

The Needs and Demands of Students as a part of the St. Olaf College Community

373 Ethnographic Research Methods

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Executive Summary:

The Needs and Demands of Students as Part of the St. Olaf College Community: On-Campus and Off-Campus Living Setting

St. Olaf College; a sample of those living in on-campus dormitories along with a sample of those living in off-campus housing. This including students living within the St. Olaf Community as separate from those students living within the Northfield Community.

Problem

Students come to St. Olaf not only for a higher level of education but to be an individual contributing to a larger community. St. Olaf provides this community through the close proximity of living arrangements, easy-to-reach staff and faculty members, and the opportunity to gain life long friendships. Despite this, St. Olaf statistics show that surprisingly only 65% of students live on campus. We wish to examine the migration of those students who choose to move to off-campus housing.

Methodology

We interviewed a total of thirteen students living on and off campus. This personal information of the students along with research performed gave us our findings.

Observations

- Students who live on campus tend to be financially dependent on their parental guardians and focus more on convenience and social security within their lives.

1. Students who live on campus tend not to believe they do not need much responsibility in comparison to those who live off campus.
2. Students living on campus also crave more personal space and many times feel forced to see their peers.
3. Students living off campus feel more independent with more freedom to dictate their own student life; this involves more

- responsibility of the individual to take care of their own economical, social, and other personal needs.
4. Though students living off campus feel it is less convenient, they also desire social security, finding it within a “new community,” separate from the St. Olaf environment.

Abstract

The average St. Olaf student who attends this 32,000-dollar school is academically motivated through leadership, creativity, and hard work. As part of attending the St. Olaf Community, the student automatically gains social priorities and aspirations: gaining and maintaining friend and family relationships, having a sense of community and security, and lastly finding independence and freedom as a means of escape within the community. In terms of our choice as individuals at this institution, there are two activities that can be made out of the college experience as a St. Olaf student: you can agree to the demands and desires and therefore comply with the institution, or you can embrace a subversive point of view, knowing that your own actions are mere reactions to the given environment. From these two conclusive viewpoints it can be more readily understood that the St. Olaf community the life of a student at this institution becomes the experience that he/ she creates for themselves.

Statement of the Problem

St. Olaf College strives to be an inclusive community, respecting those of differing backgrounds and beliefs. Through its curriculum, campus life, and off-campus programs, it stimulates students’ critical thinking and heightens their moral sensitivity; it encourages them to be seekers of truth, leading lives of unselfish service to others; and it challenges them to be responsible and knowledgeable citizens of the world.

As students at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, it becomes quite evident that we have joined a school not only offering an excellent higher level of education, but also a close community of faculty, staff, friends and family. We feel that within the small and proposed “inclusive” community of diverse persons, St. Olaf’s four- year on campus housing contributes to the “pull” of acceptance and love. In order to further understand this close community, we have interviewed students living on and off the St. Olaf campus, gathering data, gaining perspectives and making conclusions as to the needs and values of St. Olaf students. As we stated in our project statement, we are especially interested in those that move out of the close community of the St. Olaf campus:

The purpose of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the

social issues, and motives behind a students desire to live off campus...by conducting this research we hope to find a relation to the move away from campus with greater social issues here on campus.

Methodology- For On- Campus Housing

The questions asked for the On-Campus interviews are identical to those asked for the Off-Campus Housing interviews. The goal in conducting these personal interviews was to identify and provide a comparison to the off-campus housing interviews in reaching an overall definition, meaning, and more complete understanding of community on the St. Olaf College campus. With both individual and social demands within a community in mind, the general questions asked for our campus ethnography were the open ended and neutral. Once the basic answers to these questions have been delicately and individually transferred, the conclusions and findings of these on-campus and off-campus interviews are summarized. Finally, the meaning of these main factors and essential qualities in a “community” which are found will be more wholly researched and digested. Within the critical analysis of the data being collected we found that operating from a grounded theory from the beginning would perhaps skew the final analysis. Still, we did have some thoughts in mind from the start such as looking fuctionalism, and how it may be applied to institutional structures that may appear oppressive; as well as exchange theory to approach the meaning of action and the process of making value of it.

Setting

Community,

1. A group of people living in the same locality and under the same government.
2. The district or locality in which such a group lives.
 - a. Similarity or identity: a community of interests.
 - b. Sharing, participation, and fellowship

Dictionary.com

As we begin our review, let us first begin by saying that for most students at St. Olaf College, belonging to a certain community is of utmost importance for that student's esteem. Especially at such a small college (approximately 3000 students), it seems belonging to a specific community cannot be avoided: though this might be the exact purpose for some student's ambition to move off-campus. When we starting examining how to approach the question of why students have a desire to live off campus as a greater social issue and one of the underlying problems within the St. Olaf community, it became apparent to dissect this phenomena by conducting personal interviews

with not only students who live in *off*-campus housing. It is also essential to contrast the information gathered by personal interviews with those living in *on*-campus housing; this including dormitories and what the St. Olaf lingo dubs as “honor houses.”

The mission at hand as we went along analyzing these personal interviews became answering the standard question of: “1. If then, 2. Why?” And so our research developed into a process of analyzing the institution of the college, in which we not only conducted personal interviews but gathered and reviewed the residential history of the college understand the development of the St. Olaf environment and community. Although the institutional structure may very well be a factor in understanding the St. Olaf community, the more significant discovery and understanding that we have seen, has come down to the basic needs and values of an individual as a part of a community. The major factors contributing to a productive and active community include the satisfaction of individual and group values and goals; including those such as identity, productivity, vocation, moral pursuits, and happiness.

We decided not only to dissect the statistical meaning and development of the campus environment and community, but more importantly to research and ask questions in relation to the human values that are more latent within the community. As mentioned above, it is the student’s humanitarian need and the social priorities in life that drives him/ her to experience the St. Olaf College community to the fullest potential: the friend and family relationships, the sense of community and security, and lastly finding independence and freedom as a means of escape within that community. What drives us as students are not only our American values (independence and freedom), but also more specially the ambition to do the good, self-achievement, and exchanging love.

The Interviews: On-Campus

The first interview conducted was with a junior living in the St. Olaf dormitory “Rand,” aged 20. She studies Biology as her major. When asked why she asked to live on-campus and in a dorm, she replied that the main concern was her parents. They would not pay for off-campus housing, and she does not have a job to pay for this. This student wanted to especially emphasize, “we have all of our lives to live off-campus.” It is also convenient: the student does not have to worry about cooking his/her own food, and additional bills do not have to be paid. She chose Rand as the dormitory to live in during her junior year because of smaller, day-to-day conveniences and

comfort: it has a personable bathroom, taller ceilings; an upgrade from her past dormitory experiences at Olaf, and the location relative to other dorms was also a priority. She also mentioned the importance of the other students and the extra community that added to the decision with Rand.

One of the most important considerations in this student's decision to live on-campus was, as mentioned above, the opinions of her parents. She does not think living off campus would affect the relationship she has with her parents, the amount of time she talks to them per week would not change, though those relationships with those who live around her, she thinks would eventually change from living in a less concentrated environment. This biology major says she would "be around people less, so [therefore] I would feel forced to talk to them more."

Although since she lives on campus, this student feels that her social relationships have been positively affected. Maybe due to her junior status, she feels there are "less sub groups and less cliques." Students are "forced to be each others neighbors," and there are "more opportunities to see people." One downside from the St. Olaf College community would be the seclusion from the Northfield community. In spite of this seclusion from the community, this student clearly stated that she would live on campus again, and that "she would not want to live off campus." This may have something to do with the fact that she does not consider herself financially independent, even replying "no" and laughing when the question was asked.

Overall this 20 year old seems to think her social life is satisfactory. Life is "rockin' especially on the weekends," and it is "easier to socialize" on campus. Although student social life seems to be getting better as the years progress, this student still feels "forced" and obligated to talk and see people, and takes into consideration that living off campus it would be "easier to avoid" other students when wanting to escape social pressures or day-to-day stresses. As a 20 year-old student, already having lived 3 school years away from home, this student still remains reliant and dependent on her family; both economically and emotionally, as evidence of speaking to her mother once a day. She also admits it's a "different dynamic" living on campus, but more importantly the complexity and factors to live on campus "doesn't strengthen or weaken [her academia]." She also feels she is not asked to be as responsible on campus as she would off, as living off campus would "freeze obligations," but it also causes a "disconnec[tion]" to St. Olaf community life. Pointing out the notices that Fred Behr, head of public safety at St. Olaf, delivers to warn students of a severe thunderstorms, for this student it remains that this campus "take[s] care of things for you, providing a much needed "stable foundation."

For the next personal interview, a student living in a quad-suite also emphasized the “convenience” of living on campus. Though also living in Rand, she chose to live here because other rooms on campus were taken, and living on-campus provides a chance for students to “eat healthier.” Besides the less responsibility required for eating healthy, living on campus in general requires less demanding responsibilities to care for oneself. It is maybe for this reason that the thoughts of her parental guardians were not a big factor in her decisions to live in the dorms, and for this reason she also doubts her relationship and communication with her parents would be any different if she lived off campus.

The social environment of this student is easily created and maintained living on campus. She agrees that it is easiest to stay friends with those friends that she has living on campus, just for the fact that students are able to “see more people” at a higher frequency than if she lived off campus. Though there is this ease to staying close to her friends, one downside of the St. Olaf student body is that it is “homogeneous, and cliquey.” There is also a “separation between classes” that is more strongly felt. Though also financially dependent on her parental guardians as the first student interviewed, there exist surprisingly different perceptions on separation and exclusiveness between the first two students interviewed.

Unfortunately she will be creating her own gap and distance from the St. Olaf community by moving off campus for her Senior year: “The first years were good in making friends, but it is time to be on my own.” Right now there are feelings of “suffocation,” and a time for change seems necessary as a solution to these feelings. Reemphasizing her need for alone time, she says it “will be hard to study in the house...but I don’t think anything would change when I move off campus.” For this young woman, alone time is highly desirable.

Another student craved the lofted ceilings of Rand, though an alternative choice would have been to live in the pods in Ytterboe, labeling them as “the diamond in the rough.” Her parents are indifferent to her living on or off campus, in which she predicts that the plans she has to move off campus will not change the relationship and the communication she has with them. Nonetheless, it appears that this indifference that her parental guardians feel to their daughter’s choice of living on and off campus does not matter to her in terms of how she defines the St. Olaf community as a “trusting” social environment, “embracing the rich [college mission] statement.” She defines the St. Olaf community as also “friendly, warm, and welcoming.”

Also financially dependent on family members, this student would also choose to not live on campus again, “it was good while it lasted, but I’m done.” As a junior, she feels that in this time of maturing, it is also “time to find the

nest.” Although in terms of her social life, she agrees that it is “better to be on campus.” Able to understand the negative consequences, this student realizes that after attending a small liberal arts college for 4 years, and living on campus for the majority of it, there will be a “shock to the real world.”

As a studious math and art major, this girl claims one major downside to her academic life: it is “hard to study in the dorm rooms,” but to make up for it there are computer labs handy. Considering her bookish habits, we were able to easily ask about her personality. When asked whether she is an extrovert or an introvert, she conclusively claimed she has extrovert tendencies “though only with friends.” Though at St. Olaf where many large social scenes are unavoidable, she is “dominated by her introvert side.”

Another junior at St. Olaf College who lives on campus claims it is a “hassle to live off campus.” Even though she rarely speaks to her parents, and they have no say on her decision to live on campus, living in the Thorson dormitory was preferable to living in off campus housing. Money is also a big issue for this student: “if I lived off campus, I might have to talk to [my parents] to ask for money.”

As for the community, which she creates, this junior Sociology major likes having friends off campus, but is more partial to the close ties she has with her friends on campus. The close proximity of the dorms provides for easier access, to “visit dorm to dorm.” She is also able to “save money, see random people, and get some privacy.” She would agree to that which most of the interviewees have said, a downside to the St. Olaf community would be that it is “cliquey.” She is also quick to point out that an individual’s point of reference and definition of community “depends on [their] personality.”

This insightful student also claims to do “her own thing,” as an independent woman. Although she considers herself relatively independent, she is not completely independent financially, though she “[tries] to be as much as possible.” For her and her family, she claims her finances seem to come from “one big pool of money.” There are “no expectations” from her family to pay for her schooling, but she makes it clear she “doesn’t like asking for money.” Living on campus, she is able to spend less on the usual daily expenses of gas, food, and new clothes: “I borrow stuff from friends.” More specifically, living on campus she is able to eat more, where the “food is readily available.”

Next year as a senior, she has considered living off campus, where there might be a possibility for “a better environment to have fun with friends in the houses,” and an improvement and change from the usual social atmosphere. Though this is not the case, if she were to attend college for a 5th year, this junior would choose to live off campus. Either way she predicts her

academics would not be affected, as her “homework is done in my own room anyways.”

Concluding the On campus Interviews

After reviewing the on campus interviews, there were two main concentrated themes that stood out in which we were able to categorize evidence taken from the personal interviews: the theme of personal and social convenience and the overall theme of community. There were also less noticeable themes, but just as equally significant to understanding the St. Olaf community. These factors include independence, space, and responsibility. Those that said it was a “hassle” to live off campus, a convenience to live on campus, mentioned there are more opportunities to see people and the ease of visiting friends, those that demanded personal space, were not financially independent, and those that noticed a lack for the demand for “real life” responsibility, all desire the basic humanitarian needs and consider the following priorities in their social life: friend and family relationships, the sense of community and security, and finding independence and freedom as a means of escape within that community. Many may consider St. Olaf College the “mother” of its students, but in the end the St. Olaf College community experience is what the individual makes of it. There are many differences between people, but the intrinsic values between them remains the same: a search for identity, ambition for successful productivity, vocational aspirations, moral pursuits, and the everlasting quest for happiness.

Interviews: Off-Campus

The purpose of a college education is to be prepared with the skills for employment and becoming well-rounded students, yet an aspect of the college environment is that there is no emphasis on how well the schools prepare students for the challenges of life off campus. The following addresses the interviews of students that live off campus and the issues that they have come to understand.

The students that presently live off campus are mostly seniors at St. Olaf, however they would be what we could call “repeat offenders” in that almost all of these students have lived off campus before this point in their college

careers. The students in question had either taken part in the St. Olaf honor houses or continued to live on their own. Very few students were off campus for the first time, this is in part due to the fact that all freshman students must live on campus and finding a place to live is based upon financial stability. Most pertinent for each of the interviewees were the issues of independence and personal responsibility; still there was something within their responses that they had not entirely expected when they had moved off campus.

In regards to the previously mentioned issue of being a “repeat offender” students had very strong opinions on the topic. Upon asking the students this question the response was overwhelming, “go back on campus? No, I couldn’t go back there again.” said a senior philosophy major. The attitude that was explained to the researchers was something similar to the saying “you can never go home again”. This student had described his off campus living as a very changing decision; they had referred to on campus living as “not real.” He had also addressed a certain lack of options of things to do when on campus, and the lasting effect was stifling; which also describes why he found living off campus “more fun.”

Within all of the interviews this perception had become very prevalent. He described the necessity to escape the structure of St. Olaf in the sense of the immediate environment as well as certain aspects of the social environment that had become disagreeable to him as well as others. His means of survival was also very similar to that of all the other off campus students in that the tendency was to live in a house or a close proximity of other students. This is by no means true for everyone. One of the students found that the privacy and solitude of living alone off campus had been the best thing that they did for themselves and had also facilitated the “do what I want” mentality. Still most students lived in houses of at least four, and even a multi-plex.

Addressing the issue of doing what one wants, the greater feeling of escape was very clear. As one student described: “my opinion of college was based upon the experience of my older sister, who certainly lived a responsible, but free lifestyle... and I was really surprised as to how controlling this school (St. Olaf College) was.” One thing that all these students had brought to the researcher’s attention was the question of freedom of choice and the way the institution controls what choices could be made. These students had addressed that the college environment had been stifling in the sense that they couldn’t exactly do what they wanted to do. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a senior psychology major:

Researcher: “You had earlier said that your main reason for leaving was freedom. What was it that you desired freedom from?

Interviewee: "It's, totally the institution, man. I feel like the school is always trying to catch me doing something wrong. It's like I can't be trusted"

Another student made the claim that "I want to be ready for the real world, and I can do that without an RA in my house." Some students did not feel as strongly about the issue of structural control because some saw it as more of a matter of adjustment and how well someone can manage under those pressures.

The institutional structures were not the only reasons for the decision to flee. One student had explained that the "dorm life just wasn't any fun." A senior theatre major had described the social structure of the St. Olaf campus as "naïve." citing reasons for this mentality of receiving an allowance from the parents, religion, money and parental involvement. For this student living off campus was a social marker, saying "if I meet someone who lives off campus and works more than fifteen hours a week, I'll admit to having more respect for that person." He told us that living off campus and through work, a great deal of friends and interpersonal connections are made. This same student had some great insight into how the mentality in question becomes normal. He described the first year dorm experience as "a forced exercise in codependency", saying that we voluntarily segregate ourselves as part of the learning experience of being a student at this college.

To return to the issue of "going home again," the students had spoken briefly about the involvement of their parents in their decision to move off campus. When the parents came into question the aspect of work and financial stability had worked its way into the question. One student had described her experience of living off campus as being perfectly natural. She had described a high level involvement with her parents, in that they spoke and saw each other very regularly. The fact that she was no longer in the dorms didn't really cause any concern for her parents; they in fact encouraged her decision saying, "yeah, they really don't care that much." The point was made that she was financially independent from them having a steady job and working over thirty hours a week. This student explained that working and living off campus are things that we are all going to have to do eventually. Having adequate funds and living a healthy lifestyle are, to her, "all a matter of making initiative."

Parental involvement for these students is very much like that of the student that was talked about earlier. The parents in most cases had either allowed the move to be made, or even encouraged it. One student said, "My parents thought it would be good for me, though they could have supported me." Even in my own experience my parents were hesitant, but once they saw how happy I was they respected my decision. This is the case for most of the students in that almost every one of them worked at least twenty hours a week, but they could always count on their parents as something of a safety net in

case their financial situation had become slightly unstable.

This brings us right back to the reasons and justifications for living off campus. The ability to be financially independent and responsible for one's own lifestyle for some is a great source of pride. The students explained that a great deal of the reasons to leave would fall under the criteria of being independent and responsible. To have the "freedom of choice," as one student put it could, in this situation, be attained by becoming independent of the structures of the college. Most of these issues were referred to as an adult way of conducting oneself. Without having the "RA in the house," the temptation to slack off, drink and not get work done becomes stronger and students found that they were finally responsible for their own actions.

Inherent problems and concerns were just as prominent if not as abundant as the benefits of living away from campus. By moving away from campus a whole new set of worries was on students minds; some were expected but others were not until that point. For example a nice thing about living on campus is the not fact that the facilities are geared for students who live on campus, but that it is the only place things like computers are necessary. These things provide problems for students who don't possess these things, making writing papers an even greater chore (something that has become even more of a problem for myself). One student even admitted that, "sometimes I don't even know how I got all my work done on time."

Time itself becomes an even more precious commodity off campus for several reasons. Speaking from experience it takes me at least twenty minutes to walk from my home to campus; for some the distance is even greater. When students have to work at least thirty hours a week there is less time and especially energy to do schoolwork. More than one student could have been quoted to say "sometimes I just want to sit in front of the TV all day." Admittedly it had occurred on several occasions. The theatre major explained that, "it's tempting to slack, and even trickier to finish what you've started."

One thing that was unexpected was the issue of substance use. The response to this question was very interesting, not because drinking had been a pivotal part of their decision to leave the campus, especially to get away from a dry campus. The general feeling was that while off campus the amount students drank greatly increased. A number of factors were provided for this reason, one being that if you are closer to the downtown area going to the bar was less than a ten minute walk away for many, thus finding a ride home or simply getting there was much easier. The senior philosophy major explained that everyone who lived off campus was 21 and that it was very much a binding aspect of the social life of everyone who was off campus. Another thing explained was that the frequency did increase, however after this point he told

us that he “certainly don’t binge drink like I used to, I think I have become more responsible about that”. Many explained that once they graduate they don’t see themselves drinking or using any other substance, as they do now. It is more of a way that they see their friends.

Now I have explained most of the aspects of off campus life for students. However there is one thing that I have come across that had surprised almost every off campus student, which was what had formed: the “new community.” The students explained that through moving off campus they had lost touch with a great many people they had called friends at one time, so the bottom had somewhat dropped out of their social lives. “I rarely see anyone I used to hang out with anymore, that is if I don’t see them on campus” one student said. Still something had happened for all those that work downtown and live off campus. Each student had reported something to the effect of a rebuilding of their particular social landscape; in essence a new community was formed.

When asked whether or not they were surprised that this had happened the answers were fairly similar. As one student put it, “I was very surprised to find what had happened to my core group of friends. The people that I see every night are either the people I live with or people that work downtown.” Several benefits were reported back as to why this community suited those that lived off campus. According to the senior American studies major, “there is a lot more diversity with the people I’m around now, there’s a like-mindedness.” Reasons for this are hard to pin down absolutely. One student offered the explanation that everyone within the new community had the same problems and things to talk about, as well as the fact the new community’s network made it that everyone had some form of connection to one another through either work or school.

In many interviews it was found that as soon as one started working downtown they felt a connection to the Northfield community that they had never felt before. Many claimed that they felt like they now had a life of their own because of this. The psychology major explained that this new life and community felt more realistic because it isn’t nearly as contrived as the on campus community had been. Also the responsibilities of living off campus had increased the importance of the people that he now had around him. The friends that I myself have made seem more tangible as well, and I feel that I work harder to maintain these relations, not just for the sake of friendship but for a favorable work environment as well.

Concluding Off Campus Interviews

After finishing these off campus interviews three things became quite clear. Students that lived off campus were doing so for very strong personal reasons, the foremost being independence. Almost all of the students that were interviewed expressed the opinion that they had to get away from the institution of St. Olaf College in order for them to live the life that they felt was best for them. This independence is based on the student's desire to live according to what they wanted to do. Secondly they took very strong pride in their newfound responsibilities, which in ways had legitimized their lifestyles despite the obvious problems that this involved, including a lack of time, energy and motivation. Lastly the formation of the "new community" had surprised many students and gave them greater ties to their immediate environment as well as to the Northfield community that had otherwise remained unknown.

An Oppressive Institution?

From the very beginning of this research we knew that there would be reason to look upon the immediate physical and administrative environment that St. Olaf College had. Upon researching this topic and anything related, I came upon an interesting article that was written in the 1950's. Now this may seem somewhat outdated for the research at hand, but there are two things that caught my attention. First a quote: "To make men... enjoy the right things"(Ruskin). This quote exposes the essential ethos of a good liberal arts college in terms of the way that the environment is meant to suit its students: there is purpose within institution. Secondly, Shockley mentions, "The College is on the Edge of Town", an article written about the effectiveness of the location of Carleton College, in none other than Northfield, MN. "The place which he proposed "on the edge of town" would be between "seclusion and involvement, related to society, yet maintaining objectivity, perspective, intellectual independence, and scholarly integrity"(Shockley, 453). Of course there has been quite a bit of rezoning due to the sprawl caused by the changing times. Still St. Olaf College remains even more secluded and appropriate to this mentality. My second exhibit is the college mission statement itself: St. Olaf provides an education committed to the liberal arts, rooted in the Christian Gospel, incorporating a global perspective. When we are forced to look at these examples a trend becomes apparent in that as students we posses a perception of these structuring features in their overt forms. However, what often times takes the most precedence are the factors that are latent and which we may not always be aware of.

Beginning with St. Olaf's administration, policies are clear to

everyone. According to the application for off-campus housing a statement is included that informs students that if there are proper facilities for all students on campus then everyone must live on campus. For most this isn't an issue: according to figures provided by the student life office, over 65% live on campus. To choose to live on campus is usually the easiest choice for most students, besides the fact that all incoming freshmen must live in the dorms for their first year at the college. When new students enter the environment of St. Olaf College they are immediately bombarded with images of school pride and the campus ecology, there is the matriculation ceremony and the week one process begins. All of these things take part in the greater aspect of socializing incoming students to the community that they are entering. A simple trend that Hackman and Dysinger found was that students that have poor ability but high commitment, tend not to drop out after freshman year, while students with a high competency and low commitment tend to drop out more often (321).

The advantages of living on campus are quite clear; there is a greater exposure to better facilities and the convenience of being a ten-minute walk to any place on campus. Many studies have proven the advantageous of living on campus as well. Students that are actively pursuing their education and are social are proven to be very likely to go on to have great leadership roles within their community. The college atmosphere is thus predicated upon the idea that a certain environment will produce healthy, well rounded, and motivated students. These are the overt functions of the collegiate institution. Student interviews have proven it as well: many students said that the choices that they make while they are on campus are better ones, such as eating healthier meals or getting a decent amount of sleep every night.

In terms of the community that students arrive to we must take great care to understand what constructs the given St. Olaf community. Social groups are not clearly defined by the administration, however there are structuring elements that facilitate the student's doing this themselves, such as major programs, student clubs and organizations, and the fact that we are forced to co-inhabit a relatively confined space. Thus we see the latent coercive structures of the institution through the way that the social landscape as well as the institutional creates a great deal of dissonance when the common norms are not adhered.

Community in institutional form can be oppressive, if perceived to be by students. Reasons for this may vary, yet it seems that the given community of St. Olaf College might disagree with the values of certain students. In this we see the reactionary response of moving off campus to leave the community. Still, there is no escaping the immediate structures of the college's administration. For example the school sends letters to the neighbors of all off campus students; the letters in question instruct the neighbors to immediately

call the police when and if things get out of hand next door. So the overt structures and their latent effects are clear by the way the school presents itself, and students tend to leave because these structures are perceived as oppressive. However, the structure follows students when they leave, so the question is how the values are balanced.

The Meaning within the Interviews

St. Olaf College strives to be an inclusive community, respecting those of differing backgrounds and beliefs. Through its curriculum, campus life, and off-campus programs, it stimulates students' critical thinking and heightens their moral sensitivity; it encourages them to be seekers of truth, leading lives of unselfish service to others; and it challenges them to be responsible and knowledgeable citizens of the world.

St. Olaf provides a community of close interactions where not only groups of life long friends are formed, but where many varieties of other personal relationships are maintained. This community gives students the opportunity to more readily greet their ambition to do the good, attain self-achievement, and gain not only a love for others but also for themselves. It seems the interpersonal relationships within the St. Olaf environment are one of the most important contributions to these personal goals, as stated in Work and Well-Being: "interpersonal relationships are seen to matter for fundamental reasons of self-evaluation and to meet our intrinsic needs for variety, stimulation and achievement" (74). In forming these crucial relationships, it can be understood that some friends can be made under false pretenses because of the small community of St. Olaf: "we are often unsure what we should want and whether we are satisfied, and our estimates of other people's satisfaction can be crucial reference points as we seek to reduce uncertainty" (Wall 71). In this crucial time in a student's life, the theme of finding one's own identity is a prominent every day theme. And when social factors hinder the student's happiness and search for "reality," students tend to move off campus in search of independence, freedom, and have the responsibility to make their own initiative to care for their own lives. For those who moved off campus due to their perceptions on how controlling St. Olaf is, they feel St. Olaf is a "stifling" college environment, very well believe that their motivation and productivity levels will increase along with their move off campus, therefore raising their individual happiness and making for a better, healthier lifestyle.

It is not surprising though that some students prefer this "mother-like" institution, caring for students safety by staying a dry campus and by keeping the community small. The small community of St. Olaf not only provides a safe family environment, but "worrying reports that mere size is unquestionably one of the most important factors in determining the quality of employee

relationships: the smaller the unit the higher the morale and vice versa” (Dubin 119). In addition to these moral pulls that an individual feels, there is the connection of morals to not only their vocation but also their communal attachments as well.

The personal-impersonal framework more clearly stated by Kant’s moral psychology in Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology, states a “morally significant motivation as either the desire for personal happiness or respect for the impersonal demands of morality” (174). With this we see the more latent factors in an individual’s social priorities of friends and family, community and security, and their need for independence and freedom. By understanding morality as a force that drives us off campus and keeps us on campus, it is part of a larger quest for the completion of our identity and “personal identification with vocation, with its values and ideals, and a sense of personal engagement that helps to sustain the individual in carrying out the activities of the vocation” (179).

The strong need for independence and freedom portrayed in both the on and off campus interviews are based on the student’s desire to live according to what they want to do, gaining their own responsibility and “by showing how these motivations- specifically, vocation, friendship, and community- are bound up with the moral agent’s sense of personal value and meaning” (Flanagan 197). Finding one’s personal value and meaning; getting closer to understanding their identity, working towards being productive and motivated, nearing their vocational aspirations, and continuing moral pursuits all contribute to that individual’s happiness.

Happiness is the indication that man has found the answer to the problem of human existence: the productive realization of his potentialities and thus, simultaneously, being one with the world and preserving the integrity of his self. In spending his energy productively he increases his powers, he “burns without being consumed.” (Fromm 189)

It becomes clear that when people are unhappy, they do not feel a strong personal attachment to their environment: “people have a fundamental need to seek out variety and stimulation from their environment; this need is clearly reflected in social interaction” (Wall 68). If this personal satisfaction does not occur between a St. Olaf student and the St. Olaf environment, students have a tendency to move off campus and discover a “new community” separate from the St. Olaf institution. Whether staying on campus or moving off campus, students are choosing to follow their basic needs “to bridge the distance between himself and other people by some form of relationship which breaks the boundaries constraining him as a person” (69). Further, “a related source of attraction comes from a recognition that other people accept and value you” (69). If these feelings are unfortunately unfelt for a student within the college

community, then students will resist and go where they are happy; working towards a stable environment with strong friend and family relationships, sense of community and security, and also being able to find independence and freedom as a means of escape within their community. It is here where students find their own “reality” in what makes them happy, reaching their fullest potential and creating the most out of their college experience.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this research we were primarily concerned with the reasons St. Olaf students feel the need to move off campus during their time at the college. The sensibility behind this was that we have come to believe St. Olaf prides itself on its sense of community for the greater student body. Retrospectively looking at the research that was conducted with both the on and off campus communities, we found that there is a clear division between both communities despite the fact that each are essentially the same by means of value and justification. And the overall theory that we conclude as applicable to the situation, had given way to a simple realization of the importance of the individual and their value system as a part of a community.

Within the on-campus community there was a sense of ease when it came to participating in the given community. Students felt that it was quite easy to see their close friends when living in the dorms, as well as associating living off campus as a “hassle”. The sense of convenience can also be coupled with the lack of desire to be responsible financially. These values become clear as students feel the need and desire to be a participant of a social institution. Commonality exists within all the responses of the students in that they possess a strong attachment to their relationships with friends and family; also serving as a source of identity as part of the community itself.

Students that lived off campus provided a different set of values. We often came across a sense of pride in their search for independence and freedom and managing their responsibilities. This of course is not absolute for each student, especially when asked for the reasons behind their leaving the St. Olaf community. Some cited issues such as a somewhat oppressive administration while others spoke of a naivety that exists within the social bubble of Olaf students. Unexpectedly, in their act of leaving the St. Olaf community was the creation of their own new community through new relationships with neighbors off- campus: this we have called the “new community.”

The assessment that we have made is simple: despite clear differences in the two communities on and off campus, both groups of students as part of

these communities have inherently similar individual values and needs. We can make generalizations about the perceptions of these on and off campus students, yet the way these perceptions are manifested are clearly a product of the justification of the individual by what is important to them. Students on campus prefer the community and convenience that they already have, and students off campus embrace a subversive point of view gaining a mentality to possess the “freedom of choice.” Community, in a sense, is not strictly a coercive agent of norms but something that is actively engaged with those that participate within it. In essence community, is what you make of it for yourself and for others, either on the St. Olaf Campus or off campus.

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Appendix A:

Dear Student,

By reading the research statement and signing this form you are acknowledging the potential use of personally identifiable information and are in agreement of the terms. After completion of the study a copy of the information will be granted to you if so desired.

Thank you,

X..... Date.....

.....
Investigator
signature..... Date.....

Appendix B:

Oral Interview Questions

Off-Campus Community

Name(for identification purposes only) :

Age:

Year:

Major:

Off- Campus Housing ...

Why did you decide to live off-campus?

What specific housing do you live in and why?

What do your parental guardians think of you living off-campus?

Do you talk to them more or less than when you were living on campus?

If your relationships have been affected (positively or negatively), how have they been affected?

Do you feel a sense of community off-campus?

Would you consider yourself financially independent?

Will you live off-campus again?

Would you live off-campus if St. Olaf provided off-campus housing 1st and 2nd years?

How does living off-campus affect your social life?

Roomate relationships.

How does living off-campus affect your academic life?

Family life?

Eating habits/ diet?

Spending habits?

Other daily activities...How?

Personality...

Would you consider yourself an introvert or an extrovert?

Independent or dependent?

Oral Interview Questions

On-Campus Community

Name (for identification purposes only):

Age:

Year:

Major:

On- Campus Housing ...

Why did you decide to live on-campus/ in dorms?

What specific housing do you live in and why?

What do your parental guardians think of you living on-campus/ in dorms?

Do you talk to them more or less than when you were living on campus?

If your relationships have been affected (positively or negatively), how have they been affected?

Do you feel a sense of community on-campus/ in dorms?

Would you consider yourself financially independent?

Will you live on-campus/ in dorms again?

How does living on-campus/ in dorms affect your social life?

Roomate relationships.

How does living on-campus/ in dorms affect your academic life?

Family life?

Eating habits/ diet?

***Spending habits?
Other daily activities...How?***

Personality...

***Would you consider yourself an introvert or an extrovert?
Independent or dependent?***

Appendix C:

The purpose of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the social issues, and motives behind a students desire to live off campus. We wish to assess what factors may be prevalent in an individual's situation that would influence them to leave the environment of the St. Olaf campus. By conducting this research we hope to find a relation to the move away from campus with greater social issues here on campus. This research is part of the Sociology/ Anthropology 373 class and serves as a practical application of ethnographic skills. Professor Chris Chiaparri of the St. Olaf Sociology department will supervise the progress of this project.

The methodology of this project will be confined to personal interviews conducted by either researcher, students will be asked to spend no more than a half hour to an hour to briefly answer questions for us. Subjects will be recruited through personal contacts and the references of others in a similar living situation.

For the purpose of subject safety there will be no disclosure of compliance, or participation in this research; it is of the utmost importance to protect the privacy of the subjects. We foresee very minimal risk for subjects who are involved, which is dependant upon the information that is granted to the researchers. The subject's participation will be wholly voluntary in nature and they may reserve the right to discontinue their participation and withdraw from the project at any time. Information gathered will be anonymous, and only the researchers will be aware of identity for the sake of identification in the final write up of the research.

If there are more questions they may be directed to either:

Thank you

Appendices B.

When the researcher refers to himself, it is in regards to his experience in living off campus.