

Northfield Neighbors  
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Sociology/Anthropology 373: Ethnographic Research Methods

## *Executive Summary*

***Title: Northfield Neighbors***

### ***Abstract***

Our study analyzes Northfield community members' attitudes and beliefs about St. Olaf students living off-campus as well as the students' attitudes and beliefs about their neighbors. Data was collected by conducting face-to-face interviews with St. Olaf College off-campus students, their surrounding Northfield neighbors, and St. Olaf College administration. We found little to no interaction between the St. Olaf off-campus students and Northfield neighbors.

Many interactions that Northfield neighbors do have with off-campus students deal with noise, vandalism, parties, disrespect, profanities, and lack of available parking. In the same respect, the majority of interactions that St. Olaf off-campus students have with their neighbors deal with miscommunications that lead to aggravation, indirect communication, and/or police interaction. A majority of the people from both parties base their attitudes and beliefs on these negative interactions, which results in a damaged and deteriorating relationship.

### ***Main Points***

- ***The purpose of our study was to investigate the relationship between St. Olaf off-campus students and their surrounding Northfield neighbors.***
- ***We had 25 student interviewees and 22 neighbor interviewees.***

- *Students indicated that relationships with their neighbors were most often non-existent. When asked if they considered themselves neighbors in a community, students reported no. They also voiced concern about how neighbors rarely dealt with them directly when dealing with an issue or complaint. Students claimed neighbors would go straight to the police, which created animosity between the two parties.*
- *Neighbors reported little to no communication with their student neighbors, and were hesitant in forming a relationship with them. They felt that the off-campus college students did not make much effort, if any, in acknowledging or respecting their neighbors.*
- *Typically, the neighbors' only experiences with the students were when they had to deal with excessive noise, out of control parties, vandalism, and general disrespect from trafficking students. These experiences have led to a generalized negative stereotype toward off-campus students.*
- *Neighbors seemed to place a lot of the blame for these problems on the City of Northfield, St. Olaf College, the landlords, and the police department for being unable to establish and enforce policies that effectively deal with these issues.*
- *Possible solutions to deal with these problems are: create a student-neighbor contact list, establish a St. Olaf Hotline where neighbors and students can call to voice their concerns, coordinate community picnics for neighbors and students to meet, or provide a system that transport students.*
- *Further research could involve a greater number and range of students, neighbors, college administration, and Northfield community members.*

- *Our research offers both the St. Olaf and Northfield communities to see the issue(s) at hand, and has started a dialogue between the two parties that we hope will continue.*

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### ***Setting/Community***

Northfield is a small town located in south-central Minnesota founded in 1855 by John W. North. Originally an agricultural farming town nestled up next to the Cannon River; Northfield drew in potential for farmers and success (Visiting Northfield). One of

Northfield's greatest accomplishment celebrated is the famous capture of the notorious bank robber, Jesse James, on September 7, 1876. This historic event lives strong in the events, community, and traditions of Northfield as a yearly Jesse James Day celebration takes place with reenactments of September 7<sup>th</sup> (Visiting Northfield).

Since its establishment 155 years ago, Northfield has flourished into a developing and prosperous city. Today, Northfield lives by its city motto, "Cows, Colleges, and Contentment," which captures its historic past while also reflecting its present affluence. The town consists of 19, 633 residents as of July 2008 (City of Northfield: About). Northfield is mostly homogeneous with 89.4% of its residents identify as Caucasian. The second largest racial group (5.7%) is the Hispanic population (City of Northfield: About). The service industry of Northfield, such as food (Malt-o-Meal) and education (St. Olaf and Carleton) provide jobs for many people with varying socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, Northfield is also home to two nationally recognized colleges: Carleton College and St. Olaf College.

St. Olaf College was founded in 1874 under the leadership of the Rev. Bernt Julius Muus, the Rev. N.A. Quammen and Harald Thorson. Originally an academy for liberal arts education, the college component was added in 1886 and the school was officially named St. Olaf College in 1889. St. Olaf is known as a college of the church; affiliated with the Lutheran Church throughout its history. St. Olaf is a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (About St. Olaf).

St. Olaf College is a traditional 4-year liberal arts college. According to St. Olaf's 2009 Profile, the college currently has 3, 099 students enrolled with 98% (3, 028) full

time students and 2% (71) part-time students. Females outnumber males in enrollment with 55% (1, 678) female students and 45% (1, 355) male students. These 3, 099 students represent 50 states and over 30 countries (St. Olaf College 2009 Profile).

St. Olaf, similarly to Northfield, is fairly homogeneous with 85% (2,628) of students who self-classify as “White, non-Hispanic.” The second largest group with 5% (142) of students is the “Asian” population and 4% (114) of students claim “Race/Ethnicity Unknown” as their classification. The next two largest groups are 2%, “Black or African American” and “Hispanic or Latino” (53 and 57 students respectively) (St. Olaf College Profile 2009).

St. Olaf is situated on a hilltop overlooking historic Northfield and is renowned for its beauty and award-winning architecture. According to the St. Olaf website, 96% of students live in one of the college’s 11 residence halls, 10 service and honor houses, six academic language houses and one diversity house (About St. Olaf College). The remaining four percent, roughly 200 St. Olaf students, live off-campus in the Northfield community.

The majority of off-campus students live within one mile of St. Olaf’s campus. Whether in apartments, rental houses, or housing complexes, the off-campus students are integrated into the Northfield community. These temporary living arrangements give the students an opportunity to prepare for life after college, while still being connected to the St. Olaf’s resources.

## *Methodology*

In order to study the relationship between St. Olaf off-campus students, their Northfield neighbors and St. Olaf administration, we gathered ethnographic data by conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Modeling a study conducted at Illinois State University, our interviews were long conversations rather than question and answer sessions because it created more of a comfortable environment for both parties in the interview (Garcia 2008). All interviewees were informed of the voluntary nature of our research and were assured that we would keep their identities confidential.

### *Student Interviews:*

We conducted interviews with students who live off-campus to acquire their perspectives of the relationship between them and their neighbors. Initially, we obtained a list (names and e-mails) of the off-campus students from Pamela McDowell, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life. Off-campus students were emailed general information about our study, the Participant Statement, and a request to participate in our study. Due to limited time, lack of response from the people we did not know, and ease of accessibility and high response rate from the people we did know, we chose to use our social networks (close friends and classmates) to find interviewees for our research. We contacted the off-campus students to set up an interview time and location via email and face-to-face interaction. A total of 25 interviews were conducted, with 17 male and 8 female participants. Each interview lasted between 15 and 45 minutes and was conducted individually by one researcher. Interviews took place in a variety of locations including participants' places of residence, the Cage (on-campus

cafe), at intramural sports games, outside of the library, and during meals in Stav Hall (the college cafeteria). Because the majority of the interviewees were our own friends, the students were more willing to share their experiences.

*Neighborhood Interviews:*

The neighbors we selected for our study were chosen based upon their proximity to the off-campus student houses. We chose to contact and interview the neighbors by going door-to-door. This method was best for our research because face-to-face interaction makes it possible to observe body language and analyze their tone of voice. General information about our study, the Project Information Statement, and a request to participate in our study were exchanged in the beginning of each interview. Each interview lasted between 15 to 45 minutes and was conducted by two researchers at a time. One researcher was designated to take notes during the interview while the other researcher was designated to conduct the interview as well as engage in meaningful conversation. Depending on the willingness of the neighbors, interviews took place in their homes (kitchen, porch, or living room) or on their front stoop. A total of 22 neighbors were interviewed, with 8 male and 14 female participants. We chose to conduct the door-to-door interviews between 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., due to the potential of young children, job schedules, and consideration for family time, dinner, or sleeping hours.



*St. Olaf Administration:*

We met with Greg Kneser, Dean of Students, to gain a broader knowledge of an administrative perspective regarding off-campus housing. We spoke with him about the logistics of applying for an off-campus house, how many students are accepted to live in the community, and how the St. Olaf administration is involved with the process (for example, by communicating with landlords).

*Additional Methodology:*

We attended a Northfield Town Hall meeting addressing underage alcohol use held on April 14, 2010 in the Pause at St. Olaf College. St. Olaf has had many incidents of alcohol over-consumption and hospitalization. Over the 2009 Halloween weekend, St. Olaf had six students hospitalized for alcohol poisoning. Additionally, in early February 2010, St. Olaf Public Safety responded to four separate alcohol-related calls, which resulted in each student being brought by ambulance to the Northfield Hospital. Due to the amplified influx of alcohol-related hospitalizations, in January 2010, four St. Olaf staff members attended a national meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana. Here they joined with other higher education administrators to develop plans for addressing the role alcohol plays in college communities. Provoked by the New Orleans meeting and previous incidents, with the help of a federal grant, St. Olaf decided to host a town hall meeting. Carleton College, the Northfield Mayor's Task Force on Youth Alcohol and Drug Use and the Healthy Community Initiative also took part in sponsoring the meeting (Butler 2010). Furthermore, this town hall meeting was part of a "national effort by the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, Administration, U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services, to educate youth, parents, caregivers, and other adults about the harmful effects of underage drinking" (STOP Underage Drinking). Participants included roughly 55 community members, students, faculty and staff of St. Olaf and Carleton Colleges, and members of the Northfield Police. Underage drinking, drinking at St. Olaf, Carleton, and in the Northfield community, noise, vandalism, and disrespect were among the broader issues raised, examined, discussed, and deliberated among the participants.

Additionally, we attended and presented our research at the Student Town Hall Discussion on Alcohol on May 5, 2010. This meeting was a follow-up to the Northfield Town Hall meeting in mid-April geared towards the St. Olaf student community. The meeting was held in Trollhaugen (Buntrock Commons, St. Olaf College). The event was sponsored by St. Olaf's Student Government Association, Wellness Center, and the St. Olaf administration. Participants included roughly 150 St. Olaf on- and off-campus students and St. Olaf administration (Pamela McDowell, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life, Dean Kneser, Dean of Students, Rosalyn Eaton-Neeb, Associate Dean of Students, and Kris Vatter, Director of Student Activities). The event stemmed from St. Olaf's motto, 'Never Leave an Ole Behind' encouraging students to never hesitate to help an Ole who is overly intoxicated. It was a moderated discussion about St. Olaf students and alcohol behaviors on campus.

We also contacted the Northfield police to gain an official's perspective on the housing of St. Olaf off-campus students within the Northfield community. Unfortunately,

after contacting them several times with no response we decided to continue our research without their input.

*Limitations:*

Due to our non-random, convenience sampling method, we cannot generalize our findings to the whole St. Olaf off-campus student population or the entire Northfield community population.

With more time, it would have been helpful to interview a greater number and range of students, neighbors, administrators, and community members. Hearing from the police department, bar owners, or taxi cab drivers could have also been beneficial in obtaining more perspectives about St. Olaf off-campus students and the Northfield community. Interactions between off-campus students and their neighbors during the fall semester and interim may have changed by the spring; therefore we are not able to generalize our findings to the entire school year.

When deciding on how to interview the Northfield neighbors, we considered several options. Our first idea was to send a letter in the mail to the neighbors informing them of the research and giving them the option to email us if they would like to participate. We found complications with this method such as federal and local policies as well as our limited budget and an uncertainty as to how high the actual participant response rate would be. We decided the door-to-door method would be best for our research. Although the best fit for our research, the door-to-door method still created limitations in our research. We had a limited time frame to conduct the door-to-door

interviews, from 7:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m., which may have influenced the response rate. Additionally, the door-to-door method had potential to be seen as an invasion of privacy that may have led to the unwillingness to participate from neighbors and/or shortened answers. The door-to-door method was also a large time commitment which resulted in less overall neighborhood interviews conducted by our deadline.

### ***Problem***

The colleges—St. Olaf College and Carleton College—are a large part of the identity of Northfield. The presence of a college in a community—or in Northfield's case, two colleges—can greatly enhance and enlighten the lives of the residents. The students affect the atmosphere of the town by living, working, and playing, but at the same time can also cause problems for the residents, and create a relational tension between the college and the community. Roughly 200 students from St. Olaf College alone are permitted to live off-campus. We chose to investigate the relationship, or lack thereof, between these off-campus students and their Northfield neighbors to learn what they think and know about each other. We also wanted to make educated suggestions as to how to form or improve these relationships.

In order to ground our research, we analyzed previous studies that dealt with the problems we wanted to address. Minimal research has been conducted regarding the issue of off-campus living in relation to neighbors and the social impact it has on residential communities, yet a number of studies have examined similar issues. Kenyon (1997) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of student households on residential communities. After conducting face-to-face interviews with off-campus college students

and their surrounding neighbors about university-community relations, Kenyon (1997) found that the university's neglect of student perspective negatively impacted university-community relations. Students living in off-campus homes within residential neighborhoods were perceived by both residents, and themselves, to form a "community within a community" (Kenyon 1997:286), neglecting the fact that they were outside of their university boundaries.

Hubbard (2009) completed a case study at a university in the United Kingdom that focused on the increase of off-campus housing and the decline of students living on campus. Hubbard (2009) found that the increase of these students in the neighborhoods made the living less enjoyable for surrounding neighbors, and was even thought to decrease the value of their property. Among these problems, the neighbors also voiced complaints about unkempt yards and loudness at all times of the day, notably on weekends. The university is attempting to lure students back to living on campus but many students argue that their off-campus housing is more affordable and offers a better place for quiet study, and that life without a meal plan was more manageable.

Kenyon (1997) analyzed the impact of student households on residential communities. She found that many of the neighbors were frustrated that the students who lived among them kept poorly maintained properties. Landlords are able to let these properties stay in such poor conditions because they know they will always have students wanting to rent; as a result of this neglect of the houses' appearances the property values of the surrounding houses are lowered.

Patterson Lorenzetti (2009) found that many students feel disconnected when they live in off-campus facilities and do not receive the benefits that dorm living has to

offer. Mansfield University in Pennsylvania has been trying to encourage these off-campus students to become more involved in campus life. Off-campus students are caught in-between living in a college community and a residential community. They are forced to deal with the policies set by the college as well as policies set by the residential community. However, many students disrespect the residential community by drinking, being loud, and vandalizing property.

We found several studies that pertained to the issue of alcohol and off-campus living. Although alcohol use is not the only issue that interferes with the relationship between neighbors and college students, it has been identified as a major contributor to the miscommunication between the two parties. A study conducted by Wechsler et al. (2002) examined how college neighbors were affected secondhand by alcohol use. Disturbances such as excessive noise, vandalism, drunkenness, vomiting, and urination led to a reportedly lower quality of neighborhood life. Several of these secondhand affects were revealed in our neighbor interviews. Other disturbances mentioned by the neighbors included knocked over flower beds, half-eaten flowers, removal of furniture, and beer bottles thrown carelessly on lawns.

The researchers also looked at the number of alcohol outlets defined as either on-premise (bars and nightclubs) or off-premise (liquor stores) and found that alcohol outlets located within a mile of the college encouraged heavier drinking (Wechsler et al. 2002:426). We used this information to identify establishments in Northfield that could be part of this one mile radius to St. Olaf College. Froggy Bottoms, The Contented Cow, The Reubenstein, and the Northfield Liquor store are all close to one mile of the St. Olaf campus, and residents living between the college and these establishments have been

more likely to report noise and disturbances directly related to alcohol.

A study conducted by DeJong and Vehige (2008) found that any conflicting issues between students and residents had a ripple effect. Neighborhood residents calling the police put a strain on the law enforcement and distracted them from other work. Residents calling campus officials had little understanding of their responsibilities and failed to recognize that community problems went beyond the officials' roles as monitors of student safety (DeJong and Vehige 2008). DeJong and Vehige (2008) recognized the growing tension between colleges and communities and suggested possible methods to solve the problem, such as open lines of communication, telephone hotlines for complaints, education for students on how to be respectful and responsible as a community neighbor, how to build connections, encouraging landlords to have disciplinary record checks, and passing and enforcing new ordinances. This research helped us decide who to interview and how to form interview questions that would help us gain a broader background perspective on the college and community relationship. It also helped us develop a list of possible solutions that have been suggested in the past.

Zimmerman (2004) researched the benefits, consequences, and overall effectiveness of partnerships between campuses and communities. He found that “participants in coalitions deliver consistent and unified messages to make their case for policies and programs leading to environmental change” (2004:1). Zimmerman (2004) found that an environment that treats the college and its surrounding community as a single unit gives the student population and neighboring community the opportunity to confront misunderstandings between the two parties. A coalition “open[s] new lines of communication between campus and community leaders” as well as “lead[ing] to

improved collaboration between campus and community police” (Zimmerman 2004:2). But universities and colleges need to do their research before embarking on a coalition with the community. Zimmerman (2004) found many benefits from forming campus and community alliances but the effort, time, and support mandatory on both parts to make such a relationship successful is a large commitment.

## **Findings**

### *Administrative Perspective:*

To better understand the college's perspective of the relationship between off-campus students and the Northfield neighbors, we first interviewed Dean Greg Kneser, the Dean of Students at St. Olaf College. Dean Kneser reported that he has been impressed with the off-campus students recently compared to years in the past. He has seen an improvement and stated that “off-campus [living] has settled down” in comparison to four years ago when off-campus housing and students were a "messy" issue in the Northfield community. St. Olaf was adamant in working with the Northfield community and landlords to revise the Northfield city rental code. The rental code was revised in 2007 "to provide minimum standards to safeguard life, personal health and safety, and the public welfare by regulating and controlling the use and occupancy, maintenance and repair of all buildings and structures within the city which are used for the purpose of rental housing" (City Council of Northfield, 2007:1). The implementation of the code, Dean Kneser believes, has created a better relationship between the college, the landlords, and the off-campus students. With student safety as the main priority, it is important to have the St. Olaf administration closely involved with off-campus students' living.



More recently, especially this year with the improvement of behaviors, Dean Kneser emphasized that off-campus housing and students are not necessarily the problem. Rather he thinks that the problem is “the walkers”: students walking up and down, through and around the neighborhoods between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. being loud and disruptive and vandalizing yards. Much of the blame gets placed upon the students who live off-campus; however he acknowledges that these walkers may just as likely be the on-campus students in transit.

In addressing how to solve this current issue, Dean Kneser recognized that there a number of possible solutions. Among some of his suggestions were a transportation service, a no tolerance policy for being “wasted” (which can be defined as a level of intoxication that severely impedes functioning), and stricter rules, consequences, and discipline for offenders. He wanted the students to know what is expected of them and left us with a question to ponder: "How do you get students to change their behavior?"

Following our interview, Dean Kneser further addressed the issue of alcohol consumption via an e-mail sent to the students at St. Olaf College on April 27, 2010. He acknowledged that the issue needs to be addressed with not only off-campus students, but the whole student body. He writes:

I have received a number of complaints personally, as well as others that have come to us via community forums and select individuals, about the late-night conduct of students passing through residential neighborhoods. Most complaints involve students walking up and down St. Olaf Avenue late at night, particularly on weekends between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. Specifically, neighbors have told stories of lawn furniture

being vandalized, flower beds being torn up, students being asked to quiet down and responding with profanity. Further, families with children talk about being awakened by yelling, breaking glass and general disrespect for the community. As you can imagine, this is hard for us to hear, but the incidents are real, and have a lasting effect on the perception of ALL St. Olaf students...I would ask that students hold each other accountable and insist on civility among each other. Further, if you know who might be responsible for these incidents, please share their names with us, and we will address them. St. Olaf does not exist in a vacuum, and we can not act as if we do. This means acting responsibly in our community, and taking account when we cause harm. I am appealing to the better angels of our character to do just that.

*Student Perspective:*

When interviewing the students regarding their motives to live off-campus, we found that the majority wanted a chance to transition between dorm life and the life they anticipated after college—the real world. Living off-campus served as a learning opportunity by teaching students how to pay their own bills, cook, and acquire skills to live on their own. Many of the students reported that they wanted the freedom they did not experience under the residence life policies on campus. Some students even reported that they wanted their own room so they would be able to have sex without having to worry about being too loud in the dorms. After experiencing off-campus living, one senior female expressed mixed feelings about her living situation. She liked her own space but also missed the “dorm atmosphere and being closer to more of her friends.”

Many students indicated that the relationships they had with their neighbors were non-existent. Because students only spend a small amount of time in the neighborhoods aside from the weekends, many feel that there is not much opportunity to form a bond with their neighbors. They also reported that they did not observe much interaction between the other neighbors either. When asked if they considered themselves neighbors in a community, students said no. One student commented further to say that his time spent living off-campus was a temporary arrangement, and felt no need to try to form a relationship.

Students reported that the majority of experiences they have had with their neighbors have been negative. Most have involved scolding or calls to the dean of the college or the police department. The students voiced that they would appreciate being warned before the neighbors automatically relied on extreme measures.

The students do not believe that they should be targeted as the main problem, because the problem is, as one senior female student sees it, "The kids coming off campus. It is the freshmen and sophomores that roam around terrorizing the neighborhoods and knocking on doors." This senior had further suggestions, "Get a 'Drunk Bus', it would solve all of the problems that the neighbors are having."

This is similar to a transportation system sponsored by the Student Senate at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. They provide the 'GusBus' which safely transports students to nine nearby street corners and all dormitories on campus (Gustavus Adolphus College Student Senate). This female student has used the GusBus at Gustavus and said it was a convenient and clever way to prevent students from roaming through residential neighborhoods. She thinks that such a bus could be

worthwhile at St. Olaf College.

In separate instances of noise complaint, two households of male students were asked to write letters apologizing to the neighbors offended by their loud behavior. One household did not write the letter. The other household complied when asked to write the letter and received a reduction of their citation. In the first case, the lack of desire to reconcile pushed the neighbors further apart, while the second scenario seemed to recreate neutrality between the two parties.

Not all reported interactions with neighbors were negative. Students indicated some instances of positive contact, for example receiving help moving a car out of the snow. These interactions, though seldom, are the types of behaviors that facilitate friendly relations. Through the process of our interviews, we have been able to draw a number of conclusions about the perceived relationships off-campus students have with their neighbors and about the general experience of living off-campus at St. Olaf. The relationships between the two parties are diminished because of the lack of communication and lack of effort from both sides. It is possible for the relationship to be improved by increasing student awareness about the problems the neighbors have discussed with us.

*Neighbor Perspective:*

Neighbors, like many of the off-campus students, claim to have little to no relationship with the St. Olaf students surrounding them. According to most neighbors, students do not invest much time into their neighborhood because they consider themselves more a part of the St. Olaf community. Many neighbors also claimed that a

subject of disagreement between them and the students was the difference in “body clocks”; Neighbors go to bed early because of commitments with jobs or school while students stay up late, depending on the day of the week, studying or partying.

While the fault of the non-existent relationship does not lie solely with the off-campus students, some of the parties that take place at their houses further deter some neighbors from wanting to form a relationship. As a result of these parties, neighbors deal with issues of excessive noise, vandalism, and an overall elitist attitude embodied by students. One neighbor stated,

I understand college living. I went to Gustavus myself, but living in a residential neighborhood as a college student directly clashes with community values. The students aren't wrong, but they need to realize that they are no longer living in dorms. That is the point of friction.

Other problems that neighbors have dealt with include trash being thrown into their yard, students urinating or vomiting on their property, being woken up in the early hours of the morning by students bowling with beer bottles in the street, and crowded streets due to students occupying the available parking spaces. One community member reported that their student neighbors from five years ago “were wild enough to drive a Methodist minister to drink.” Another said, “I’ve got a family and do not want to be putting up with their shit and their smoking dope in the back yard.” These express the personal frustrations that they or their family are dealing with directly. Other neighbors claimed that behaviors such as the aforementioned combined with college neighbors who fail to keep their house

or lawn looking tidy can decrease the property value and make their neighborhood unattractive for potential buyers.

Though it may seem like the detriments outweigh the benefits of living next to these students, neighbors were adamant to share aspects they *do* enjoy about living near college students. They enjoy the added energy that living in a college town brings. One woman fondly recounted that their student neighbors shoveled their walkway on snowy days, and Dean Kneser mentioned that his son mows the lawn of his college neighbors in return for homemade cookies. Another man claimed that his neighbors, although they threw the occasional party, would always inform him ahead of time and promise to keep noise levels down. Other neighbors have a system of communication in place for problems that arise, like exchanging phone numbers in the fall so that they do not have to walk into a crowded party when they need the students to quiet down.

In addition, most of these neighbors also seemed to understand that the full blame cannot be directed towards the off-campus students alone; instead, the neighbors believed that some of the blame should also be directed at the trafficking students who wander drunkenly through the streets at night on their way to the bars or the off-campus parties. The students were not the only targets of the complaints. Much of the neighbors' aggravation seemed to be directed at the City of Northfield, St. Olaf, the landlords, and the police department for failing to establish and enforce a policy to deal with these problems effectively. One neighbor stated,

The city council is corrupt because of the influence of the two colleges. Northfield has its thumb firmly up its ass with their rules and scenarios. Northfield gets bailed out of a lot of dumb decisions because of Carleton and St. Olaf. People want to live here, and it is necessary that the town appeals to outsiders. In order to fix problems, the city council needs to be direct with their rules. If the problem is noise, then the city needs to legislate against noise. When I went to Gustavus, there was a three strike policy, and after three strikes you lost your rental license. The rules need to be straight to the point.

These neighbors wished that students had a better understanding of what it means to be a respectful member of a community, and that this responsibility falls heavily on the college, landlords, police department, and the city of Northfield to successfully communicate the message to these off-campus students.

*Community Perspective:*

After attending the Northfield Town Hall meeting regarding underage drinking on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the concerns that the students, community members, and administration of both colleges have were raised. Underage drinking is an issue that plagues college campuses across the nation, and the forum facilitated an open dialogue, as well as allowed all attendees an opportunity to write down any questions they had about the issues discussed. As one community member noted, “Should the goal be to *stop* underage drinking? Or do we need to find ways to lessen the problem of binge drinking?” If we preach abstinence from alcohol, it is predicted that no change will come

about. Rather if we teach safe drinking and ways to address the issue, we would be able to reach a larger population of students who would be more receptive to this sort of message.

The Student Town Hall meeting, held on May 5, 2010, allowed students to voice their opinions, suggestions, and thoughts about drinking at St. Olaf College. The meeting was not issued to address St. Olaf's drinking policy but to initiate dialogue between students as well as with administration. Student participants ranged from JC's (Junior Counselors) to off-campus students, freshman to seniors, athletes to musicians, and so forth. Students expressed a variety of different opinions about the drinking issue, however, a majority, if not all, students agreed that there was a problem. St. Olaf administration was present to answer any questions, but the meeting was geared towards open discussion by students and between students. One JC stated, "I know my corridor boys drink but we try to keep our door open at all times, to offer a safe and fun outlet if they need hang out, talk, or just play video games." Some students claimed that freshman are the ones who are inexperienced and immature and "don't know how to control themselves" in drinking situations. One student even went to addressing the administration and asked, "What will you do for us?" Students were creative with the solutions to address the drinking issue. One student, while several agreed, suggested "transportation for the students so we can stop bothering the Northfield community," while one student voiced, "Maybe we need more education, more outlets, more something, but at the end of the day, it is the St. Olaf students who need to step up, take responsibility for their actions, and be respectful of the St. Olaf and Northfield community." While this meeting allowed students to hear and voice opinions and



suggestions, ultimately, it has started a dialogue that will hopefully continue in and with the future years of the students and college.

*Analysis:*

Within other college communities, off-campus students and neighbors deal with similar issues, such as alcohol abuse, noise level, and misunderstandings. When it comes to solutions to the problem, our interviews have given us insight to a number of possibilities for change. The ultimate goal of our study was to learn how to improve neighbor-student relations and enhance community living. Because our topic of study is relatively understudied in regards to ethnographic research, our results are hard to generalize to other universities and college experiences. With our data, we are able to analyze the St. Olaf community's experience with off-campus living, and more specifically, St. Olaf can derive solutions from what our data has shown. One solution that was already mentioned by a number of interviewees would be a transportation service similar to that of the Gus Bus. By offering safe alternatives to students, colleges and universities may eliminate many of the issues complained about by surrounding neighbors, such as noise, vandalism, and students walking through lawns in the middle of the night. Other possibilities are a St. Olaf Hotline created for neighbors to voice their concerns, a joint St. Olaf and Northfield community barbeque or picnic to initiate communication and friendly relations, or a phone number exchange at the start of each year.

***Future Research/ Conclusion:***

Our research has begun a conversation that will be carried far into the future. To raise awareness about the issues people want to see solved in their own communities is the first step in solving the problem. In talking to administration, students, and neighbors, we have been able to gather information on the main issues each party is facing. Most of the neighbors that we interviewed were extremely grateful that we were conducting our study, and were elated to see students interested in helping the relationship between off-campus students and Northfield neighbors.

Further research, such as a more extensive replication of our original study, would be beneficial to expand the conversation about change and work in-depth with the different parties to move toward resolution and change. We, as researchers, have served as mediators between the students, neighbors, and administration and are among the first people to approach the problem head on and work towards bettering social relationships within the St. Olaf and Northfield communities.

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