different from themselves, actors change the nature of their social networks, making them more diverse. This diversity will aid actors who would normally experience social isolation by giving them social ties which they can leverage into social mobility. If the proximity hypothesis is correct, then at the very least residents of Hope VI communities should experience more

interactions with actors different from themselves than they would living in economically segregated communities and these interactions should lead to meaningful relationships which they can potentially draw on for support. If proximity is the sole determinant of who actors interact and form relationships with, then residents of Hope VI should have the same quantity and quality of interactions and social ties with actors who are different from themselves as they do with actors who are similar to themselves.

Existing Research

The results of my study and the studies of others exploring social interaction and relationships in mixed-income communities suggest mixed evidence for the proximity hypothesis. While some residents may enjoy more interaction with dissimilar others than they would have living in economically segregated communities, this is not the case for all residents. I and other researchers have also found that interactions and social ties between actors of different economic statuses are often experienced by residents as superficial and/or fleeting (Briggs, 1998; Freeman, 2006; Joseph, 2008; Kleit, 2005; Kleit and Carnegie 2011). So while these interactions and social ties do occur in mixed-income communities, they may not be meaningful enough to end social segregation by economic status or reverse the effects of social isolation. As Lance Freeman writes, “spatial proximity does not necessarily equal social proximity” (Freeman, 2006. pp. 131).

In the literature, I found three types of studies examining social life in mixed-income communities: those that looked at mixed-income communities created by gentrification or

market forces, those that looked at scattered-site housing communities, and those that looked at Hope VI public housing communities.

In his qualitative study of two gentrifying African American communities in New York City, Lance Freeman used observational and interview data with residents of both tenures to examine their experiences of community life. Freeman writes that urban sociologists hypothesize that social ties are important in part because of peer effects; our peers have the ability to give us advice, role model socially acceptable behavior, and connect us to opportunities for stability as well as upward mobility. Social isolation robs residents of isolated poor communities of opportunities to form social ties which will have these positive peer effects. Freeman argues that the social ties which will produce these peer effects should be robust; we will reach out to and take advice from those who we trust and consider our peers. He therefore measures the quality of interactions and relationships of his respondents with dissimilar others. Asking his respondents to discuss their interactions and relationships with residents outside of their economic status, Freeman writes that “most people described their interactions with them as superficial at best,” with some reporting no to minimal interaction (e.g. saying “hi,” nodding). Freeman notes that while “gentrification certainly brings individuals with more leverageable connections into spatial proximity with indigenous residents ... relationships between the gentry and indigenous residents appear too fleeting” for indigenous residents to benefit as predicted by the neighborhood effects literature (Freeman, 2006. 147).

Similarly, Xavier Briggs’ qualitative study of Latino and African American youth living in scattered site housing in Yonkers, New York compared the social networks of youth who moved into scattered site housing in wealthier, whiter communities to those who remained in economically isolated public housing communities. Briggs measured the size of respondents’

social networks and where their ties were located, how diverse their social ties were, and whether the types of aid their social networks offered differed. Briggs hypothesized that while social ties to other poor actors could offer social support (the ability to get by), ties to wealthier actors could also offer social leverage (the ability to get ahead). Briggs measured the diversity of the youths' social networks by asking them to identify their contacts and their contacts' characteristics with an emphasis on their race/ethnicity, location, and socioeconomic status. The social support and leverage these social ties offered to the youth were then measured by asking if these contacts could be counted on to provide three types of social support: "everyday aid," "crisis aid," and "confiding" as well as three types of social leverage: "job information," "advice on future plans," and "school advice." Comparing movers and stayers, Briggs notes that "few differences in network diversity or types of aid were found" and that both movers and stayers report few significant ties to whites beyond those living in public housing like themselves (Briggs, 1998. pp. 208).

Freeman and Briggs' studies suggest that the proximity hypothesis is flawed: spatial proximity is not enough to ensure meaningful social interaction and social ties. However, one may expect outcomes to be different in Hope VI housing communities due to design factors and the implementation of formal mechanisms of interaction. For instance, in designing the property layout in Rainier Vista, community developers evaluated an older Hope VI development (New Holly) where social interaction was less than hoped for by the Seattle Housing Authority. In Rainier Vista, there are also housing authority-sponsored community organizations and events, all orchestrated by a community builder hired by the SHA specifically for the purpose of creating opportunities for social interaction between residents. However, researchers studying social interaction and social tie formation in Hope VI communities also report less interaction and less

meaningful relationships between residents of different economic statuses than expected if the proximity hypothesis is true.

In his qualitative study of a Hope VI community in Chicago, Mark L. Joseph explored early experiences of residents in a newly redeveloped housing project. Joseph interviewed both publically-assisted and non-publically assisted residents of the Hope VI development Jazz on the Boulevard and asked them to describe relations with other residents. The researcher found homeowners expressed an interest in interacting with their neighbors but “a general lack of social interaction was noted by respondents across income levels.” However, his respondents reported more interaction between those who were of the same economic status. Data from his interviews and observations provided evidence for at least three processes creating this: the physical design of the community which minimized visibility and shared space, segregated associational structures such that community organizations’ membership was contingent on economic status (a homeowners’ association for condominium owners), and tension between the publically assisted and non-publically assisted residents caused by the stigma associated with living in government subsidized housing (Joseph, 2008).

Rachel Garshik Kleit’s 2005 qualitative study in Seattle’s New Holly Hope VI community reached similar conclusions. Using phone interviews and focus groups with residents of all housing statuses, respondents’ social interactions and social ties with other residents were explored. To measure social ties and their characteristics, respondents were asked how many of their neighbors they knew well enough to say “Hi,” to name five of their neighbors they knew well enough to say “Hi,” and a battery of questions about the circumstances, demographics, and nature of interactions around the five residents they identified which measured the quality of the social tie. In focus groups, residents were asked to talk about the nature of their interactions and

relationships with other residents. While Kleit finds that there is more social interaction occurring at New Holly than reported by researchers working in other mixed-income situations, she finds that interaction is still significantly less likely to occur between people of different economic statuses than it is between people of the same economic status. Her respondents offered a number of explanations for this lack of cross-class interaction: lack of proximity between government subsidized housing units and at-market homes, language barriers, a lack of community involvement in organizations which would have inclusive membership, and differences in patterns of facility use such that residents are not occupying shared spaces or occupying those spaces at the same time. Even when interaction is reported as in the case of attending the same community organizations, residents did not necessarily report a corresponding change to the nature of their social networks (Kleit, 2005).

In their 2011 study, Rachel Garshik Kleit and Nicole Bohme Carnegie investigated the persistence of social network homophily (the tendency for actors to have social ties to actors with similar characteristics) for publically assisted residents who experienced the transition of their community from low-income to mixed-income in Seattle's High Point Hope VI site. Using longitudinal survey data taken from interviews with both English-speaking and Vietnamese-speaking residents, Kleit and Carnegie explored the heterogeneity of resident relationships and whether those relationships were "job ties" (another actor who they would discuss a job search with) or a social tie (an actor they would stop and talk to, socialize with away from the neighborhood, drop by to visit, invite to their home, ask to care for their home when they were away, or ask for a favor). English-speakers reported slightly more ethnically and economically diverse social ties following the redevelopment while the networks of the Vietnamese speakers reported that their social networks became more homogenous. While English-speakers' social

networks became slightly more diverse, they noted that there was still no change in who they went to for help in seeking employment, suggesting that the hypothesized benefits to low-income residents' social capital did not occur.

In summary, research suggests that increasing the physical proximity of poor and comparatively wealthy actors is not enough to ensure social interaction and social tie formation. Although increasing proximity creates shared spaces for residents of mixed-income communities to occupy, it cannot ensure those spaces are utilized. Other factors also affect the nature of exchanges in spaces, complicating interactions and/or creating weak and transitory relationships.

This study: Research Questions, Purpose, and Contributions

This study is an ethnographic research project examining social interaction and social tie formation in one mixed-income public housing community: Seattle's Rainier Vista Hope VI site. Using field observations in the community as well as interviews with publically-assisted and government-subsidized renters (identified hereafter as "renters"), at-market-rate homeowners (identified hereafter as "homeowners") and staff of community organizations (identified hereafter as "staff"), I explored two research questions: What is the nature of residents' social interactions and social ties in a mixed-income public housing community and what are the processes producing these outcomes?

Although other studies have explored social interaction and social ties in mixed-income communities, this study is notable for several reasons: In addition to the continued and growing importance of studying this social phenomenon, this study also brings new findings to the existing body of research on social life in mixed-income communities. Because of the

demographics of the Rainier Vista community, the field observations and iterative nature of the data collection, the respondents chosen, and the research questions asked, I was able to find similar processes to past researchers while also discovering new ones. In particular, language barriers affecting organization membership, and perceptions of others are two processes affecting the likelihood and quality of social interaction discussed by my respondents which were not uncovered by past researchers (Kleit, 2005; Kleit and Carnegie, 2011; Joseph, 2008; Briggs, 1998; Freeman, 2006).

Studying public housing communities with ethnically diverse populations as in the case of Seattle's Hope VI sites may also add to our understanding of residents' experiences. Many existing studies of public housing communities and mixed-income communities in particular have been conducted in Chicago, Illinois, a city that has consistently exhibited a high degree of residential segregation and isolation for African Americans (Denton and Massey, 1993. 21, 24, 76). The communities studied by these researchers are also frequently home to a strong majority of African American low-income and public assistance residents, as well as gentrifiers in the case of gentrifying communities (Patillo-McCoy, 2007; Rymond-Richmond, 2006; Venkatesh, 2000; Chicago Housing Authority MTW Report, 2009, Joseph, 2008). Lance Freeman's study of two gentrifying African American communities was conducted in New York City but also featured an African American and Caucasian residential population (Freeman, 2006). Xavier Briggs' 1998 study of social ties of low-income youth in public housing communities and scattered site housing in Yonkers, New York featured an African American and Latino population but focused on youths' social networks. Studying a city which has a public housing institution with more varied racial and ethnic compositions can yield insight into the complexity of low-income residents and their experiences.

Seattle's public housing does not exhibit this high degree of racial and ethnic homogeneity, nor does the city have acute residential segregation (Davis, 2005; Seattle Housing Authority MTW Report, 2009). Consequently, studies conducted in Seattle may help add dimension and complexity to a simplified depiction of residents living in mixed-income communities. For example, while Joseph's work is able to identify new mechanisms decreasing the likelihood of social interaction and social tie formation between diverse residents, his study is conducted in Chicago with a renting population that is 98% African American (Joseph 2008). As will be discussed below, the Rainier Vista renting community is not only economically but also ethnically and racially diverse, providing an opportunity to examine social interaction and social tie formation between residents who differ in more ways than their economic status.

Methodology

Data for this research project was collected using the qualitative methods of participant and non-participant observation as well as semi-structured interviews. These methods resulted in data in the form of field notes and interview transcripts. Minutes from some community meetings have also been collected in order to supplement observations. All resulting documents from data collection were analyzed using coding and categorization, procedures that will be discussed in the following section on data analysis.

Participant and non-participant observation has been used to study interactions between residents of Rainier Vista. Observations were also used to discover the meanings that residents ascribe to actions, events, and people, and to observe their subsequent reactions based upon the ascribed meanings. In addition, observations were used for the purpose of triangulation as they provided a point of comparison to interview data. Finally, observations were also used to shape

the interview protocol as questions were added concerning objects, events, relationships, and behavior observed in the field. Observations occurred over a year and a half period and averaged roughly 6 hours per work spent in the community. Settings and events included three programs serving Rainier Vista youth at which I volunteered: a computer lab offering residents and non-residents access to computers and computer classes, the Rainier Vista Traffic and Safety Committee, The Rainier Vista Homeowners Association, the Rainier Vista Landscape Committee, the Rainier Vista Multicultural Gathering, the Oromo cultural group, the Rainier Vista Sewing Group, shared spaces such as the local park and streets, community parties and potlucks, and residents' homes.

Locations for observation and my involvement were initially chosen in order to insinuate myself into the community and make initial contacts with residents and staff. I first volunteered with the Boys and Girls Club and the Neighborhood Technology center in January of 2010 in order to make initial contacts within the community and establish a routine of being physically present in Rainier Vista. Weekly volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club would continue until August of 2010 while my weekly involvement with the Neighborhood House Technology Center would continue until the Spring of 2011. In the summer of 2010, I volunteered with Horn of Africa Services, an organization providing academic assistance to East African youth in the New Holly and Rainier Vista communities. At the start of the summer, I also made my first contact with the Rainier Vista community builder and requested permission to attend the Traffic and Safety Committee and Multicultural Gathering meetings which convened monthly. I attended these meetings until January of 2011. At this time, I began attending meetings which were specific to Rainier Vista homeowners. I attended two meetings of the Landscape Committee and a meeting of the Homeowners' Association. I also began volunteering with Catholic Community

Services' Youth Tutoring Program (YTP) which was frequently utilized by East African youth in the community in order to try to have more recruitment opportunities with East African renters in the community. My weekly involvement with YTP would last until the beginning of the end of the spring of 2011. In the spring of 2011, I also attended three sessions of the Oromo Cultural Group, three sessions of the Rainier Vista Sewing Group, and a session of a martial arts group. In addition to attending regular group meetings, I also attended three community events: a presentation on disaster preparedness hosted by the traffic and safety committee, a Lunar New Year celebration hosted by the Multicultural Gathering, and a block party hosted by the Multicultural Gathering.

In addition to the formal meetings and organizations I was a participant at, I also spent more unstructured time in the Rainier Vista community. Before attending meetings or beginning a session of volunteering, I would frequently make a circuit of the community, walking from one end to the other and observing who (if anyone) was out in on the streets or in the parks. Other times I would come to the community just to sit in and walk around community spaces for an extended period of time (an hour or more) in order to see who utilized the spaces, where, and when. These observations were conducted five times and varied by time and day of the week. Interviews with residents and staff also generally occurred on the Rainier Vista property either in public spaces such as the park or community center or in more private spaces like homes and offices. Having the interviews in the community allowed for the interviews to also be an opportunity to conduct observations of respondents in shared spaces or their own, private spaces. Interviews which took place outside of the Rainier Vista community were conducted in local coffee shops. Over the course of my time in Rainier Vista, I also had several informal, extended

one-on-one conversations with residents and staff when I directly contacted them requesting a conversation or when I was invited into their homes.

Semi-structured interviewing was used to explore the nature of residents' social interactions and social ties, the processes producing these outcomes, and residents' understanding of their experiences. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The audio recordings were destroyed following transcription. The interview sample has been constructed in three ways: by creating initial contacts through volunteering at community organizations and attending community meetings; by advertising in the community using flyers; and by snowball sampling, asking initial interview respondents to put me in contact with others in the community. Flyering and ongoing requests at community groups was done in order to have multiple origin points for sampling in order to avoid the sampling bias that might be created through relying solely on snowball sampling whereby you only capture like individuals in your sample. Ongoing requests were also made as snowball samples frequently ran dry; either returning no further informants or only one or two.

At meetings, I introduced myself as a student researcher and solicited for resident participation in interviews. I introduced myself to community staff by directly contacting them by email or in person. Although I introduced myself as a student researcher, this did not mean that all residents believed me or understood my project. I would later discover in interviews with two East African renters that other East African residents in attendance at the meetings questioned my intentions and thought I might be an FBI agent or someone from Child Protective Services. This misunderstanding of who I was and what my intentions were at least partly explains my initial difficulties in recruiting East African participants. I did not have my first interview with an East African respondent until the winter of 2011.

Data Analysis and Sensitizing Concepts

This research project utilized grounded theory in order to guide the development of research questions, data collection, and data analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Strauss and Glaser, 1967; Charmaz, 2001). The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the data. Data collection and analysis occurred in waves: initial data was collected from early interviews and observations. A rudimentary data analysis looking for recurring themes was conducted and then led to a refinement in the research questions, observations, and interview protocol. New data was analyzed using the in-vivo categories and codes created in the first wave of data analysis and also led to the development of new codes and categories as new themes emerged. Old categories and codes were also refined over multiple data analyses as new data led to better understanding of these experiences and processes.

While the conceptual framework of this study was largely developed from the data, I also utilized Strauss and Glaser's technique of using "sensitizing concepts" from the literature in order to develop questions, inform my interview protocol and provide early categories around which the data was organized. The two sensitizing concepts from the literature I used were "social interaction" and "social ties" and their conceptualizations in the literature helped me to create my measures of these social phenomena as will be discussed below. However, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss as well as Glaser, I also refined these concepts in order to accurately capture my respondents' experiences. For example, the concept of "social interaction" is vague and does not capture the variety of social interactions experienced by renters and homeowners in Rainier Vista. In their interviews, both renters and homeowners talked about differences in quality of interaction, in particular that there were interactions where rich verbal communications were exchanged (talking about children, the weather, homes, concerns, etc) as

well as interactions which were not verbally communicative (nodding to each other, saying “hi,” sitting on the same park bench in silence, etc). This led me to develop two categories of social interaction between residents: communicative interaction and non-communicative interaction. I then examined variations in the amount of the two types of interaction across similar and different residents. Below, I discuss how I have conceptualized, operationalized, and measured these concepts. These concepts will be discussed within the conceptual framework of the proximity hypothesis.

I have deduced from the proximity hypothesis that proximity generates increased opportunities for social interaction between actors because of its potential for creating shared spaces. I define a shared space as a location where actors converge at the same time. Actors coming together in the same place at the same time encounter one another and engage in either communicative or non-communicative social interaction. Actors either come into these spaces purposefully or over the course of routine activities. Physical proximity increases the incidences of two actors sharing physical space together because it increases the likelihood of their routine activities bringing them to the same location at the same time. For instance, when residents bring their children to the local park, it will be the same park. When they go to the bus stop, it will be the same bus stop, etc. However, during my study, I also found that some shared spaces are not created by physical proximity and a resulting overlap in routine activities. Sometimes, actors enter into spaces for the specific purpose of interacting with other actors. For instance, when someone attends a Multicultural Gathering or Traffic and Safety Committee in order to communicate with other residents or residents attend a block party, they are creating shared spaces.

Whenever two actors share a space, they interact. I distinguish between two types of social interactions: communicative and non-communicative. Communicative social interactions are “rich” verbal exchanges between two actors. Non-communicative social interactions are minor verbal and/or observational exchanges. In communicative social interactions, there is a two-sided exchange of information (at least one imparts and at least one receives). In non-communicative interaction, information about an actor or situation may be perceived by another actor, but there is not an exchange of information between the two actors. Because of this, I argue that only communicative interactions can lead to the formation of a social tie which I define as an established connection between two actors by which information is exchanged. However, communicative social interactions do not necessarily lead to social tie formation. Respondents reported that they had one-off communicative interactions which never developed into a pattern of exchanges or that these interactions were negative and decreased their likelihood of entering shared spaces or engaging in communicative interactions with that actor (and sometimes other actors) again.

Finally, for the purposes of this study, social ties are defined as an established pathway between two actors by which information is exchanged. This pathway becomes established over a pattern of communication. Social ties are also resources that can be drawn on by the actors who possess them. Actors may activate social ties for many purposes including information gathering, resource sharing, and generating collective action for the purposes of reaching personal and/or collective goals. Social ties can be qualitatively different; ties can differ in their level of intimacy, the nature of the exchanges between the actors, etc. Ties can be strengthened by repeated communicative social interaction or purposeful usage as a source of aid. This conceptualization of social ties as a pattern of communicative social interactions is consistent

with Kleit's treatment of the concept in her 2005 paper. In her study, residents were asked about their involvement in shared spaces and these patterns of interaction were compared to the structure of these respondents' social networks. Kleit concluded that social interaction in shared spaces did not always lead to social ties as measured by her respondents themselves when they identified who they "knew" in the community.

Entering the community, I not only wanted to understand how much interaction is occurring between residents but what residents understood as social interaction and what social interaction and social ties meant to them. Because of this, I asked residents semi-structured questions about their social experiences in Rainier Vista. The following were used as measures of respondents' presence in community spaces, the quantity and quality of interaction with residents of different statuses, the quantity and quality of residents' social ties, and the demographic composition of the residents' social ties:

- 1) Have you tried to meet your neighbors? If so, what have you done to meet people and how effective do you think that was?
- 2) How would you describe your relationship with your neighbors? Why do you think your relationship is like that? Probe: How would you describe your relationship with renters, homeowners (used if they do not specify the class status of the neighbors they are discussing)?
- 3) Are you satisfied with your current relationship with your neighbors? Why or why not? Would you change things if you could?
- 4) Can you name five friends and where they live in the community? Are those people renters, homeowners, both? Are any of those people of a different race or ethnicity from your own?
- 5) How did you meet those friends? How often do you see those friends? Do you see them casually or do you plan things to do together?
- 6) Do you ever go to community events or spend time outside in the community? Can you give examples?
- 7) Are you or your family members active in any community clubs or organizations? If so, which?
- 8) If you have children, do they play with any other children in the community?
If so, has this made you familiar with other parents in the area?
If so, how often do you see and talk to these parents?
Would you consider these parents to be your friends?

- 9) If you are active in meeting with your neighbors, volunteering in the community, or engaging in organizations, why are you? If not, why not? Are you satisfied with your current level of engagement?
- 10) Why do you think your neighbors are engaged/not engaged?
- 11) Are you a member of the Rainier Vista community listserv?
 - a. What sorts of things do people talk about on the listserv?
 - b. Do you usually read the emails that come from the listserv? Are there emails you are more likely to read/respond to?
 - c. Are you generally a reader or a responder?
 - d. What are your impressions of the conversations and the utility of these conversations?

In observations and interviews, I evaluated the quantity and quality of interactions by examining who was utilizing potentially shared spaces, if actors were encountering each other in those spaces, and if the interactions between actors were communicative or not. I measured “communicative” in ways which respondents identified distinguishing between the quality of the interaction: whether there was any kind of prolonged verbal exchange between the two actors. This did not necessitate that both actors were speaking to each other; one actor could be speaking and the other listening. In order to determine if a social tie developed from these social interactions as well as the quality of that tie, respondents were asked if the social interactions they experienced in these spaces were repeated and if they occurred in other spaces outside of the ones in which the other actor was initially encountered.

In observations, I evaluated the presence of a social tie by whether or not I observed repeated communicative social interactions with or without interpreters. Respondents may be speaking or listening. For instance, if two actors shared space in the context of a community organization over at least two of an organization’s sessions, I included this as a developing social tie. Respondents also noted that their communicative interactions in these spaces had made them “know” the actors they shared these spaces with, making this measure consistent with residents’ experiences.

In analyzing data from interviews, I evaluated the presence or absence of a social tie in several different ways. If respondents identified someone as a friend or an acquaintance, I identified those two actors as sharing a social tie. If respondents described interacting with someone for companionship such as inviting someone out or over to their home, I included this as a social tie assuming that an invitation requires there to be an established pathway of communication (an exchange of phone numbers, email addresses, knowledge of where someone lives and comfort enough to know on their door) in order to be made. I also identified a social tie as existing between two actors if respondents indicated a pattern of communicative social interaction between themselves and someone else. If someone described activating a social tie in order to get assistance or work towards a personal or collective goal, I also marked this as indicating a social tie as is consistent with other researchers' conceptualization of social ties as resources which can be activated for these purposes (Kleit, 2005; Kleit and Carnegie 2011; Briggs, 1998; Freeman, 2006; Joseph 2008).

Rainier Vista as Research Site

Rainier Vista is a public housing development in South Seattle. It was first erected in the 1940s as affordable housing to accommodate the influx of workers into the city during the war effort (Taylor, 1994). After World War II, the development was utilized by the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) as government subsidized housing for Seattle's poorest residents. In 1999, the SHA was awarded a Hope VI grant to redevelop the aging housing project (Seattle Housing Authority Website). Rainier Vista residents were displaced and the buildings demolished in 2003. Phase 1 of redevelopment was completed in 2005. The community is now a mix of public assistance (30% of area median income) as well as tax credit rental units (60% of the area

median income) and homeownership units (at market) in the form of townhomes and stand-alone homes. Since 2011, the construction of phases II and III of redevelopment has been ongoing and is soon to be completed (5/18/2011).

The Rainier Vista public housing community is bisected by a major street (Martin Luther King Way) running down its center. Phase 1 of Rainier Vista is on the west side of this dividing line. Phase 1 is a combination of 4 apartment buildings (Providence/Gamelin, Snoqualmie, McBride Court, and Genesee House), townhomes, single-family rental homes, and stand-alone homes. Three apartment buildings are located at the southern end of the development. The bottom half of the eastern face of the Providence/Gamelin building runs along Martin Luther King Way and is rented out as store-front property to an eclectic mix of local businesses and non-profits, mirroring the diversity of interests and needs of the Rainier Vista community: a vegetarian restaurant and cocktail lounge; a Hilal grocer and purveyor of East African goods; a branch of the Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA); and others. The townhomes and stand-alone units are generally located in the central and northern parts of the property, clustering around and bridging off of the community's architectural heart: "Central park." Central Park is a communal green space which includes playground equipment, two single-hoop basketball courts, wooden benches, metal picnic/chess tables, and open field. Across from the park is a community center owned by the Seattle-based nonprofit Neighborhood House. This building houses the Rainier Vista technology center, several satellite offices for other non-profits as well as SHA staff, Neighborhood-House-employed social workers, and a Head Start program. In addition, this building houses the primary meeting space utilized by community groups such as the "multicultural gathering" and "traffic and safety committee." For-sale homes and rental homes are generally clustered such that one street will be for-sale homes while the next street will be

rental homes. This leads to homeowners facing homeowners and renters facing renters. Occasionally, renter and homeowner backyards will abut one another though this is not typical.

Sampling and Informants

The data include 33 semi-structured interviews (28 with residents, 5 with staff members) and participant observation at various community meetings, organizations, and settings (an unknown number of subjects). Interview respondents were required to be adult community members of Seattle's Rainier Vista community. Minors were not interviewed as the primary subjects of concern are the adults in these communities. Subjects were purposefully selected to ensure an equal distribution of renters and homeowners as well as ensuring there were participants of varying racial and ethnic identities.

The researcher requested and received demographic information from the Seattle Housing Authority staff at the Rainier Vista site to determine characteristics of the residents living in subsidized housing in Rainier Vista. This ensured the study's sample of renting respondents captured the racial and ethnic diversity of Rainier Vista's renters. The SHA's statistics provide information on the ethnic groups living in the community by supplying numbers of first language speakers in language groups. The most prevalent ethnic groups are East African: Somali, Oromo, Ethiopian, and Eritrean (ranked by numbers). The next dominant groups are Asian: Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian. Finally, there are "English speakers." This is a problematic category as it does not break down this group by race. This study's interview sample captures much of this diversity, however, two ethnic groups living in Rainier Vista are missing: Eritreans and Cambodians.

It was more difficult to ensure racial and ethnic spread for homeowners as the SHA kept no racial or demographic information on this group of residents. Based upon observation and interview data with homeowners and staff, it appears that Rainier Vista homeowners are primarily white (one multi-racial homeowner described the homeowners as “a bunch of white folks” with a laugh). There are Asian-American, African-American, multi-racial, and other homeowners of color living in Rainier Vista, but they are in a distinct minority. Similarly, this study’s home-owning informants are overwhelmingly white, with only two respondents who have identified themselves as being members of a minority group. There are also some East African homeowners in the community who live in homes built by Habitat for Humanity, far removed from their fellow homeowners. At a Homeowners’ Association meeting I attended, the homeowners present and the board members in particular talked about their efforts to make these homeowners feel like a part of their home-owning community but this was complicated by “language barriers” and distance (the homes’ placement at the far, northern edge of the community). Since this study is primarily interested in the effects of proximity on interaction between people of different income levels, and because I never encountered homeowners living in the Habitat for Humanity homes, these homeowners are not included in this study.

There are also renting residents living in Rainier Vista who are not English language speakers and this created an exclusion criteria: The researcher was limited to speaking to ESL community members who were proficient enough in English to understand the informed consent protocol as well as coherently communicate their responses. This was done to ensure comprehension between the researcher and respondent as well as to ensure the respondent would be able to give their informed consent to be in the study.

The following tables provide demographic information for the 28 respondents who are Rainier Vista residents. Demographics for the staff have been omitted due to concerns of relevancy and the possibility of identification:

Interview Respondents: Renters (13)		
Gender		
	Female	9
	Male	4
Race/Ethnicity		
	East African/East African American (Somali, Oromo, Ethiopian)	4
	Asian/Asian-American (Chinese, Vietnamese)	2
	African American	4
	Caucasian	3
	Multi-Racial	2
Parental Status		
	Parent w/ children (18 <) in the community	5
	Not a parent or parent w/ no children (18 <) in the community	8
Length of Residency		
	Lived in RV prior to redevelopment	7
	2 ≥ years	5
	2 < years	1
Type of Housing		
	Apartment Building	4
	Townhome	9
First Language		
	English	7
	East African Language	4
	Asian Language	2

Interview Respondents: Homeowners (15)		
Gender		
	Female	8
	Male	7
Race/Ethnicity		
	East African/East African American (Somali, Oromo, Ethiopian)	0
	Asian/Asian-American (Chinese, Vietnamese)	0
	African American	0
	Caucasian	15
	Multi-Racial	2

Parental Status		
	Parent w/ children (18 <) in the community	9
	Not a parent or parent w/ no children (18 <) in the community	6
Length of Residency		
	4 ≥	7
	4 <	8
Type of Housing		
	Stand Alone	2
	Townhome	13
First Language		
	English	15
	East African Language	0
	Asian Language	0

Finally, five staff members working in a variety of organizations in Rainier Vista (such as the Seattle Housing Authority and non-profits offering community services) were also interviewed. These interviews serve as another point of triangulation for my observations and the residents' experiences, flesh-out processes identified elsewhere, and helped me discover other processes at work not identified by the residents themselves. It was also important to speak with these staff members due to the number of mechanisms designed to promote resident interaction that were created or are being created by these organizations. These staff members provided insight into the purpose behind these mechanisms as well as their effectiveness in reaching their intended goals.

Analysis and Findings

This paper's critical findings of community life in Rainier Vista are not intended to disparage the community, its residents, or the milestones members have already reached in becoming the community they want to be. Many community members, both residents and staff, had positive things to say about Rainier Vista. One renter who lived in Rainier Vista for years prior to its redevelopment stated he liked "the Vista" then and he likes it now. A homeowner mentioned that

this was the most involved community of which she had ever been a part. Seattle Housing Authority staff are proud of the improvements they made in Rainier Vista over their older Hope VI communities, having innovated to create more opportunities for social interaction between residents of different statuses.

However, almost all renting respondents as well as several home-owning respondents in the sample expressed that the community is not where they want it to be in terms of interaction and the development of relationships (expressed by 11 of 13 renters and 4 of 12 homeowners). In my own personal experience in Rainier Vista, residents and staff were welcoming of my presence and even scrutiny, many of them wanting be “one big community rather than communities” as one homeowner put it, but not knowing how to get there. Residents and staff asked for copies of my final paper, one homeowner calling it a progress report for where the community is in achieving homeowners’ vision of a unified, thriving Rainier Vista. A renter and his friend just hoped it would open up dialogue, something they saw as badly lacking between residents of different groups. My hope is that this investigation into their community will aid in members’ quest to realize the kind of community they want to live in as well as build on social scientists and policy makers’ understanding of this emerging form of residential community.

I: The Nature of Social Interaction and Social Ties in Rainier Vista

Respondents reported having quantitatively and qualitatively different interactions with those that share their housing status than they do with those who do not. Renters report more frequent and communicative social interactions with other renters, while homeowners report more frequent and communicative social interactions with other homeowners. In describing their social networks within the Rainier Vista community, most residents report that they have

numerous social ties with other community members but the community members whom they have relationships with almost always share their economic characteristics such that renters have few to no social ties to homeowners and homeowners have few to no social ties to renters. Respondents indicated that other statuses were also important in affecting the likelihood of interaction between residents of the same housing status: homeowners also report having more interaction and more social ties with homeowners who live closer to them, renters also report having more interaction and more social ties with renters who share their ethnic or tenure status.

While residents will often describe frequent communicative social interaction and strong ties to many members within their housing status, interaction with others outside their housing status is sporadic, usually only occurring at particular events (such as community meetings, and yearly events such as block parties) or locations (such as the community park). Based upon observations and interviews in the Rainier Vista community, there are a few shared spaces around which residents of diverse characteristics converge. For example, Central Park or the main green space at the center of the community is a place in which children and their parents congregate and several respondents noted this as their main setting of social interaction with neighbors of different groups who they would not otherwise encounter.

Community meetings with the exception of the landscaping committee and homeowner's association meetings also serve as shared spaces and are attended by both renters and homeowners, albeit in low numbers (averaging about 10-15 residents per meeting). SHA staff member John notes the importance of these shared spaces as it gives adult residents "something to talk about which they have in common" such as their children or an interest in keeping speeding cars out of the community and that this can lead to communicative interactions which they do not otherwise have. Occasionally, homeowners and renters will even note that their

interactions in these shared spaces have led to ongoing communicative interactions or a social tie (5/13 renters and 5/15 homeowners). However, all but three respondents reporting these social ties noted that their relationships did not extend into communicative interactions outside of those shared spaces making them qualitatively different from the social ties they formed with residents of their own economic statuses. An example of this is Stacy and her social ties to two East African renters. Stacy cites these women as renters who are friends she has sustained communications with in the park, but notes that despite this and efforts to build more intimate relationships with them, she has so far been unsuccessful:

R: They're two totally awesome women and I would never have the chance and probably never have a reason to talk to them if I wasn't at a park and they were also at the park with their kids playing. And I guess that's what I was looking for...just to meet people like them that I wouldn't otherwise come across given where I was living before.

L: Do you ever meet outside of the park do you ever have play dates with their kids?

R: ... (One of the women) and I have been talking about doing it for a year, you know, for awhile ... I have to make the effort and I haven't done it yet. ... It's one of those things that I feel horrible about and I don't know why it's been so hard for me to have her over ... But it's been really hard to, you know...incorporate someone new.

More commonly, renters and homeowners report non-communicative interactions with residents outside of their economic status in these shared spaces (nodding, saying "Hi," etc). These interactions may be repeated over a period of time and residents will describe being able to recognize someone of another group by their face but they almost never learn their names and have no further interaction with them outside of these settings, nor richer interactions.

Homeowners' likelihood of interacting and forming relationships with other homeowners varies by their statuses as well. Generally, homeowners have the most frequent interactions with other homeowners who live in their physical proximity. They are also more likely to report having social ties with their immediate neighbors (such as in the same row of townhomes or across the street from their unit). Homeowners also note that they generally have closer

relationships with other homeowners who share other statuses with them such as being members of the same community activities, having the same length of tenure in the community, being parents, or being members of the same profession. However, homeowning respondents would often also note they were friends with other homeowners in the community who were physically distant from them having met and created friendly relationships at get-togethers, day-care groups, or other events that were distinct from day-to-day life in Rainier Vista. Homeowners are also members of the Rainier Vista Homeowners Association, which holds regular meetings (generally every other month or quarterly). This has also decreased the importance of proximity for social interaction and consequently social tie formation among homeowners. However, these meetings are generally not well-attended by homeowners as reported by members of the Homeowners' Association Board.

As will be discussed below, homeowners have also created a digital space in which they can have communicative social interactions. The "Google Group" or Rainier Vista homeowners' listerv allows frequent and convenient communication between homeowners, decreasing the importance of physical proximity for creating opportunities to interact. In interviews, respondents described getting several emails a week from fellow homeowners with various topics such as reviews of restaurants, notices and meeting minutes for community groups, and complaints of deviance in the area. The board is also used to discuss concerns, working to formulate shared definitions of situations and orchestrate collective action as appropriate. All of the home-owning respondents in this sample reported being on the Google listserv. While none of the respondents in my interview sample identified themselves as frequent posters to the board, they noted that they read messages on a daily or weekly basis.

Renters also note that their likelihood of interacting and forming relationships with other renters varies by statuses; in particular, tenure and ethnicity. Oromo residents in particular report frequent communicative social interactions and rich relationships with other residents of their ethnic group. For example, the Oromo respondents interviewed report frequent communications with each other and several other Oromo parents in the community because of their involvement in the Oromo cultural group meetings as well as attending gatherings at each other's homes. These Oromo residents were also organized enough to have identified and mobilized to reach common goals such as strengthening their children's academic performance and preserving their culture through teaching their children the Oromo language and their people's history, thus creating the Oromo cultural group. Ifrah, a Somali renter in my sample, reported similar rich relationships with other Somali individuals in Rainier Vista. She noted that some of them routinely meet in each other's homes to share news and advice as well as participate in community activities together such as the Neighborhood House sewing group.

When talking to old-timer renters (those who were residents prior to Rainier Vista's redevelopment), they frequently note that their social ties in the community were made years ago in old Vista and that these relationships have persisted over time. This is also upheld by observations and who these renters connected me to in my snowball sampling. Even if they did not consider another old-timer to be a friend or someone they were in communication with, they still knew that person's face, name, and reputation through past interactions.

Although I observed and several renting interview respondents reported communicative interaction and social ties with renters outside of their ethnic groups, 6 of 7 African American and Caucasian renters reported wanting more communicative interactions with their renting neighbors but that this was complicated by ethnic status.

The following excerpts from interviews and observations help further illustrate these differences in social interaction and social tie formation in Rainier Vista: In her seemingly contradictory account of social interaction and social ties in Rainier Vista, Caucasian homeowner Nicole describes her experiences in and hopes for the community. She seems to initially struggle with how to define “community” and “neighbors,” eventually specifying what she means when she uses these terms. She states that Rainier Vista is “the most involved I’ve ever seen a large community. I know my neighbors by name. We talk in the alley. I know sort of what’s going on in their lives...and I feel like it’s a community where people want to know their neighbors.” However, the respondent later says that she is not involved in communication with her adult, renting neighbors but is with their children who she sees and speaks to occasionally while out playing with her daughter (though she knows none of these children by name). This same homeowner later describes Rainier Vista in the following way:

I: Now, you were saying that if you could change anything it would probably be the amount of time that you spend with renters.

R: Well, just making it feel like it IS one big community and not, sort of, this interlocking connection of different communities. Because that is sort of what it is. We have the Somali community and the Ethiopian community and the Cambodian community, the Chinese community and then all of the homeowners ... I can’t really reflect on how much the various communities within the renters interact with each other but yeah sort of the idea that we could all...meet up.

African American renter Kevin’s account of his interactions with both renters and homeowners mirrors Nicole’s. Kevin notes that he is generally very happy living in Rainier Vista and that he enjoys the relationships he has built with his handful of friends and the neighborhood children, but that he wants more interaction with other people in the community:

R: We just need more. We just need more involvement with more neighbors in there instead of just a few ... if they want to interact with us, come in. We don’t bite! ... Everybody needs to interact in that community. I mean, some of the children can do it, the teenagers can do it. Why can’t the grown-ups do it? ... It’s not one, big circle ‘cause

we've got the Africans, here, some of the Blacks here. We got the Asians in the back. Then we've got the Caucasians across the street in the private park. So there's not really- I mean, there's not really too much interaction in there.

I also experienced this fragmentation into "communities" during my own observations and nowhere was it more clear than when I attended the multicultural committee's block party and observed patterns of communicative interaction residents settled within a shared space. Young, Caucasian home-owning couples stood in the side park area, discussing parenting and the landscaping committee while older homeowners "talked shop" about their careers. Older, Caucasian renters sat chatting on a cluster of benches. East African renters went and sat off in their own corner of the community center to eat when the potluck was served. A group of older, male African American renters sat out playing music in their own spot of the park. One of these men later told me in an interview that he became frustrated with the lack of people approaching them during this event and later told his friend to pack up and leave prematurely.

The proximity hypothesis predicts that having created shared spaces between people of different housing status, these residents should be routinely interacting in meaningful ways with one another and these interactions should be resulting in social ties. Renting residents should then be able to draw on these relationships as resources for social mobility. However, observations and interview data reveal that not all residents do regularly enter into shared spaces with residents outside of their housing status group. Those who do utilize shared spaces like the community park describe their typical encounter with those of the opposite housing status consisting of non-communicative pleasantries: nodding their heads, saying "Hi," or saying "Cute kid" and indicating the parent's child. Occasionally, richer interactions such as communicative social interactions around deviance and social control, conversations about the community, or questions and answers about one another will be exchanged, but observations and interview

respondents indicate this is a minority of these interactions. Even when they do occur, these communicative social interactions do not necessarily lead to future interactions or a relationship between two actors. When these relationships do develop, homeowners and renters generally describe them as bound to place, difficult to develop, and comparatively superficial to their other social ties.

II: Explaining Interaction and Social Ties in Rainier Vista

While proximity has created new opportunities for social interaction between dissimilar people, there are several processes operating in Rainier Vista which are affecting the likelihood and nature of residents' interactions. In the course of my fieldwork and observations, I have identified four distinct processes producing these outcomes: language barriers and communication norms, group-specific mechanisms or spaces of interaction, perceptions of different groups and perceptions of how they perceive your own group(s), and busyness. These processes operate by affecting a stage of the process by which proximity should help create meaningful social relationships between residents of different statuses. For example, while proximity creates shared spaces which residents of different statuses can utilize, language barriers can affect the nature of the social interactions occurring within that shared space. While residents of the same language group can use this as an opportunity to engage in communicative social interaction, residents of different language groups could be forced to have a non-communicative social interaction if they cannot understand one another. Due to this lack of communication, a social tie cannot form. These processes along with how they fit into the

conceptual framework of the proximity hypothesis will be explored below and supported with data from observations and interviews.

Language Barriers, Norms of Communication, and Their Effects

When asked why they think there is less meaningful social interaction between residents of different housing and ethnic statuses than they expected or desire, many respondents cited language barriers as the cause. As seen in observations between residents as well as in my own experience in recruiting for my interview sample, language differences are frequent and challenging hurdles for Rainier Vista residents. Among renters, there are eight major language groups (English, Oromo, Amharic, Chinese, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Somali, and Tigrinyan, as identified in interviews with staff as well as observed in SHA demographics for Rainier Vista). All homeowners in my interview sample identified English as being their first language (with several joking that it was also their *only* language). Respondents note that while there are opportunities for social interaction because of shared spaces in the community such as Central Park, interactions between members of different language groups are generally non-communicative in those spaces which lack an interpreter. So, although increasing proximity may create shared spaces and increase the possibility of social interaction, the quality of those social interactions can be negatively impacted by language barriers and, lacking communicative interactions, residents are unable to establish social ties.

In their interviews, renters for whom English is not their first language discuss how being an ESL speaker creates problems of comprehension, coherence, and comfort when interacting with Rainier Vista residents outside of their language group (which most if not all of the Rainier Vista homeowners are). The Asian and East African renters in my interviews cited language

barriers they and other residents within their language group have experienced; three specifically mentioned avoiding interactions outside of their language group in the past because of language-related concerns.

Ibsitu, an Oromo/Ethiopian woman, illustrated this processes in her interview. Ibsitu discussed the language barriers experienced by other East African residents in the community:

L: And so it sounds like when you take your kids to the park, they play and you talk to the other parents. Do you think a lot of other East African moms, do you think that's what they do too ... ?

R: No, not that much.

...

R: They want to but the problem is- most of it's the language, you know. The language problem and then, I don't know. They are not comfortable too. You know.

L: Why do you think they're not comfortable?

R: One is the language. It's a problem, language. They don't understand each other.

In a second excerpt, Ibsitu illustrates how differences in norms around communication can also impact social interactions by creating fear. Ibsitu discusses how frightened she was of interacting with other people when she first came to the United States due in part to limited proficiency in English as well as encounters which violated her norms around respectful interaction:

R: You know the first time- Let me tell you my story. When I first came and I live around Rainier (Vista)- I didn't know "What's up?" and then I go- I'm walking to Safeway and then people say "What's up?" Right? Oh my goodness, I was shaking! Because I don't know what to do. I know "Hi" like by this (waves) or by shaking hand. I don't know-

L: Oh you don't know what "Hey" or "What's up?" means?

R: Hey is an insult in our country. If I call you, like "Hey," that's disrespectful. ... But right now I know "Hi." I don't care because I'm used to it.

L: But for somebody who just came over or somebody who's-

R: That's hard. For me, hard, that's the first time I come. ... (I) focus (on) my working (laughs). But yeah it's hard. It's not comfortable. It's (a) new culture, new stuff but it's ok.

Also of interest in this excerpt is Ibsitu's comment that she is no longer afraid because she "got used" to verbal exchanges that violated her norms through exposure and, as she notes elsewhere in the interview, by talking to other Ethiopian refugees who were more acculturated. This suggests that the importance of this mechanism for impacting the likelihood of communicative social interaction can decrease with time. My interview with Karen, a Chinese/Vietnamese speaker also suggests that language barriers fade with time. Karen is an "old-timer" who lived in Rainier Vista since before its redevelopment. When asked to describe her relationships with residents in Old Vista, Karen said that she did not know anyone who did not speak her first languages because she could not speak English at the time. Now, she reports communicative interactions and relationships in the community with renters outside of her language group. From this, I deduce that as Karen's language skills improved, language barriers became less of an influence on her likelihood of having communicative social interactions.

Language barriers and cultural differences can also impact the established organizations which residents choose to be a part of. This process may affect the likelihood of social interaction as potential shared spaces within the community are then not utilized by residents of different language groups. A staff member at a local organization servicing youth in Rainier Vista and the surrounding area discussed how cultural and language barriers negatively impacted the advertising of their programs to second language speakers. Most of the youth they serve are African American and their families are not taken from the Rainier Vista community despite their close, physical proximity to the development. When asked to explain why he thought this

was, staff member Martin noted how difficult it was to communicate the value and purpose of his organization to non-English speaking, renting parents in the community:

L: ... It sounds like there's been talk about marketing and ... that there's a disconnect between the community across the street so to speak and the kids you're serving.

R: We know it. We talk about it, yeah. The community in Rainier Vista phase I is predominantly East African. Those kids are first or second generation East African kids. Not all of them native speakers. Parents definitely not native speakers. There's a huge language barrier there and we're not staffed appropriately to not only cater to those families as far as registration goes or fully get them to understand our mission. Language barriers present a problem for registration but it also presents a larger problem in marketing. I can tell you how much it costs and you might be able to understand or your child might be able to understand and tell you how much it costs to come here. What I can't explain to you is the impact parameters that we have around our club, the outcome measurement, and how our programs are outcome driven. ... Parents can't understand how great the programs are that we run for their kids because they- there's an inherent language barrier.

If Martin and other staff at his organization were better able to advertise the value of their organization, more ESL parents in Rainier Vista may enroll their children there and it would become a shared space where children and possibly parents of different statuses are brought together and interact. As it stands, language barriers are a process that keeps ESL families in Rainier Vista from wanting to utilize that space and it does not become a shared space. On the other hand, children and parents of the same ethnic statuses do utilize that space, making it a point of interaction for them.

The fact that language barriers negatively impact the likelihood and quality of social interactions demonstrates how important community meetings are to communicative interaction between renters and homeowners as well as renters of different language groups. The Seattle Housing Authority created two formal forums for communication between renters and homeowners: the Rainier Vista Traffic and Safety Committee and the Rainier Vista Multicultural Gathering. At these meetings, the community builder brings in interpreters for the major

language groups, allowing for rich, communicative exchanges between different residents. The interpreters allow for these shared spaces to not only be sites of interaction but sites of rich, communicative interaction unlike other shared spaces such as Central Park. During my observations of these meetings over a period of several months, I witnessed a number of these exchanges: homeowners and residents of all language and ethnic groups were able to discuss, ask questions, and coordinate collective action around community events, deviance and social control, shared concerns, and cultural similarities and differences. Winnie notes in her interview that this has been an important space for her in interacting with homeowners and cites these homeowners as those whom she “knows.” Winnie is not the only resident to emphasize the importance of these formal mechanisms in creating opportunities for communicative social interaction between dissimilar residents. Both homeowners and renters who were active in these formal mechanisms noted that it helped them in interacting and developing relationships with people outside of their ethnic and economic status. However, I witnessed low levels of participation in these organizations by both renters and homeowners. I also saw a drop-off in numbers over time as I continued observing. This phenomenon of “low numbers” or a decline in participation was noted by both renters and homeowners in their interviews and other, informal, conversations in the field. Over my observations, the average meeting consisted of 8 to 10 renters and 3 to 4 homeowners and the same residents would participate monthly.

Cross-community organizations like the Traffic and Safety Committee and the Multicultural Gathering create opportunities for transcending language barriers and having richer interactions making them a potentially important mechanism for establishing social ties between people of different statuses. Because of this function, it is important to understand why these mechanisms are under-utilized by residents. During my interviews, I asked renters and

homeowners either why they did not participate or why they thought their neighbors were not participating in these forums. Aside from busyness and commitments elsewhere, respondents discussed three reasons for this: dissatisfaction with the mechanisms, a perception that those activities were “not for them,” and discomfort.

Several renters and homeowners expressed dissatisfaction with the existing organizations, noting that they wanted different interaction points or to modify the existing ones and that this either kept them from using these spaces or eventually made them stop utilizing them. For example, when I asked Ifrah, a Somali renter, why she and other Somali women had stopped going to the multicultural gatherings, she said that they lost interest because “all they do is talk.” She says the Somali women were expecting opportunities to exchange phone numbers, visit each others’ homes, and help each other with various tasks like cleaning and childcare. When they found that this would not be the case, the attendance of the Somali women dropped off. Renee, a homeowner, said that she became interested in joining the sewing group but felt pressured by staff to take on a leadership role in the group due to her homeowner status, a task for which she did not have the time or interest. Because of this, she decided not to participate in the sewing group. Renee discusses her frustration:

R: I know like a staff member is trying to put together a sewing group because apparently some of the renters have expressed an interest in knowing how to sew. I might be interested in a collective group of people who got together to sew for instance but the last thing I heard about it wasn’t an invitation to the homeowners to come be part of this group. This was a plea: We need an instructor and as that instructor you need to commit to so many hours and you need to create lesson plans ... when you present it as we have this thing we would like to do for the renters and we need somebody to come and teach it, suddenly I don’t have any interest anymore ... I don’t want to be responsible for creating a series of lesson plans and being responsible for being the one teaching them. I want a social get together. I want to sit in a room where a bunch of people are sewing and knitting and have us all have a conversation about our projects and our kids and what we’re cooking for dinner. You know, that’s community building.

JD and Henry, two male homeowners, also had similar explanations for why they were not involved in community organizations, despite being interested in them. Both men expressed concern that they would be pressured to be more involved than they wanted to be and that this kept them from participating all together.

Homeowners and renters may also feel that some community organizations and events are specifically for one group or feel that they do not stand to benefit anything from going as it is not “marketed” or “targeted” at them. In her interview, a homeowner active in the multicultural gathering discussed her unsuccessful attempts to get her home-owning neighbors involved in the group as well as the reasons they gave her for not becoming involved. In addition to saying they were “too busy” and that they “didn’t know what they would talk about,” her neighbors also said they didn’t see the point in going since those groups were there to help the renters. For example, there is a Neighborhood House-sponsored cooking group in Rainier Vista which meets on a weekly basis where residents can come together, share recipes, and cook food together. Stacy was an on again-off again participant and invited her neighbors who turned down the invitation saying “Why would we go? We already have food,” implying that the group was there to help the renters who may have difficulty affording the cost of food. While Stacy viewed and treated the group as an opportunity to learn new dishes and interact with her neighbors, other homeowners saw it as something that was not “marketed” or intended for them.

Two male homeowners who were not involved in the Multicultural Gathering also expressed an interest in learning more about their renting neighbors, particularly those who were of a different ethnicity from themselves and even saw the group as a good opportunity to have richer interactions with these neighbors. However, these men also expressed discomfort in going to the meetings and “putting themselves out there,” noting that this would be uncomfortable due

to cultural differences. Both cited this as a reason why they had not yet attended meetings.

Richard, a homeowner who was involved in a homeowners-specific organization in the community (the Homeowners' Association), discusses this perspective as he explains why he has not attended a multicultural gathering:

R: There is a feeling that I would have to be a little bit more on my game I guess to participate in the multicultural committee which is kind of silly ... it takes more effort to go to one of those meetings and participate or to be involved yeah and probably some trepidation about what do I bring to...I mean my culture is, you know, Americana basically. What do I bring to the table in that sense? Each family has its barriers around cultural traditions. A Somali family has very strong cultural traditions so I feel like I would just be going there to learn about their culture and less to share about mine which isn't necessarily bad. ... I'm sure they have so many questions about our culture. Or that I feel that there may be judgment just because of impressions Americans draw so... And then there's probably others (other homeowners) where there's some aspect of trepidation about cultural respect, about...opening up to that level of commitment, to that level of...interaction with one's neighbors. Just, you know, how do I bridge that cultural divide?

Richard and Henry were not the only homeowners to express “trepidation” about “cultural respect” in interactions. Other homeowners discussed concerns that they were violating norms of East African renters in particular during interactions with them. Although these homeowners did not discuss this as a reason for not attending community organizations, they did note that this concern kept them from trying to have richer interactions when they encounter these renters in shared spaces. These concerns about culture and norms come from perceptions of groups, a process which will be discussed in more detail below.

Group-Specific Mechanisms of Social Interaction

As noted above, SHA staff members and other community organizations have created spaces for interaction in the Rainier Vista community. However, renters and homeowners have also created mechanisms of social interaction which are specific to their ethnic and economic groups. These

mechanisms may be exclusive to one group of people due to purposeful design, unintended consequence of design, or because they were created to cater to the specific needs of one group and, while not exclusive, other residents outside of that group would not be interested in participating. These mechanisms create interaction between residents of the same statuses but not between residents of different statuses.

An important shared space between homeowners is their “Google group” or an emailing listserv which was, until recently, exclusive in membership to homeowners. As noted above, all homeowners in my interview sample were members of the Google group and reported receiving daily or weekly messages from their fellow homeowners. Being exclusive to Rainier Vista homeowners, the Google listserv did not help foster communicative social interaction between renters or between renters and homeowners. Later on in its development, the listserv owners decided they wanted to encourage communicative social interaction between renters and homeowners and created a listserv which would be for everyone. However, Renee, one of the homeowners responsible for the maintenance of the listserv discussed that it was not utilized:

R: We also started a second Google group that was going to be for everybody and we just never got the buy in. Not as many homeowners expressed interest in it despite the fact that we leafleted and it was something the community builder was aware of. We never got any of the renters to sign up for it. We even went so far as to say that there was no minimum age so that in households where the kids were the tech savvy ones, they could be the interface. They could, you know, either coach their parents through it or be the one on it and pass the news on, you know. Nobody took us up on it. ... I don't know what the reason was but we did try and it never gained any traction. I think that the list technically still exists. Just nobody uses it.

Exploring why this mechanism “never gained any traction” among the renters reveals another process preventing communicative social interaction in modern, mixed-income communities: digital divides. Based on observational and interview data, I conclude that the reason for the failure of the second Google group is that it is a potentially shared space which is inaccessible to

people who are either not English literate, not computer literate, or who have limited to no access to a computer. There is what staff member Chloe describes as a “digital divide” between renters and homeowners. Chloe describes the digital divide as follows:

R: The digital divide is loosely the idea that low income communities don’t always have access to technology or the resources that technology can offer and that can take a lot of different forms. It can be not having access to internet. Simply not having wire laid in the community. It can be not having the funds to buy a computer. Not having the skills to use that computer. For example, like not having the skills taught in the school.

The digital divide is something I have witnessed in my observations in the field, my interviews and informal conversations with my renting respondents, and my volunteer work in the Neighborhood House Technology Center in Rainier Vista. Some renters in Rainier Vista (immigrant or refugee renters from what I have observed or they and staff have told me) have never touched a computer before let-alone have ready access to one. This, coupled with their fledgling English skills, make digital community forums inaccessible to them. Others may have some rudimentary knowledge of the computer but are not proficient, usually lacking email addresses and expressing frustration or disinterest in the technology as in the case of Angela. Other residents either told me that they only had access to a computer by using the computer lab or, when invited into their homes, I noticed that they did not have a computer. While homeowners generally describe the listserv as useful, convenient, and a way to keep in touch with neighbors, many renters would most likely experience this mechanism as being beyond their current capabilities or resources.

Other mechanisms that create interaction between similar residents are those that are only compatible with particular lifestyles. For example, old timers from Old Vista describe “hanging out” while East Africans discuss “sharing lunch” or “having coffee.” In conversations with African American long-time residents, they would describe old Vista and what made it a

“socializing community” in their opinion. They would talk about how they all “hung out” together, that when someone was home, they would usually be outside talking to other residents or watching their children as they played. This seems to have been bolstered by the fact that many renters “were just hanging out and not working back then” as described by Angela and supported by Kevin. Kevin, Madison, and Shane also note that this kept residents in communication with one another and led to lasting friendships. Two East African renters also noted similar social interactions in Kenya (their waypoint between their countries of origin and the US), Ethiopia, and Somalia. People were not “inside people” as Ifrah describes the people here in Rainier Vista but children were either in school or outside (Ifrah and Ibsitu) and the adults all knew each other from frequent interactions inside and outside of their homes. For example, Ibsitu said neighbors would contact each other before going to the market or would knock on each others’ doors, inviting each other to coffee or lunch on a daily basis. The serendipitous, frequent interactions described by renters are a contrast to homeowners who describe cementing their relationships with fellow homeowners through scheduled dinner parties, play dates, and barbeques, fitting their behind-doors-and-fences social interactions into a busy schedule which frequently takes them outside of the community for extended periods of time on a daily basis.

Relying on “hanging out” to meet homeowners is particularly ineffective in this community given its physical structure. Renter backyards and front yards are generally not in alignment with homeowners’ and many homeowners also have privacy fences. However, old timers and East African renters still utilize these mechanisms of social interaction as in the case of Kevin who plays dominoes on his stoop and waits for neighborhood kids and his adult friends to come join him or Gordon whose living room is a bachelor pad enjoyed by Shane, Kevin, and

other friends from the community who want to come “hang out.” Ibsitu and Ifrah note that Ethiopian and Somali residents in the community still continue the tradition of having meals or coffee together in order to engage in communicative social interactions where they come together within their ethnic groups to discuss concerns and disputes, organize collective action, and enjoy each others’ company.

Finally one ethnic group among the renters has created a formal mechanism of collective action and communicative social interaction that is specific to their interests. The Oromo cultural group was designed by the parents of community youth who were concerned that their children were struggling to perform in American schools and who were not learning the language and cultural traditions of their parents. The group serves some 60 local youth and is run by their parents who teach lessons, serve as recess monitors, and fund the needed materials (snacks, textbooks, supplies, etc). It convenes every weekend on Saturday and Sunday. I observed this group and also interviewed two Oromo parents in the community who are group members (Ibsitu and Hadish). Oromo youth engage with Oromo youth and adults. Oromo adults engage in communicative social interaction with one another as well while group is in session. During one recess break, I sat with the adults in the park while they handed out juice boxes and snacks and discussed their concerns about crime and how to keep their children away from it. Another time, the women were discussing their plans for the rest of the weekend. While this space fosters opportunity for interaction between Oromo residents and their children, it is not likely to be utilized by those outside their ethnic group due to a lack of shared interests. For example, American residents are not concerned about the transmission of Oromo culture or language to their children and will then not use a mechanism of interaction which also serves that purpose.

The Oromo group is not the only resident organization mobilizing for collective action either. Two homeowners' groups serve similar functions for homeowners: the Cheasty Greenbelt Group and the Alley Block Party Committee. The Cheasty Greenbelt group is an association of homeowners who came together over a common concern; these homeowners' houses back up onto a large greenbelt that they argue is not being properly maintained by the SHA and other stakeholders in the area which puts their homes in danger of damage and/or vandalism. Realizing their common concern, these homeowners banded together for collective action: negotiating with stakeholders and creating volunteer initiatives to maintain the Cheasty Greenbelt. Again, this mechanism addresses a concern specific to the homeowners living on the greenbelt. While it serves as a mechanism of communicative and purposeful social interaction among these homeowners, it is not going to spur social interaction between renters and homeowners due to a lack of shared interest; renters do not have to be concerned about property values and their homes are also not located along this strip of the property.

The Alley Block Party is another mechanism that was created by a group of homeowners living in the same area with a common concern. This group of four home-owning men wanted to create an event that would bring both renters and homeowners in their alley (a small section of the overall Rainier Vista complex) together to interact and have fun with their children. This has been a recurring event over a three year period and occurs in the summer. The members of the group apply for grants from the city in order to fund their party, hire local entertainment to perform, and hold a cookout. This mechanism is interesting as for the first two years of its existence, the group was homeowner-exclusive; the four men would come together, plan, and socialize over a four month period. However, this past year an East African renter and his wife also became involved with the planning of the event and were incorporated into the group. Ryan

notes that the group has now gone from being a space where he socializes with his three home-owning friends to a space where he now has semi-regular communicative social interactions with an East African renting couple. This circumstance suggests that renters and homeowners can recognize and work together to realize their common interests and that working together can provide new opportunities for communicative social interaction and social tie formation.

Perceptions of Others Affecting the Likelihood and Quality of Interactions

One of the mechanisms affecting the likelihood of social interaction and social tie formation is people's perceptions of others. Perceptions of others brought to an interaction or formed during it can affect that as well as future interactions due to resulting avoidance, fear, mistrust, and/or low expectations for the encounter. So, while proximity may increase the availability of shared spaces and consequently opportunities for social interaction, perceptions of others can decrease the likelihood of people utilizing those spaces or negatively affect the nature of the interactions which occur in those spaces. This in turn decreases the likelihood of forming social ties with people from the group you have perceptions of. Finally, the accuracy of these perceptions is irrelevant; they are still real in their consequences as the perceptions can affect how residents experience their community and the other people living in it.

My respondents reported two types of perceptions: 1) perceptions of others not connected with how you believe they perceive you and 2) perceptions of how another perceives you or others like you. An example of the first type would be a person being frightened of an African American person due to preconceptions of African Americans that they bring to an encounter. An example of the second type would be African Americans avoiding interactions with non-

African Americans because they expect that non-African Americans hold negative perceptions of them.

Type I: Perceptions of Other Groups, Cultures, and Places

Both renters and homeowners reported perceptions of people and cultures outside of their own housing and ethnic group that decreased their likelihood of interactions with others: homeowners discussed perceptions of East African renters and their culture which made them uncomfortable in interacting with them, renters and homeowners reported perceptions of deviance amongst people or in particular places which generated concerns for their safety, and renters discussed perceiving that homeowners were not interested in having richer interactions.

Perceived Cultural Differences and Uncertainty Among Rainier Vista Homeowners

Homeowners reported confusion about the culture and gender norms among non-native renters and East African residents in particular. Uncertain of what is acceptable and unacceptable, homeowners describe feeling uncomfortable and that this affected their behavior towards East African renters. These homeowners report that though they are interested in having richer, communicative interactions with these renters, their interactions are generally kept non-communicative. In particular, two male homeowners reported that they developed assumptions of gender norms in Muslim and East African cultures through interactions with East African residents as well as through conversations they have had with non-Muslim Americans. These men perceived that it may be socially unacceptable for them to interact with the Muslim women in the community. JD, a homeowner and father of young children in the community discusses his

hesitance to have richer interactions with East African women in the community, stating that, “I don’t want to cause any problems:”

R: I don’t really know how approachable some of the non...you know some of the immigrant population is to me approaching them even to say hello. And there just hasn’t really been that opportunity or that comfort level for me.

L: Are there things that make you feel like they’re not as approachable or do you think it’s-

R: I just don’t- well I remember when we first moved in here and the mini-van of, I guess, a Somali mother and children pulled up and she didn’t have, you know, her face covered and I don’t know what their ethnicity was but- and she was asking me about, you know, where to find out about renting one of these homes and I was like I honestly don’t know. I think, you know, the housing authority office is over there and- and I remember one of her children eventually telling her mother that her face wasn’t covered and then there was that uncomfortable- and then her mom then at that point covered her face and so that was just interesting. I’ve never experienced that before. And then...yeah often times...(laughs) to make a broad generalization, often times when I’m at the park they’re dealing with all their kids or they’re on their cell phone mostly. ... I don’t want to be that creepy guy who I don’t know who he is and especially not knowing their norms and, you know, I think in those cultures the male is a lot different and I don’t want to, you know, overstep any bounds. Just kind of given my observations with the male- their husbands. I don’t want to, you know, cause any problems.

Ryan, another male homeowner, reports more communicative interactions with East African women in the community but notes that “it’s been pretty superficial.” For example, Ryan encounters East African women at the bus-stop their children share. He sometimes engages these women in conversation. His children also played with the children of one East African mother in the community which made him have regular interactions with her and develop a social tie which he notes was broken when she moved out of the community. Nonetheless, he also reports “awkwardness” and discomfort in interactions with the East African women, citing cues of discomfort and overstepping gender boundaries in his exchanges with them.

Three home-owning women also reported confusion over “what the rules are” when it comes to interaction with residents outside of their ethnic group. In their interview, home-

owning couple Renee and Peter tried to make sense of why they think more meaningful social interaction has been slow to occur between renters and homeowners. Like JD and Ryan, Renee also cites confusion about gender norms in Islamic cultures and that she's not sure who she's "allowed" to interact with. She wishes there was more opportunities to learn about the cultures as this would reduce her confusion:

R: So you know I don't know how to make the interaction happen ... In practice it really would be neat ... if when the white folk moved in, if there was some sort of introduction to the other cultures. You know, basic rules: This is what the head scarves mean and this is how you say hello. These are who you are allowed to talk to or not to talk to. I don't know that much about Islam. ... In an effort to not step on anybody's rules- I don't know who I'm allowed to talk to, you know? Is it ok for me to make eye contact with the gentleman who brings his children to the bus stop in the morning ... or because there's a gender difference there, is that not ok? You know, what are the rules for married women talking to other women? Is that ok or are they only allowed to talk to people that they're related to? I don't know! You know and I've probably got a whole slew of skewed ideas because I read a lot of fiction. ... You know, nobody's talking to each other because we've got a language barrier there because nobody really knows what the rules are.

Renee perceives that there are rules of interaction she does not fully understand and this makes her uncomfortable in interactions. Interestingly, she notes how this uncertainty is exacerbated by the language barrier; without being able to have more communicative interactions because of the language barrier, she feels unable to learn about the rules of respectful exchange in order to feel more comfortable in having richer interactions in the future. Repeated interactions then make little difference; she's still left with the same perceptions and understanding of those cultures which she started with.

“We Don't Have Like that Back Home:” Perceptions of Deviance

Both renters and homeowners perceived the presence of deviance which either threatened their safety or which they did not want their children to be exposed to. Respondents from both groups

discussed modifying their behavior because of this, decreasing their presence in potentially shared spaces or reducing the quality of their interactions with others who they perceived as deviant. Three East African renters and an Asian renter expressed concerns about deviance in Rainier Vista, South Seattle, and the United States more broadly. Ibsitu and Ifrah both compared deviance in the United States to their experiences in Africa (Ethiopia and Kenya) and expressed feeling unsafe and mistrustful because of their perception of comparatively high rates of deviance in the United States. Ibsitu discussed being fearful of victimization and consequently altering her behavior in order to stay safe. The behaviors Ibsitu takes to minimize her likelihood of victimization also decrease her likelihood of interacting with others. For example, Ibsitu notes that in Ethiopia, she would have opened her front door to anyone who knocked; now, she will not open the door if she doesn't know who the person is.

Ibsitu, Ifrah, Winnie, and Hadish all spoke about regulating their children's behavior by only letting them outside when they were with them, by not allowing them over other people's houses, and/or by having them attend activities and events designed in part to provide social control of youth (such as the Oromo cultural group). Ibsitu's response captures this feeling of vulnerability and concern for her children's safety and future as well as how she modifies her behavior and the behavior of her children to keep them away from unsafe and/or deviant situations:

R: I don't have that much communication (interaction with her neighbors) because I'm kind of with my three kids. So I like to spend with my kids. I don't want to lose them so I don't do that much.

L: Mmh. You just said that you don't want to lose them...

R: Yeah I mean, you know. All the time I want to know with me. I want them taking my culture and stuff. I don't take of them (around other) people, the kids. Because they take a lot of- I used to be like that but if I go other like Oromo house or neighbor or family, it depend the family, you know? They take (get exposed to) some word you know and it's

bad. I don't like it. It's bad word. The family- I don't know. You worry for your kids, you know? ... The kids are not like back home. They parents are like back home. You don't worry back home but if the parents are sitting together talking, drinking coffee, you don't know here or here it's different. The kids is different, you know?

Renters were not the only ones to express concerns about deviance and social control.

Homeowners also note that they have controlled their children's access to potentially shared spaces because of the behavior of renters' children. Bridget, a female homeowner, discusses her experiences with deviance and social control in the park. Bridget struggles with whether or not to approach community members with behavior she sees as harmful and/or deviant or to simply remove herself from that space. She observed home-owning parents come to the park with their children and, upon seeing deviant behavior from renter children (swearing, violence, etc), remove themselves from those spaces. In discussing deviance and social control, Bridget says:

R: It's not an easy interaction (approaching children of renters or their parents concerning deviant behavior) and so I think that's probably why a lot of people just do nothing ... I've seen things where instead of...like a lot of things happen around the park. Instead of like... addressing the issue or just saying, "You know, that wasn't so cool, like you know, here's why. Let's figure this out," in that moment where it happens, I will literally see people leave. And I'm just like, "Well the park is supposed to be for all of us so" ...but I'm guilty of it too because I'm not a very physically imposing person and...I'm not going to get into it with a bunch of kids who are the same size as me or bigger, especially while pregnant and with a three-year-old so if kids aren't listening and there's no like adult around who looks like they might be in charge of them or at least know them, I'm going to clear out and that's a bummer so....

A staff member also told me that she has seen similar behavior from home-owning parents and that these homeowners have come to her, wanting her to create rules to govern behavior in the park before they return with their children there. As discussed above, being a parent can help encourage social interaction between people of different economic statuses as it brings people together by creating shared spaces bus-stops, Central Park, and homes. However, if concerns about deviance and social control lead parents to minimize their presence and the presence of their children in these spaces, than these mechanisms will lose their effectiveness.

Behavior of Others Interpreted as Lack of Interest

Renters contrast their lifestyles and norms around “being neighborly” to the behavior of homeowners, struggling to interpret behavior which they see as different and insular. Although renters and homeowners may encounter one another in a shared space, renters may receive cues from the homeowners’ behavior and/or demeanor that they are not interested in having richer interactions with the renter. Renters use this perception to gauge how they should interact with homeowners and this can lead to non-communicative rather than communicative interactions, regardless of how interested either party is in having richer interactions. For example, Madison, a young, Caucasian woman who rents in Rainier Vista contrasted the social milieu of the old Vista to the new Vista, recalling a childhood where she would come home from school and then her mother would send her out to play in the community. She compared this to what she sees now: renter children out and about in the community but the homeowners’ children only coming out when escorted by their parents with that being the only time the parents are really out in the community. She perceived that even there in the park homeowners stick to themselves, a sentiment that will be repeated by East African renters. This leads her to conclude “they don’t want to get to know us.” Three female East African renters compared the friendliness and openness of people in Africa to people in America who they described as colder and “afraid of other people.” Ibsitu called Americans “inside people,” echoing the female Caucasian renter’s perceptions of the homeowners. Ifrah described trying to engage in conversation with homeowners in the park saying that they “Just want to say hi and that’s it.” She explains that back in Kenya, people would want to meet their children, want to see their home, and then have

their children play with each others' but that homeowners here never do that which she interprets as a lack of interest in her. During our interview, she even pointed to a Caucasian father seated at a bench approximately ten feet away from us who was watching his daughter play in the park and said "See what he's doing? He sits there, watches her. Goes back home. Doesn't even say hi to us." Hadish, a male Oromo renter, discussed how he used the behavior of others to decide if he was going to try to interact with them:

L: And can I ask you- so it sounds like you know a lot the East Africans pretty well or at least the ones around you. You said some of them who are farther away, you don't know very well, right (he nods)? Do you know any homeowners that you would know by name?

R: Oh, no I don't.

L: So maybe you know them by face if you saw them?

R: Yes, yeah.

L: Do you ever talk to any of them?

R: (shakes head).

L: No? Why do you think that is?

R: It depend on how you make me- how you make contact. So if you are- I try to depend on the how the people living there. Some of them didn't say to you anything and I say nothing.

In his interview, Gordon, an African American renter questioned me when I told him homeowners talked about wanting more interaction and relationships with renters, a theme discussed by 8 of the 15 home-owning respondents. For Gordon, the behavior of the homeowners was incompatible with what they say they want as, in his perspective, they stay "over there," to themselves and "segregate themselves:"

R: If people over there (the homeowners) want to really be involved in the community, then they really need to, you know- like I was watching this movie...Supernatural the other day. I watch it almost every day and the lady (in the show) came over and she says "Hi." This is a new neighbor. "Hey. Look I have some cookies or had something I

thought you might be able to use this.” But like they did back years ago, they don’t do that anymore ...Your neighbor moved in, you said “Hi neighbor! Here’s a cookie.” or “Hi”- you know? Oh you see the neighbor cutting the grass or something and said, “Hey look a little bit of rump for somebody. Maybe this will help you one time. I can’t use that myself.” That kind of sense of getting into your neighbor, you know but when you stay over just in that area and you don’t communicate, what do you expect?

Sensing that homeowners are uninterested in interacting with them, renters may modify their expectations of encounters as well as their own behaviors, preventing richer interactions. However, as homeowners discuss in their interviews, they may be interested in having richer interactions but are unsure of how to do so because of language barriers, uncertainty about norms, or uncertainty about the renters’ interest in *them*. Indeed, Ryan and JD both discuss encountering renters in the park or at the bus stop. They were interested in communicating with them but noticed that they were speaking in groups amongst themselves or on their cell phones and were uncertain if they could enter those conversations. Bridget described encounters where she tried to communicate with renter parents about the behavior of their children and felt dismissed by them as she did not interpret their response as demonstrating interest in her concern. This led to a perception that these renters were not willing to enter into a social control partnership with her.

Type II: Perceptions of How Others View You and Those Like You

Renters reported perceptions of people’s views of them and their status groups which frustrated them, decreased their likelihood of entering shared spaces, or decreased their likelihood of trying to have more meaningful interactions with them. In particular, some renters perceived that homeowners held classist views or were fearful of renters because of what they had heard of the old community, African American renters perceived that Asian and East African renters held

racist views of them, and East African respondents reported Muslim renters feared non-Muslims were scared of them.

Perceptions of Classism Against Renters

A theme in interviews with African American and Caucasian renters was that they believed homeowners perceived them negatively because they were poor or lived in public housing and that this colored as well as limited interactions between the income groups. Gordon went so far as to call the homeowners “the rich people over there living on the plantation” who thought they were better than the renters and could treat them like children. When asked why he thought this, Gordon described several negative communicative interactions with one homeowner which made him consider ending his participation in community functions. Gordon later told me he interpreted these interactions as this neighbor expressing his authority over him. When I asked why he would feel superior, the renter stated that this homeowner thought he had authority over him because he was wealthier and therefore better than him.

In another conversation with Gordon, he explained why he thinks more African Americans do not attend community meetings such as the Traffic and Safety Committee or the Multicultural Gatherings. Gordon reported speaking to another renter and long-time friend about attending the Traffic and Safety Committee meetings in order to communicate with homeowners who were taking issue with the behavior of her children. Gordon says she wasn’t interested in opening dialogue with them as she believed that “They’re not going to change. They’re still going to have it out for us,” voicing her opinion that interacting with the homeowners was a waste of time; they would still take issue with renters’ children. This perception prevents her from engaging in opportunities for communicative interaction with homeowners where she may

be able to change her own views on the homeowners as well as the homeowners' views of her children and their behavior.

Perceptions of Racism Against African American Renters

African American renters perceived that other renters looked down on them or avoided them because they were Black. In particular, African American renters expressed that East African and Asian renters avoided them in various interactions such as not saying "Hi" back when they are encountered and greeted in the street in the case of Gordon and moving to the side and avoiding eye-contact when encountered in the hallways of apartment buildings as in the case of Selena. When asked why they thought this was occurring, the renters would offer various explanations, generally variations on Selena's explanation: "Because I'm Black." For example, Selena recalled incidents of East Africans avoiding her in the hallway, looking down and moving to the side as she approached. When asked if she thought those same people would avoid me in the hall or not open the door for me, Selena said "No, you're White." I asked her if she had any points of comparison, if she had seen any interactions between them and renters who were of their own racial/ethnic group or White renters and she said that she didn't but she believed that it was because she was Black. When asked why he thought East African and Asian renters were avoiding him, Gordon and his African American son and friends provided the following explanation:

R: Now the people who are renters in this community- you don't have much communication with the Africans. They stay to their group. The Asians stay to their group.

R3: They don't like us.

R4: No they don't. They don't respect black folks. ... they just won't talk to you. They won't look at you. That's- it's weird. I know they don't talk. I've heard say some of the African men say about black men stereotypes and stuff like that. That we're...we just want to mess with women and some of the women are attracted to us but they won't say nothing to us about it so their women stay- tend to...stay away from us.

R: Well if you...if you were an African woman and you talk to an American Black, you're banned from your tribe and community.

R4: They size us up and to them we're more...inferior. I mean, they're afraid of us because we're a lot- our race is strong. That group of people feel...maybe not rebellious to us but they feel as though we're more superior than they are in maybe like strength like fighting, working, that kind of thing. And they keep their women away from us because of some of that stuff.

While none of the African American renters who discussed this perception noted that they avoided other renters because of them, other renters and homeowners who discussed their perceptions of other people and groups did note that their likelihood and quality of interactions were impacted. If African American renters who feel stereotyped against experience these perceptions similarly, then it is likely they also modify their behavior, decreasing their presence in shared spaces and/or attempts at communicative interactions with other renters.

Perceptions of Stereotypes Against Muslims

Over the course of my interviews with East Africans, I discovered that some of them experienced trepidation in engaging with me as well as interacting with their non-East African neighbors.

Data from my interviews suggest that at least part of this wariness of non-East Africans is coming from the vilification Muslims are experiencing in the United States today. Ifrah, a Somali woman who rents in Rainier Vista, discussed how she experiences non-Muslims' perceptions of her and how it has affected the likelihood and quality of interactions she has with them.

In her interview, Ifrah told me that she withdrew her daughter from her public school after she experienced physical and verbal bullying for wearing the hijab and being Muslim. From her daughter's experiences, Ifrah developed a perception that non-Muslims had negative views of people within her status group. Eventually, Ifrah decided to place her daughter in a private Muslim school where her daughter seems much happier. Perceiving others' negative perceptions of people in her status group, Ifrah removes her daughter from these interactions. Ifrah's decision to withdraw her daughter from public school is important when considering social life in Rainier Vista as well as participation in common institutions creating opportunities for social interaction between residents. Homeowners, renters, and staff have all noted in their interviews that children's schooling has had effects on the likelihood of interaction between renters and homeowners. Children's schooling brings parents into shared spaces, increasing the likelihood of social interaction over the course of routine activities. Withdrawing from dominant educational institutions as in the case of Ifrah and her daughter may end her participation in those shared spaces as her routine activities no longer bring her to them (for example, if her daughter is no longer sharing that bus stop with other community children because she is no longer attending that school).

Later in her interview, Ifrah describes her own fear of interacting with non-Muslims as well as the fear experienced by other Somali residents in the community and how this affects their behavior. When asked if she can put me in contact with other Somali renters for interviewing, she recalled a community meeting where I advertised my study and said that the Somali women were talking amongst themselves and had suspicions of who I was as well as my intentions. They feel targeted for being Muslims, and this makes them afraid and cautious of who they interact with: "They say no. They're scared, you know? ... Right now when you watch the

news they are talking about Muslim, Muslim, Muslim. They are talking about terrorists and things. They (other Somali residents) say we are Muslim and we are afraid. We're still on the news and most of them, they focus on the Muslim terrorists and they think we are terrorists.” Ifrah also notes that this fear of how non-Muslims perceive Muslims has affected her behavior toward homeowners in the community. In her interview, Ifrah told me that she only has interactions with homeowners inside of the community park. When I ask her why she thinks this is, Ifrah talks about being afraid of the homeowners: “I can't go to their homes (homeowners). I wear a hijab, I think they're scared of me. They think I have a bomb. They think I'm a terrorist. That's why I don't go. If they call 911, what can I do? I'm scared. If they have a gun and shoot me, what can I do? I want to keep my kids in my house. I have to be careful. The people in the park make me nervous.” Ifrah's fear of her non-Muslim neighbors demonstrates how type II perceptions can rob members of certain status groups of having more rich social interactions with others. While she notes that she has interactions with non-Muslims in the shared space of the community park, Ifrah reports wanting more meaningful interactions such as going into each other's homes, meeting each other's families, and helping one another deal with the tasks of everyday life. However, because of her perceptions of others and how they view Muslims, she describes herself as being too afraid of having these types of interactions and relationships.

“Busyness,” Space, and the Importance Placed on Community Social Ties

Another mechanism both renters and homeowners cite as limiting their opportunities for social interaction is “busyness:” being too involved with other commitments both inside and outside the community to engage their neighbors in new ways. Busyness decreases the likelihood that residents will share space with one another; respondents report that busyness elsewhere

decreases the amount of time they can or are willing to spend engaging in purposefully entering shared spaces. Homeowners who discuss transitioning back into the work-force after having been a stay-at-home parent also note that their routine activities no longer take them into spaces which they used to share with other residents. One renter noted that working the early morning shift at his store decreased his likelihood of entering shared spaces with others as his routine activities were being conducted when most other residents were in bed. Both renters and homeowners expressed “being busy” when they discussed their social activities in Rainier Vista although more homeowners than renters did so and homeowners did so more frequently over the course of their interview. Common causes of busyness were “focusing on my career,” “parenting,” and “non-conducive careers.” Bethany’s interview is representative of the pressure “busy” renters and homeowners describe:

L: So how often do you see those people (other residents) that you named as friends?

R: I mean, Patricia was just like...she was in my wedding and I hardly see her. We want to it's just like we're so damn busy. Abigail and James are great though because every Tuesday night they have this barbeque in their house for their friends and so my husband has been going pretty regularly and I just...I have not had a free Tuesday night in...I don't know, three months?

L: How many hours a week do you work? If you can even gauge it like that (laughs).

R: ... At the best it's probably forty to fifty hours a week and then at the worst it's probably about 80 hours a week.

L: Wow.

R: And then I do- I sing in a couple of choirs on top of that and so it's just like...why am I doing this to myself? It's because I love what I do ... Normally if I wasn't insane I would be seeing them on a weekly basis. But like, my next door neighbors, I haven't seen them...I swear in a couple of months. And they live here! I mean they're like a few feet away, you know?

Not only do renters and homeowners feel pressure from busyness, but they also note that interaction with people who are similar to you and those who are different from you are not equivalent in the amount of time and effort they take. Homeowners in particular have discussed

how engaging with social interaction with those outside of their ethnic and economic status is not equivalent to the time they spend interacting with those inside of it. As Stacy, Ryan, and Gerald all note, “it’s harder” and “it takes more effort.” Homeowning respondents identified one reason for this when they discussed differences between “organic” and “artificial” or “purposeful” social interaction. Organic interaction is the interactions they have with neighbors that occur over the course of a person carrying out their routine activities. They happen to be in a space, engaging in whatever purpose they have there, and encounter and interact with a neighbor. For example, respondents talk about encountering their neighbors as they go to the mailbox, take their children to the park, walk out to their car in the morning and into their house in the evening, use their backyards, etc. On the other hand, artificial social interaction is when one goes to a planned event or meeting with the purpose of interacting with their neighbors. Artificial interaction is more time consuming than organic social interaction as in the former, one has to go outside of what they would be doing anyway to interact with their neighbors.

This distinction is important when considering the design of the community, the spaces residents share, and the likelihood of social interaction between people of the same and different housing statuses. As discussed above, something that makes interaction harder between dissimilar others is language barriers. While the formal mechanisms of interaction such as the multicultural gathering and traffic and safety committee provide ways to circumvent those barriers, utilizing these spaces is time-consuming because they are “artificial;” you would not otherwise be attending the meeting over the course of your day-to-day activities. You set aside time in your schedule to attend and enter into that shared space. However, this is something that many residents seem unwilling or unable to do due to business or lack of interest considering the low numbers of renters and homeowners in attendance as discussed above

The design of the community also makes social interaction easier among those of the same ethnic and economic status. Residents of the same housing status are more likely to share space and encounter one another in the course of routine activities because of their close physical proximity. The SHA and developers designed the community in such a way that each street is a row of rental units or a row of at-market homeownership units and is generally facing the same type of unit across the street. The community was also designed for visibility such that your immediate neighbors can see you enter and leave your home and fences are short enough that neighbors can easily see over them. This means that back-yards, front-yards, sidewalk, and driveway are all shared space with your immediate neighbors and routine organic social interaction with them will occur. However, the lack of physical proximity between rental and homeownership units means there are fewer shared spaces where these residents will organically interact with one another. This is reported by homeowners as well as renters. Homeowners and renters frequently cite the community park, “the alleys” and “the sidewalk” as the two places in the community they do organically interact with one another.

Renters and homeowners placed different emphases on the importance of “knowing one’s neighbors” and making Rainier Vista a social as well as residential community. This may have repercussions for the amount of time they are willing to dedicate to purposefully interacting with their neighbors. Lynn, a multi-racial homeowner, identified herself and her husband as being involved in “too many communities already” between their respective careers and their children’s schooling. They did not feel like they had the time to become more involved, nor did she feel particularly troubled by it, noting that they were content to let someone else be on the Homeowners Association Board and be otherwise involved. Lack of time compounded by fulfilling social commitments and relationships elsewhere was a theme raised by six other

homeowners as well, describing themselves as “focused on their career right now,” involved in too many other things, or not having moved into the community to be a part of something like that to begin with as they are already “wealthy with friends.” For homeowners, their focus was not necessarily on the Rainier Vista community. Where they lived may be one facet of who they are, but they had many more aspects of their lives occurring elsewhere which occupied their time.

Renters placed more emphasis on the importance of “neighbors” and “community.” This may explain the differences in the numbers of renters versus homeowners who reported dissatisfaction with their current interactions and relationships in the community (11 of 13 vs. 4 of 12). For example, Selena expressed annoyance with her neighbors who “don’t want to get to know each other” saying that “we don’t have to be best friends but you have to know your neighbors. You have to know they’re there for you. I might not like you but am I going to make sure you get out of the building if there’s a fire? Of course I am. You need that if something happens.” Angela also noted the importance of neighbors in “watching out for each other” saying that was what community meant to her. For Angela, “watching out for someone” does not just mean knowing who belongs and who doesn’t or calling the police if something is suspicious; it means “checking in” and supporting one another; tasks she relies on her current social network of other women in the community for. This theme of “supporting one another” was a dominant one in many renter interviews. I observed and renters reported utilizing their social ties in order to weather difficult times as well as reach goals; these relationships could be sources of emotional, informational, and material support. For example, Ifrah and Hadish reported that East African women in the community would clean each others’ apartments, cooking each others’ meals, and watching each others’ children when one of the women was sick or otherwise

struggling. Angela described how her and other renting women tried to help their friends who suffered from phobias and other impairments to adopt more healthy habits. They also served as “check-ins” for each other, routinely calling or visiting one another. Madison said her old friends from Rainier Vista looked at her mother as their own and would routinely call for advice and comfort. Gordon noted his appreciation for Shane and Kevin who helped him run errands, checked in on him, and supported his efforts at community events. Oromo renters Ibsitu and Hadish explained how the Oromo cultural group was formed by concerned parents in and around Rainier Vista who wanted to keep their children out of trouble, as well as teach them the Oromo language and culture. Parents volunteered their time and money to create this self-driven and implemented program that services upwards of 60 children in the Rainier Vista community center.

In addition, renters in Rainier Vista were more bound to place and may have limited opportunities to build relationships. This may also increase renters’ dissatisfaction with existing social interactions and relationships. Ifrah discussed her frustration with a lack of interaction with some community members, noting that she was trying to recruit local families as clients for her daycare that she ran out of her home. Ifrah not only lived in Rainier Vista with her family: it was also her primary social context due to her work also being in the community. This is a theme repeated with other renters in my sample as well: several are unemployed, four are employed by agencies within the community or blocks away from it, one is on disability and is close to retirement age, and one is self-employed within the community. For many of these renters, Rainier Vista is their primary if not sole community and this may increase their interest in building social ties to other residents within the community. In the literature, researchers of social networks have suggested that low-income individuals’ networks may be more “spatially

situated” such that they are less likely to form social ties outside of their residential community (Kleit 2008) and data from Rainier Vista supports this.

While homeowners described relationships to other residents as useful for deviance and social control, orchestrating child care, creating a sense of belonging and providing companionship, renters discussed utilizing these ties as social support to “get by,” as described by Briggs (Briggs, 1998). The need to activate social capital in order to overcome challenges that are potentially destabilizing as well as the spatially-constrained nature of many renters’ social ties may explain the different emphases renters and homeowners place on the importance of community social ties. If homeowners are not as reliant on community social ties for social support or social mobility, they may be more inclined to invest time fostering strong social ties elsewhere.

The Variable of Time: Predictions for Rainier Vista’s Future

While social interaction and relationships between residents of different ethnic and economic statuses are not currently of the same quantity and quality which the proximity hypothesis predicts, interview data with residents and staff in Rainier Vista suggests that this may change in the future. Three processes occurring in the data suggest this is the case: residents for whom English is not their first language report strengthening language skills and confidence over time; both renters and homeowners report changing perceptions over time due to exposure; and, finally, staff members and residents are innovating to create new shared spaces which will overcome processes affecting the quality of social interactions.

Ibsitu and Karen, two renters for whom English is a second language, reported initial trepidation in engaging with English speakers as they struggled with comprehension and were frightened by an unfamiliar language and norms of communication. However, both noted they diversified who they interacted with over time as their English language skills and knowledge of American norms improved. As discussed above, Ibsitu noted that “it was hard,” but exposure over time and learning from more acculturated friends has made her more comfortable. I would anticipate that as other renters for whom English is a second language engage with English speakers and American institutions (media, schools, etc), the barriers they feel will decrease, however, this is likely to require a long period of time.

As discussed above, perceptions are a powerful mechanism affecting the presence of residents in potentially shared space and the meaningfulness of the interactions they have in those spaces. Perceptions of others and perceptions of how they perceive us can lead to fear, anger, mistrust, and confusion. However, both renting and home-owning respondents also noted that perceptions change over time as residents have positive non-communicative and communicative interactions with others. In Shane’s interview, he discussed how he has seen changes in the quantity of non-communicative social interaction over time as more people are coming out and sharing spaces. When asked why he thinks this is, Shane draws on his own experience to talk about changing perceptions:

R: You know what it is, is noticing how much they’ve got in common, you know what I’m saying? Because, you know, when you’re not socializing, you never know. You never know how much you’ve got in common with this person or this race or whatever it is. But, I mean, I’ve noticed that ... I’d be out smoking a cigarette and I might see the homeowners doing the same thing or just drinking a beer. ... And they can go out, having fun, having parties just like we do. So they realize that it’s not a problem to be yourself, to be the same thing, just different.

...

I: Did you have assumptions about them (the homeowners)?

R: Yeah, I did. I did. I thought it was going to be the whole weird little awkward- I mean, it's going to be like you've got to watch what you do. ... it's all new people, so, you know, when it's new people, you're always going to have assumptions because you don't know until you actually find out from meeting them. But no, it's fine ... we do what we do and they don't have a problem with it. We see them. Like before, they (the homeowners) didn't come outside too much but if they did they would hurry up and go back inside because they see somebody outside, you know? So no, I mean, I think like I said, everybody's feeling each other out. You know, everybody is trying at least, know what I mean?

Shane's experience shows how even non-communicative social interactions can challenge and change perceptions you have of another group of people. Shane is hopeful that with time, residents of both housing statuses and all ethnicities will have richer social interactions as they discover what they have in common instead of focus on perceived differences.

Seattle Housing Authority staff are also recognizing difficulties in engaging in communicative social interaction and are working to develop new mechanisms to make communication easier by circumventing the language barrier and the digital divide. For example, one staff member discussed an idea they developed called a phone tree after observing that renters were left out of the Google listserv due to language and technological barriers. The phone tree is a system where English-proficient ESL renters exchange contact information with homeowners who can then contact them, providing them with information about deviance in the community as well as emergency situations for dissemination with other, non-English proficient members of their language group. The system can also work in reverse to keep homeowners informed and create dialogue between the language groups in a convenient and routine way (as opposed to the monthly traffic and safety meetings, for example). Like the Google listserv, the phone tree would create a new potential shared space where residents can interact and it would facilitate easy communicative interaction. As time passes, the researcher believes that other,

similar mechanisms will develop and old mechanisms will be refined as SHA staff receive more information on the needs of their residential population.

While the passage of time may help improve the quantity and quality of social interactions among Rainier Vista's residents, I believe processes occurring over time also have the capacity to maintain existing patterns as well as sever the delicate social ties which have developed.

As noted by renters and homeowners discussing their perceptions of others and how others view them, both groups of respondents discussed how interactions can create negative perceptions. Social interactions, both communicative and non-communicative, are not always positive. It was through social interactions that JD began to suspect he was violating the gender norms of his Muslim neighbors; experiences with deviance and social control (or a lack there of) in public spaces and neighbors' houses also led renters and homeowners to conclude those spaces were not safe; interactions with homeowners also created or reinforced Gordon's perceptions that homeowners look down on renters, feeling themselves to be superior. Time, then, may negatively as well as positively affect residents' perceptions of others. In her interview, Bethany illustrates this process by discussing how her own stereotypes of Black people were reinforced through her interactions with East Africans and African Americans in the community:

R: One of the things we talk about in social psychology is ways to reduce prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, and one of the things that you can do is increase exposure to those groups for whom you have a negative prejudice or stereotypes about and, that's kind of what I thought would happen when I came here...and what's interesting is that unfortunately I feel like some of my negative stereotypes about African Americans in particular have been reinforced unfortunately because I've seen, the, you know, the delinquent behavior coming from African American or East African kids. So that has been really interesting for me to notice. Like that, that was very unexpected. I mean in part I came, I, I chose to live here because ... I thought that this would be even better.

I'll have more exposure. Get to know them. And unfortunately we see the delinquent behavior. So that has reinforced, unfortunately some negative stereotypes for me.

L: Do you think other homeowners had some of their own, latent stereotypes kind of enforced by what they've seen? Are there any impressions you've had?

R: I mean, probably. You know, we're all human so...and if I'm a social sciences professional and I'm noticing this happening...then I would imagine yeah, absolutely it's...probably mostly implicit but yeah I'm sure it's happening. That's my guess.

While Shane's has experienced how positive interactions can challenge negative perceptions, Bethany and others' experiences give a reminder that this is not a certainty; interactions can create and reinforce negative perceptions of a person or group, reducing the likelihood of meaningful interaction. Which experience will be more common among Rainier Vista residents cannot be determined by the data from this study.

Finally, several home-owning respondents discussed thinking about moving in the near future. Two separate concerns prompted thinking about leaving: concerns about the quality of neighborhood schools and concerns about deviance and social control. Parents discussed struggling with whether or not to stay in the community as their children get older and will be funneled into public schools in the area with poor reputations. While some parents mentioned toying with the idea of private schools, others note that that is not an economically-viable option for them and that as their children complete elementary school, they will be considering locating elsewhere. JD, a father of two, discusses this concern:

R: We're not so concerned about the grade school. We just don't know about the middle and high schools at this point and we know that's a few years away but we just don't see that things are going to improve drastically over the next six years just given- it's been bad for a long time (laughs). It's not turned around by now so what- what is the city and what are the parents doing to address it? So yeah we were starting to think about that and starting to get a little concerned.

L: Now what makes you hesitate to send your children somewhere else?

R: Somewhere else like a different public school?

L: Yeah.

R: I think...well...it's not close to home. Just the logistics. We've never once- well I haven't at least thought oh I'm going to drop my kids off in Ballard every day. Or I might drive to Mercer Island for junior high everyday. At some point that's just- I think at that point if you're that concerned, you've just got to move personally. I'm not gonna spend 12 years, you know, taxiing my kids to another part of the city. I'll find a way to live there if that's what I want. So...or we'll leave Seattle all together. That type of thing.

Bridget, a mother and homeowner, also reported that that she and her husband were considering leaving due to concerns about the quality of schools. Discussing why, Bridget gives the common motive given by these parents: “We also want to give our kids, like any parent does, the best chance that they have at success and...right now we're not sure if staying here is going to do that.”

This process is interesting as it demonstrates the lingering effects of concentrated disadvantage in an area, even after gentrification or other forces create mixed-income communities. Historically impoverished areas continue to have struggling institutions long after redevelopment occurs; this can prompt reconsideration of decisions and the flight of wealthier residents back out of poor areas. Home-owning and renting respondents report that the social ties they do have with residents of the other housing status are embedded in specific shared spaces. With the exception of Ibsitu and Stacy, these actors are not contacting each other by email or phone; they encounter one another in shared spaces such as the park, sidewalk, light-rail or community meetings and, while these encounters sometimes lead to invitations into more private spaces (as reported by 3 of 28 respondents), those shared spaces typically define the boundaries of their relationship. If residents move out of the residential community, it is likely that this will sever these social ties. I predict that this will be a process affecting Rainier Vista in the years to come. Several home-owning respondents describe themselves as young married couples who

moved into the community to buy a home and start families (7 out of the 15 home-owning respondents). Now, as these residents start to have children and as their children get older, the quality of schools can only become more salient to them.

Two other homeowners discussed how they were considering leaving the community over problems related to deviance and social control. Bridget has experienced youth trespassing in her backyard and other incidents which have made her feel unsafe. She notes that this, in conjunction with her daughter's schooling, will likely mean a move for her and her family in the future:

L: Overall, how safe do you feel Rainier Vista is? Compared maybe even to other places you've lived?

R: I'd say...like 85% of the time I'm super happy, feel safe but that 15% of the time... things really unnerve me and I'm like, let's get out. You know? Because of things that are so invasive like teenagers running through my yard in the middle of the night freaking the living bejeezus out of me because again I don't know who you are. I don't know if you're just sort of like...lazy, just being silly, you know, teenagers or if you're like- like up to no good you know? That's when I start thinking, "Ok, maybe not the greatest place to have a family." I don't want to feel like I have to move but...you know? We probably will.

Time is an unpredictable variable given the limited nature of the study and the processes described above. However, what is clear is that the processes affecting interactions and relationships between Rainier Vista residents will not change overnight, for better or worse. Residents and staff interested in developing community across the development should consider finding ways to speed along positive social interactions and the redevelopment of perceptions, helping ESL speakers become more comfortable and English proficient, creating mechanisms which overcome communication divides, and thinking of strategies to retain residents in the community.

Conclusions

Like other social scientists exploring social interaction and social tie formation in mixed-income communities, I have found that proximity does not guarantee social interaction and that the interactions and relationships which do occur are not as meaningful as urban sociologists and policymakers have hoped. In Rainier Vista, several processes affected the likelihood and nature of social interaction: language barriers and norms of communication, perceptions of others, busyness, and group-specific mechanisms or spaces of social interaction. Rainier Vista's future is uncertain due to the complicated and changing nature of residents' capabilities, comfort, perceptions, and needs.

Limitations of the Study Design

This study has several limitations: Seattle's history and current demographics are different from many other sites where public housing has been studied. While this provides an opportunity to examine the effects of these differences as noted above, it also may limit the generalizability of this study's findings. Theoretical processes which emerge from these data may then be limited in their scope and applicability elsewhere. Another weakness is the self-selective nature of the study as well as other sources of sampling bias such as those introduced by snowball sampling techniques. A non-random sampling technique such as snowball sampling can compromise the validity of a study due to the likelihood that respondents build relationships with the like-minded and/or with those who share similar characteristics with themselves. Flyering for resident participation in interviews may have helped to mitigate this source of possible bias however I only received one interview through flyering.

Another complication which arises from Rainier Vista and Seattle's ethnic heterogeneity is that there are residents who are non-English speakers or who have a limited knowledge of the English language. This has limited the researcher in picking informants and may have hampered capturing the diverse range of experiences in the Rainier Vista community. Talking to other, more English-proficient members of these ethnic minority groups may have allowed me to collect data on some of the processes impacting this community but it also means the data may have come from informants who are more indoctrinated into American culture as well as accepted by native Americans. Because of this, acculturated informants may not be able to lend perfect insight into the experiences of those who are not so acculturated.

Another limitation of the study is that it might suffer a bias from a possible omitted variable of great importance: the passage of time. As discussed above, Rainier Vista potentially stands to change a great deal with time however, there are processes at work which may cause the current levels of interaction and social tie formation to persist. While my projections are based on interview data from my respondents, it is difficult to predict what Rainier Vista's future will look like. A return study to Rainier Vista several years in the future would be informative.

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