

RECIPE FOR COLLECTIVE COMPLACENCY: SOCIAL BARRIERS IN A
COMMUNITY-BASED AFTER-SCHOOL ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

By

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by

Alex Goldman

To my mother, Ginger.

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I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all my professors over the past four years at the University of Florida. They are truly responsible for sparking my interest in finding novel ways to improve human lives.

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This study attempts to address the reasons for consistently low child attendance and low adult volunteer support during community-based after-school programming in a disadvantaged African American neighborhood. Research began with immersion into the after-school tutoring programming and local resident association meetings in the fall of 2002. Later, 60 semi-structured interviews were conducted with neighborhood residents living with and without children to explore their views concerning the social aspects of the neighborhood and their implications for local children's activities during their non-school hours. In the summer of 2003, the experience culminated in a fortunate natural experiment featuring a Participatory Action Research (PAR) component. Residents mobilized and pushed their city commission to reestablish a well-funded municipal summer program for children in the area. Eventually, momentum anticlimactically collapsed when too few local parents completed the requisite application forms.

Following these discouraging developments, further motions to transform the fundamental dynamics of the neighborhood's child enrichment programming to include more resident volunteers were rejected by the director in charge of the community center. The inquiry in this thesis focuses on how the contextual social characteristics of the neighborhood and its connected institutions foster conditions in which substantive change in the opportunity structure for local children remains hard to come by. The specific neighborhood factors inhibiting resident participation in ameliorative initiatives are examined in depth, with focus on features such as social divisions within the neighborhood based on age, class, and residential tenure. These findings are then directly tied to the nature of the director's largely unaccountable position within the neighborhood and implicated in an overarching pattern of collective complacency among residents and parents alike towards improving the programming.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to address the problem of low child attendance and low adult volunteer support in community-based after-school programming. Specifically, this pertains to programming particularly geared to low-income African American boys age 6 to 12 years at their local community resource center. The central question of this research is broken down into three parts for greater clarity within the text:

1. Why do so few local boys attend the programs in the neighborhood?
2. Why do so few adults, especially local residents, volunteer in the programs?
3. Under what conditions could participation levels be improved?

Chapters 2 through 4 address Questions 1 and 2 with a broad overview of conditions in the neighborhood and within the programming. Question 3 required that the study move beyond traditional methodologies toward an action research model that attempts to devise novel solutions to confront the problems of low child attendance and volunteer support. The contextual timeline in which this took place, the strategies used, and conclusions regarding how the experience ties into relevant social science literature are presented in Chapters 5 through 8.

CHAPTER 2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY SITE

I moved into the neighborhood hereafter referred to as “First Street” in the Summer of 2002. Over the next 18 months, I spent 4 hours per week tutoring children involved in after-school enrichment programs at the local community center. Through interactions with local children, fellow volunteers, and the director of the center, I became quite familiar with conditions in the programming. Also, in tandem with this experience, my everyday activities and transit within the neighborhood helped me to get to know many local residents. Regular attendance at monthly neighborhood association meetings offered a deeper understanding the area’s history, demographic patterns, and relation to institutional operations at the municipal level. My personal journals and the structured field notes collected throughout these experiences allowed me to keep track and make sense of my increasing base of knowledge and understanding of First Street. To help the reader more fully understand the nature of the questions at hand within the context of the First Street neighborhood, I offer my own set of observations and interpretations of what life is like for the adults and children who call it home. Without this quasi-insider information, many of my analyses would not make sense.

First Street possesses the following key characteristics: a high-proportion African American population, a large public housing development, a high-proportion of low-income residents, many single-mothers and grandparents raising children, and high drug-related crime with related police presence. The neighborhood is about 35 square blocks in area. Census data from 2000 indicate that three quarters of residents identify

themselves as African American. The remainder almost all identify as White. Female-headed households make up two thirds of the households with children. A fifth of these households were living below the poverty level in 1999. The average per capita income in the First Street as a whole was about \$9,000.

First Street is a socially isolated neighborhood inside the larger scope of the city in which it is set. Residential areas populated mostly by white students and professionals flank the neighborhood on three sides. All of its border streets are heavily trafficked roadways. The only demographically similar neighborhood is separated by one of the roadways. Even so, historically there has been a social gap between these two neighborhoods due to railroad tracks that separated them up until 15 years ago. Within First Street, this other neighborhood is broadly referred to as “cross-tracks” to illustrate the deep-seated separation. The two neighborhoods have entirely distinct social institutions ranging from their own small businesses and local clienteles to their own political organizations, churches, schools, and community centers. Many First Street parents don’t want their children crossing the busy road necessary to get “cross tracks.” A primary explanation for adolescents’ “failure to thrive” in neighborhoods such as First Street is the social isolation/segregation characteristic of disadvantaged urban African-American communities in the United States. This malady brings with it accompanying levels of general resource deprivation, less effective families and schools, the development of delinquent subcultures, and a lack of valuable social control over the youth residing within these neighborhoods (Wilson 1987, Sampson 1997).

First Street once held a special place in Gainesville’s historic African American community, but it has since fallen from grace. Residents claim it has been disintegrating

socially since the 1960s. Desegregation marked an exodus of its most wealthy families who left in search of a better life outside of the confines of the ghetto. Its once vibrantly self-sufficient commercial district was slowly decimated as it found it could not compete with lower prices that larger white businesses now offered members of the black community. The epidemic of crack cocaine abuse and the violence of its markets particularly scarred the local black community, much as it did nationally. Today, residents sadly acknowledge that it is only a shell of its former self. The city's largest newspaper runs history pieces on days that commemorate important dates for the city's black community, which always seem to have a particular focus on First Street. There is a prominent feeling of loss among the older long-time residents in the neighborhood who remember its glory days.

At least one abandoned or partially demolished house sits on almost every block in the neighborhood, visibly advertising the inability of the area to attract new residents. Most of the houses in the neighborhood are quite old, and are built on land deeded by Union forces after the civil war. Most have been kept within local families for long periods of time. Many of the abandoned houses were seized after crises rendered their owners unable to pay their property taxes. Many of these have been bought and subsequently ignored by large property management companies. Others have been seized and are slowly processing through the city bureaucracy to eventually be razed. Those houses that do get renovated are immediately rented out to white students at inflated rates. Locals either cannot afford such homes, or consider their rates exorbitant and go to look for housing elsewhere. Thus, a pattern of gentrification is slowly changing the face

of the neighborhood. At least a dozen houses have been renovated and occupied by students (like myself) in the past 2 years I have lived in First Street.

At one end of the neighborhood in which new student renters have tended to concentrate, houses are much newer and often multi-storied. These streets are also better lighted at night and shaded by luxurious oak trees during the day, making them especially attractive properties. While this often appears to outside observers as “diversity” or an “integrating” force, to long-term residents it may again highlight the trend of social disintegration. The pattern of gentrification has not de-segregated the area so much as it has created a more obvious racial and class divide within the neighborhood. Social interaction beyond common pleasantries between these two distinctly different groups is still very rare. In great part, this has root in the lack of cultural similarity between how these groups express their values. A prime example of this can be seen in how these young white renters, many of whom identify with the styles and values of the punk subculture, strive to appear lower class in their outward appearances. Black residents, on the other hand, often strive to show off higher-class consumer products such as flashy cars, clothes, and jewelry. Such directly opposed displays do not foster communication.

Most homes in the eastern part of the neighborhood are owned and occupied by older long-term residents whose children have long since moved out. A good number of them, however, still have significant responsibilities in caring for their grandchildren. The financial burdens of these elderly residents are often quite evident through the outward appearance of their homes and yards, many of which are in obvious states of disrepair. Grossly peeling paint, badly slanted foundations, rusted tin roofs, and missing windows covered by plastic tarps are all easy indicators. Still, many properties in the

neighborhood remain remarkably well kept, evidencing the relative stability and success of their owners. There have even been a few new homes built in the last decade, complete with intricate gardens and landscaping.

Another omnipresent feature of First Street is the high proportion of houses displaying at least one “No Trespassing” or “Keep Out” sign. This seems to indicate a fundamental aura of mistrust and a widespread perception of imminent property crime, even though the area has only average rates of theft and burglary. It is likely a holdover from an earlier mentality common during the late 1980s and early 1990s when crack wars made theft and violent crime a much more serious and rampant problem in First Street. Drugs are still an omnipresent blight on the neighborhood and their presence is felt in many ways. For a prime experience of these effects, one need only stroll down First Street’s main avenue. It is common to see groups of young men standing on the corners day and night, moving only from one block to another. The only thing that moves these formations is the appearance of a police cruiser. Police presence is quite high First Street and especially targets the neighborhood because it has one of the city’s highest drug-related arrest rates. Drug dealers have a set lookout system that often utilizes local children letting them know when to move off the block or take cover in nearby homes. In my two years living in First Street, I have seen levels of drug trafficking ebb and flow with policing efforts, but police tactics have seemingly not been able to reduce the overall number of dealers doing business in the neighborhood.

Another indicator of the drug presence is the constant flow of addicts (crackheads), prostitutes, and homeless men and women (these categories often overlap) constantly wandering up and down the streets at all times day and night. A lone banner is displayed

in a resident's yard near where the majority of the dealing occurs, reading "Stop Drugs and Prostitution in Our Neighborhood." This may indicate most residents' displeasure at effects of the constant drug presence in First Street, but it doesn't speak well to such resistance having any measurable effect. Homeless people are often seen pushing shopping carts filled with collected aluminum cans past this banner on their way towards the reclamation center. Over time, enough abandoned carts had accumulated in one specific empty lot within the neighborhood to create a "cart graveyard" that had to be brought to the attention of a code enforcement official at a monthly meeting I observed.

The public housing apartments are the center of the drug trade in First Street. A no trespassing policy ("guests and residents only") represents an obvious anti-drug policy, but has been remarkably ineffective as a social impediment since the dealers often have close relationships with the young single mothers who live there. These housing units were originally built for university students, but since their conversion a quarter century ago, their landscape has deteriorated. The city only maintains the area sporadically and many of the "front yards" consist mostly of dirt instead of grass. The nearby "tot lot" built for local children remains quite poorly maintained as well. Its basketball hoop is bent and many of the metal structures are dangerously rusty. This complements the run down basketball court at the community center across the neighborhood. Many residents think these conditions are representative of how the city discriminates against and neglects the neighborhood as a whole. This is especially felt in regards to their priorities concerning the well being of local children.

The neighborhood's landmark restaurant has a large flyer posted in the window reading, "Young Black Man Beaten to within an Inch of his Life.... Stop Police Brutality

in Our City”. This is an indicator of an underlying oppositional political sentiment regarding the police within the local black community. The owner of the establishment displays large evangelical messages on his customized SUV along with a large quote below reading “been there, done that” as a reference to his past history with drug abuse and spiritually recovered outlook on life. The restaurant also gives free food and clothing to the homeless and indigent on a weekly basis. Nearby, a two-story building is being used as a rehab clinic, a church, and recently as another tutoring site in the neighborhood staffed by university students. There are three other churches operating in First Street. On the two neighboring blocks, two poorly capitalized small business ventures operate selling fried fish, barbeque, snacks, jewelry, and bootleg videos. A bit further down the main drag is the remains of the neighborhood’s largest storefront, now abandoned and collapsing. The owner promised neighborhood association members a year ago that he would have the building renovated to avoid having the city seize and raze his property, but workers have not been present in many months and all that remains is an equally ugly plywood fence around it and a “Trespassing = Felony” sign.

Over half of all children in First Street live in the local public housing developments. Most of the children involved in the local after-school enrichment programs reside there with their parents or grandparents. These are low-income families, most of which are headed by single African American females. Many of these mothers had their children at a young age. Some mothers living in the “projects” are known to fraternize and occasionally cohabit with local drug dealers. These types of relationships provide the dealers with safe haven from periodic police patrols while giving some of these young mothers high profile boyfriends with access to quick cash.

Adolescent outcomes associated with growing up under such conditions are often poor. Serious pit-falls range from juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, socio-emotional problems, and dropping out of high school (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1997a,b). Furthermore, such outcomes become more likely where many forms of disadvantage such as low incomes, single-mother families, drug trafficking, and public housing cluster in geographic “hot-spots”. They are thought to converge and intensify to form greater-than-sum “concentration effects” (Wilson 1987; Sampson 2001). Furthermore, the characteristics of disadvantaged neighborhoods directly influence children’s socialization processes by selecting of the types of role models youth are consistently exposed to, especially those encountered outside of the home (Wilson 1996). Ainsworth (2002) suggests collective socialization processes may be unparalleled in importance when attempting to explain the effects of neighborhood contexts on youth development and especially educational outcomes.

CHAPTER 3 CONTEXT OF LOCAL AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

Many neighborhood children have few options open to them to escape disadvantaged environments. School is obviously one of them. However, most of the boys involved in the after-school tutoring programs are already at risk for low academic performance. The community center's director informed me during my time tutoring that almost half of them had already been held back a grade level in school. The failure of schools to provide formats in which often disadvantaged minority students can succeed is often partially attributed to dissonance between the culture and values of the institution versus those of the population they purport to serve (Fruchter 1984). There is a concomitant value judgment in the black community that issues specifically pertinent to African Americans should be ingrained within curriculum to foster motivation in students and optimal educational outcomes (Lightfoot 1978). Utilizing such intrinsically motivating activities has been found to be of great salience. These findings speak to the greater psychosocial need amongst African American boys to feel well-treated and respected by adults during activities, a likely allusion to self-esteem.

However, parents would have to propose such improvements in curriculum in order to see them eventually enacted. Many local parents already seemed to be uneasy in dealing with their child's respective officials and/or the educational material brought home. This could certainly be interpreted as a result of many parents' poor personal academic performance in the past. The director of the center sometimes acted as a proxy between students who were struggling academically and their frustrated yet non-

responsive parents. Research proposes that African American parents often feel institutionalized settings within schools tend to delegitimize their perspectives and hence alienate them from the mainstream educational experiences of their children (Winters 1993). This finding is in concert with others proposing that school professionals often consider educational decisions to be fully within their purview and that they resist external parental programming, especially when considering input from black parents (Chavkin 1989, Lightfoot 1978). Due to these constraints, parents may not be able to take advantage of opportunities to influence their children's educational experience, the empowerment that comes with such contribution, and/or the chance to network and develop new skills through such interactions.

Despite common findings that African American students fare poorly in public schools as compared with white counterparts (Kozol 1991), parental commitment to educational achievement as a means to upward mobility remains unwavering. They tend to hold their children's education as the highest priority behind respect, obedience, and discipline in their child-rearing practices. This is even more pronounced among lower income, less educated, single parents, and those residing in high crime areas. However, it seems their aspirations for their children's education are not grounded in the current academic performance of their children or on pragmatic strategies of how to make desired levels of achievement more likely (Hill 1999).

It seems their families and schools may lack the necessary resources to secure the developmental outcomes and academic success they hope for these children. With improvements in these arenas seeming quite distant, the responsibility may fall to what can be done in the context of after-school youth development. Thus, it becomes

important for these children to have access to quality after-school institution that are effective as possible in filling in social, emotional, and academic gaps for young people in these contexts. There are certainly different options open to parents in structuring their children's after-school hours. Some attend their school's after-school extracurricular activities. Many others go to day care centers in the neighborhood. Unluckily, a large cadre of these children just "hang out" in the neighborhood after school. These young African American males with excessive amounts of unstructured and unsupervised time after-school in a disadvantaged, high-crime neighborhoods are at serious risk.

Researchers have argued that formulating safe, structured, and enjoyable after-school programming reduces the risk of a variety of such developmental pitfalls (Brooks-Gunn et al.1997ab). Also, instead of strategies that hinge predominantly on risk prevention, the "youth development" perspective emphasizes providing opportunities and supports for youths within such programs as they strive to develop a wide range of skills and social commitments within the community context (McLaughlin et al., 1994). Bergin (1992) found significantly higher achievement measures in grades and self-esteem of children who were involved in an educationally oriented after-school program. However, requisite supervision in after-school contexts does not guarantee that programming will be high quality or even beneficial. The nature of such effects is believed to be dependent on the type of strategies an organization employs in their programs.

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development in 1991 called attention to the potential benefits of community-based youth development organizations. Such programs are an especially important resource for students who do not value their school contexts

very highly. They especially appeal to young African American males, who seem to find the treatment they receive in neighborhood-based after-school programs preferable to what they receive during the school day. This may be a relatively rare affective context in their lives, where they can feel safe, respected, and motivated. Thus, supports made available to them here make the adoption of pro-social norms and improved social integration more likely (Kahne et al. 2001).

The following is an examination of collected data that speaks to the first two parts of this paper's central question, namely why child and adult participation levels in the local after-school boys programming is so low. While I consider all my experiences at the center data, I also took the time to step back from my position as tutor to examine the workings of the programming from afar. The experiences I recollect and quote here are from four separate occasions when I engaged in structured field observations at the center. My sessions all got underway at about 3PM on either Monday or Wednesday and lasted till about 5PM. I obtained permission to observe at the site from the director of the center, Kandra. She knew me quite well from the tutoring I had done at the boys program there over the past year. Kandra is an African American woman in her mid-fifties who has been the director of the center for three years now.

The children that I observed at the center were all African American boys between the ages of 8 and 13. The children were observed outside during recreational activities before the tutoring sessions began and I later followed them inside to observe and record the actual tutoring sessions in progress. I attempted to diversify my observations at the center by focusing attention at different times on different component aspects such as the director herself, the activities and interactions of the children before and after the

tutoring, the volunteers themselves, and their interactions with the children. In this way, I believe I was able to get at a more coherent picture of the center's operations.

In addition, an in-depth interview was conducted with two neighborhood parents at their homes to get these key informants' perspectives on what they believed to be going on at the center currently and what could be done to improve it now. (Appendix A) Both respondents were given informed consent forms and had the totally voluntary nature of the interview verbally explained to them. Biographical information was then gathered from the interviewee and the main theme of the interview was then stated,

“Almost everyone in the neighborhood claims to want to see more educational and recreational opportunities locally available to children when they're out of school. The center is available as a base for such activities. Why aren't more people taking the initiative to help structure and participate in what goes on during children's after-school activities?”

The first interview was conducted with a resident of the public housing projects in the neighborhood. Jenny is a single African American woman in her late thirties who has lived in First Street for a decade. She is currently raising two children in the neighborhood. She had experience working at the center with Kandra in the past (for pay), but left two years ago due to personal differences. Jenny knows most of the people in the public housing developments and has some personal networks that extend into the longer-term residents on the other side of the neighborhood. She is very well known to most of the neighborhood children and is still involved in activities with them, especially on the holidays. However, her two children are now only occasionally involved in the activities at the community center.

The second interview was conducted with Dante, who originally hails from New York but has spent the last five years living at his family's First Street home. Dante is an African American man in his late fifties who is father to eight children. Most of these are

still pre-teenagers who live with him currently in Gainesville. He was once a promoter for the club scene in Manhattan and retains his independent, creative style in his analyses of the neighborhood. His wife enrolled five of their children in programs at the center two years ago, but has since moved them to after-school day care due to difficulties with Kandra and other children involved in the programming. His personal networks within the neighborhood are not as deep or well developed as Jenny's, but he has been involved in activities with trying to improve the situation for local children.

During my field observations at the center, there were always around ten boys in attendance for the full length of the programming. It is important to note that the original number of boys around for the pre-tutoring basketball games was always recorded as higher than the actual number that attend the tutoring session. Some children are able and choose to sneak away right before tutoring begins. It can be inferred that they don't wish to attend because they feel they have better things to do in the street. Kandra, however, does not acknowledge this fact. In the following observed interaction between herself and a sports volunteer named Jared, she denies this situation. Jared said, "It looks like you're missing a couple of kids." Kandra replied, "No, I don't think so." (9/22/03).

Attendance has been at these levels and lower for at least the past year. This means that only about a quarter of neighborhood boys who are of eligible age are attending the after-school programming at the community center. Jenny claims there had been more children involved at the center in the past, especially during Kandra's first year in the position, "When I was working over at the center, I had it packed with tons of kids from [First Street] because I actually used to get out and walk to get my kids." (11/04/03) If we take her at her word, we must then ask what caused these children to stop attending?

In my observations, the average ratio of tutors to children was about 3 to 1. An African American psychologist who works with students at the University of Florida, Dr. Brown, was brought in by Kandra on Mondays to work on social skills with the children. In his opinion, "These kids are still behind in their schoolwork. We need to get them up to speed, but I just don't think the tutors have the right skills or a consistent enough relationship with a child they know. And there aren't enough tutors to cover the children individually." (9/22/03) Kandra is directly responsible for recruiting and screening the tutors that attend. During my observations, none of the tutors who came were locals from the neighborhood. They were all people who either came from the university through obligatory service learning classes or they were people Kandra knew through her connections to other organizations such as the local chapter of the NAACP. In my other experiences tutoring at the center, it was extremely rare for a local resident to volunteer.

Kandra seems to specifically recruit black professionals and activists because she believes that they are especially good influences on the boys. It is thought that children's perceptions of their own self-worth are enhanced when they have the opportunity to see and work with individuals from their own cultural communities in positions of responsibility carrying out valued tasks (Comer 1989). However, just because these volunteers share some similar characteristics with the boys they tutor does not mean that they intrinsically have a deep commitment to these children. Being outsiders, they have no real connection to or investment in the lives of local children and their families. Specifically, they would seem to have much less so than someone who is actually from the First Street neighborhood. The following quotes from interviews labor this point

further. When I asked Jenny why she thought there wasn't much recruitment of volunteers from within the neighborhood, she replied,

“Well, Kandra isn't doing it yet. She does she gets people from outside the neighborhood. Even the parents of the girls in Girl Power [the girls programming at the center] tell me that a lot of the girls in the program are from outside the neighborhood. The center is for this area, not outsiders. Take care of people around here first. I used to tell Kandra all the time that there's so much talent in this neighborhood but we've got to find out what people like to do, especially for the community. We had lots of people help out with the Halloween party this year.”
(11/04/03)

Some of the quasi-volunteers who lived in the First Street at one point or another have some harsh things to say about the character of other residents, especially parents. Jared, who had been playing football with a group of the boys every afternoon, had been forced to cut the games back to a couple days a week, specifically, after their tutoring sessions. When asked why, he replied, “I just don't have the time anymore with my other responsibilities pressing me, you know like my wife, my job, and my church.” Upon hearing that he was overburdened, I suggested, “Well, maybe we could find somebody else in the neighborhood who would be interested in filling in for you on the days you aren't available, like a parent or one of the kids older brothers.” However, in response to my proposition, Jared looked at me very seriously and said,

“Man, you've been out there with me enough to know no other people from around here show up to help out these kids. They're too busy off in their own worlds to care about what these kids are up to or what they need. You think they'd be acting how they did if those type people were working with them now. Their behavior is just a reflection of their environment in the neighborhood and in their home situations. You know, these kids wanted to play a game against the city league kids that share the field with us some days and I just thought to myself, man, they wouldn't know how to act, they'd be cussing and fighting as soon as the thing got underway and the next thing you know, the cops would be involved or something.”

With the criticism some have of possible local people volunteer candidates notwithstanding, many of the current tutors are sporadic and relatively transient in their

attendance. There was at least one new volunteer on each day of my observations at the center. (Kahne et al. 2001) found that supportive long-term relationships between African American boys and the non-kin adults involved in their after-school programming were one of the most often mentioned positive aspects of such programs. Many of the boys these researchers interviewed reported that this was among the biggest reasons that they attended. Those boys who reported they liked the activities more got into trouble less often at the programs. Relationships between involved youth and the adults who structure and participate in after-school programs are hoped to be supportive, protective, and encouraging of achievement.

The psychologist's earlier reference to insufficient individual attention seems well founded. In my observations, the more children a tutor was charged with, the less effective the tutoring session became. The attentiveness and responsiveness of the children simply declined. The children seemed to need the attention and praise of the tutor focused on them more than was possible in a three to one situation. When the tutor moved to help one child, the other would almost immediately get off task. Students I observed reacted to attention shifting off them by laying their chins on the desk or staring off in another direction. The volunteers were simply unable to multitask well enough in such a format to maintain the performance level of multiple children simultaneously.

Other shortcomings of the tutoring program that came out in the observations touched on aspects of the tutors themselves, the children, and the material they had to work with. It seemed the tutors had little training in working with children. As the sole exception, one of the center's most consistent tutors is also a teacher at the juvenile detention center. The children that the tutors were charged with assisting were almost

always in different grades and working within different levels of achievement. This made the tutoring all the more difficult to handle since the children were often working on different sequences of material. Work could not under these circumstances be streamlined in a group fashion.

Some of the children in attendance were also defiant and disrespectful to the volunteers at times. Some of them, especially the younger tutors from the university, did not seem to know how to respond appropriately to this poor social conduct. Through my observations on one particular day at the center (10/22/03), it became clearer than ever to me that this resource mismatch in the tutoring program was inherently frustrating to all parties involved. It becomes obvious in this example, however, that the situation is significantly more frustrating to the children involved. My field notes that day give an illuminating picture of the situation.

A young African American woman named Gloria came in for her first day at the center. She was a sophomore university student who was tutoring to fulfill the volunteer requirement of a class called "Exceptional People". Gloria was assigned three children to work with. One boy, Teal, was used to the routine and got to work almost immediately. The other two, who had not been coming to the center very long and who were already friends, proceeded in giving the tutor a hard time with getting them on task. One of the boys, Maurice, didn't even attempt to get started on anything academically constructive. Instead, he divided his time between trying to distract the other boys and just laying his head on the desk. Kandra eventually came over to see what was going on and noticed that Maurice wasn't doing any work. Since he claimed he did not have any homework,

she brought him a sheet of multiplication problems and a Newsweek article about the new anthropological theories surrounding human dependency.

I believe Kandra chose the article because the magazine cover featured a drawing speculating what the hypothetical Adam and Eve might have looked like. This drawing gave the impression that the pair looked much more like present-day African populations than present-day Eurasian populations. Kandra is highly concerned with an Afrocentric curriculum and related décor in the center as a means to give the children self-esteem in feeling good about their culture and heritage. However, the article turned out to be far above the reading level of this ten year old boy who was obviously academically challenged to begin with. Maurice struggled to read this piece as the tutor aided him in sounding out the words. Eventually, she had to shift focus onto one of the other children who needed assistance with their workload. Maurice quickly put the article away out of a sense of frustration at the lack of sufficient aid, attention, and support. He began to try to do the multiplication sheet, but since he did not seem to know his times tables very well at all, he had to ask the tutor if his answers were correct on almost every problem. Most of the time, before the tutor could even answer, one of the other children who were his age or older and already knew their times tables would chime in with the answer, which frustrated Maurice even more. The same thing had been happening occasionally when he was attempting to sound out words. Eventually, he just put his head down and stopped all work when the tutor was dealing with the other two children. She brought her attention back to him after about a minute and asked, “Why aren’t you working on your math problems?” He replied, “I don’t want to, I’m sick of this.” At just this moment, Kandra had walked into the room and heard this interaction. She said, “Maurice, I can’t

believe you just spoke to Miss Gloria like that. You better apologize right now and explain to her why you are being so disrespectful and not working on your math. We do work around here Maurice, this isn't no place for games."

The boy looked back and forth between the two women, but no words came out of his mouth. Instead, tears began to well up in his eyes. Kandra looked at him sternly and said, "Well, what do you got to say for yourself?" He still said nothing and the tears began to roll down his cheeks. The tutor looked sad as well. Kandra shook her head and said to the boy, "Well, if you aren't going to do right by me and you're not going to do right by yourself, then you can't be here. You are here to do your homework, but since you claim not to have any; and I don't believe that because all the other kids at least have spelling words, then you can't be here. Go ahead and get your stuff together and go home." So Maurice quietly packed up his things and left out the back door.

The group began to work again and Kandra left the room. With only two students left, Gloria was able to work more effectively. They began taking turns reading in a book about Frederick Douglas, the great black orator and abolitionist. They talked about some of the meanings in the passages in the first couple of pages, which were directed at an understanding of the African slaves' understanding of Independence Day through the meaning of the word "freedom." I thought the interaction to be quite positive. After they had been reading and talking for a while, Maurice's friend Anton left to get a water break. On the way back he strayed off to see what one of the other tutoring groups in the room were doing. Kandra appeared back in the room again. He seemed noticed her presence out of the corner of his eye and he began moving back towards his tutor to avoid being tagged as off-task. Kandra called out to him, "Anton." In order to get back to his

seat he had to walk past Kandra. As he passed her, she called out again, “Anton.” The boy sat down and began to ask Gloria, “Do we have to read anymore...?” At that point Kandra had walked up behind him with her hands on her hips and said in a loud, intimidating voice, “I know you didn’t just walk past and ignore me when I was talking to you.” The boy replied defensively, “I didn’t hear you and I just wanted to ask Gloria a question.” She replied,

“Oh, and now you’re going to sit here and lie to my face in front of everybody in this room that just saw you do it. You’re not even going to apologize? You know what, you can pack your things up and leave too. Go on. You and your friend Maurice will have to learn how to act around here. We will not put up with this kind of disrespect towards people who are trying to help you. And you better come back and have a long talk with me about this before you think about coming back here.”

Anton remained defiant with a scowl on his face as he gathered his things and left the room out the same back door as his friend. Everyone in the room stared. Two children from the other room had heard the commotion and came into the other room to watch. Kandra said to Gloria after Anton had left, “I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s going on with these boys today. They’re normally not like this.”

Out of my observations and personal experience in the tutoring program, I can conclude that although these types of interactions certainly represent the extreme negative of the program, they are indicative of the underlying challenges it faces. I have also witnessed Kandra on many occasions being very affectionate and understanding with the children, so I am unsure if this represents an anomaly in her mood or if she just thought that the children’s behavior warranted discipline by dismissal. Still, the root of the problem most likely lies with the structure of the activities at the center and not the fluctuations of personalities.

Common criticisms leveled at many after-school enrichment organizations center on widespread failures to provide activities that are developmentally appropriate, academically targeted, and enjoyable. In addition, many seem to lack the ability to provide for the development of meaningful long-term relationships between adults and involved children. There is evidence that mothers place higher value on exchanges and influences that occur within their social networks between their children and other non-related adults. This can only happen in networks where concordance of values leads non-related adults to feel that they have shared stake in the adolescent outcomes of local children and thus take an active interest in their lives (Hirsch et al., 1994). Studies show that social support processes mediate child development, but the characteristics of certain children (poor behavior or lack of respect) receiving such support can affect adults' willingness or enthusiasm to work with them or others. These interactions must be properly mediated by persons skilled in monitoring such exchanges if they are to be positive and rewarding for both parties (Maccoby and Martin 1983).

Children's inconsistent attendance and participation in programming may hamper efforts to provide concrete benefits. This can also be a negative result of children attending different organizations' programs simultaneously (Kahne et al. 2001). This may happen often in the neighborhood where other after-school activities such as those aligned with primary schools, or organizations such as the YMCA, or government subsidized day care for low income parents competes with programming at the center. The contrast between day care and the center's activities is important to consider. The two local day care establishments in the neighborhood are close and do an excellent job of keeping children off the street. However, they provide minimal services to enhance

children's academic success or skill repertoire. They have an incentive to keep children happy because they want parents to continue sending them to their establishment so they can collect inflated rates picked up mostly by the government. Kandra has no such incentives and perhaps her strategies highlight this fact. Again, it seems that children lose out at the end of this distorted youth development equation.

The tutoring activities do not appear to be intrinsically motivating to these boys. The activities and overall tutoring atmosphere are a bit too conventional and a bit too much like school. Since they just came from that possibly stifling atmosphere earlier in the afternoon, it is not pleasurable to be plunged back into a poorly run facsimile of it again just an hour after they get off the bus and finish their brief basketball session. This rings especially true when taking into account the poor academic performance of these boys at school and the frustration it must cause them day in and day out. Dante says,

“I really think that they kids should be involved to the point where they can play an active part in governing their whole situation. I've been talking to a bunch of neighborhood kids lately and the things they tell me make me think that there's a whole untapped market out there because people don't listen to them. It's always people telling them what to do or they just push them off to the side and tell them that what they're saying isn't important. If you get the kids motivated by incentives to not just go run around and throw rocks and not to as the alternative, come here and listen to some flugies sit here and tell me about school. If there was some kind of weekly field trips. Movie theaters, pawn shops, UF stadium, Ocala. There are places to take them and things to do outside of the basic routine of come on lets play some basketball and do some homework. Get them out of the doldrums. Kids today are hip man. It's the same problem with church. My kids fall asleep in church. There's a couple of churches that have their own little churches for kids. They run it themselves. They have their own little deacons and ushers and ministers and they run it. There's lots of kids in these places.”
(11/06/03)

Here is some recognition that perhaps the activities in the programming need to be more child-centered. If children feel as though they have no motivation, representation, or responsibility within the structure, they will simply vote with their feet and not attend.

This is the continual fight that after-school strategists focus on: how to win the hearts and minds of youth. The interviewees recognize this. Jenny told me of her experience,

“It’s a lot of little things that they tell me that keep [the children] away [from the center], a lot of different things about why they don’t want to be there or why they don’t want to do this or that. A lot of little issues... But if you get out there and give them reason for wanting to be there, they’ll be back around. Being adults, we’ve got to be able to find things that peek their curiosity. You know, something fun for them everyday. I sat down and asked them what they wanted from us and they told me their opinions so we tried to do the things that they wanted to do to keep them interested and busy and at the center. I don’t know if that’s what’s happening now because you know Kandra has her own agenda. We had a problem with this before, she asked me how I was able to keep them here, say for her Girl Power program, and I told her that I just asked and listened to what they had to say when I asked them what I could do to keep them there and keep their minds occupied.” (11/04/03)

Again, the problem of listening comes back to haunt Kandra. My earlier field notes give an impression of her failure to accurately gauge the academic competency of the children or their response to attempts at discipline. Her own ideas about how things should be done within the context of her programming may get in the way of productive activities. The same can be said for her interactions with local parents. The two parents I interviewed have had problems in the past dealing with Kandra. While the following excerpts probably do not represent the norm, there may be enough evidence of these types of problems here to validate the criticisms beyond just bad personal experience.

“My wife had the kids go to the after school center and eventually they had some kind of conflict down there and they refused to have the kids come back there or something like that. It was definitely a conflict with the person who runs things over there. She has ways of doing certain things...” (Dante, 11/06/03)

These two parents, who happen to be personally unknown to each other, seem to have a unified critique of the way Kandra handles some of her altercations with children in the course of her programming. While they view her as just another person with human flaws, they realize these are magnified by her position and the social situation of

the neighborhood. Jenny told me in our interview that, “Kandra has her ways and she always has. I like that she cares for the kids. But kids will push her to a point, but being an adult you should come out of that better.” (11/04/03) These two parents also have a much larger and more scathing indictment of her (ab)use of her position as director and the way it often seems to stymie the larger mission of the center to serve the community. They seem to believe her intimidating autocratic style alienates both local children and their parents and thus suppresses their overall participation in the programming.

“I think there should be more community people involved in the program and there should be more people who are of this neighborhood sitting on the board of directors making decisions about the programs instead of just one person in total control of everything regarding who comes there and who doesn’t come there and what programs get run. Like the other day, they wanted to have a drumming class or something over there and she decided hey I don’t want you here on this Sunday after letting them be there for a while. It was just disappointing because my kids were involved in the drumming class and then Sunday we went over there and they told us well Kandra doesn’t want us here anymore and that was the end of that.” (Dante, 11/06/03)

“Well, I tell you what really made me angry was a couple of weeks ago, my new neighbor sent one of her two girls over there to see if Kandra had any more room for her in Girl Power. I went over there with her and I’ve never seen Kandra turn away a child before but she told me they didn’t have any more room for this girl. She really wanted to go because some of her friends already attend. That’s what scares me. We had our little dispute but I look over that and hope that our adult issues aren’t impacting her decisions about working with the children.” (Jenny, 11/04/03)

There seems to be fundamental disagreement over whom the center is “of, by, or for.” The respondents feel that it is too “of, by, and for Kandra” at the present time. They feel there isn’t enough community control over the center and its programming decisions. They feel unable to constructively resolve conflicts that arise in the course of programming. This barrier might be easier for them to acquiesce to if a remotely known city employee operated the center. Then the dynamic would be a classic example of the “expertise” of a larger municipal bureaucracy vs. the political and cultural will of a local

neighborhood community. However, Kandra takes a strong rhetorical line concerning her pro-black allegiance with neighborhood residents. Thus, the lack of internal cooperation and input taken from locals becomes all the more contradictory and appalling to them.

“With one person in charge with a dictatorship-like position where they feel some new type idea might be threatening to their job or their position they don’t want to have nothing else to do with it and normally it gets cut off. In some kind of way we need to talk to the head of the finance committee or whoever is really in charge of the programs to find out what’s really happening. I think it could be improved if she is willing to change her attitude and be a little more open-minded. This has been going on for years now. A lot of people are ready for regime change already. She’s been more or less running the place since I’ve been in Gainesville and that’s seven years now. A change in authority definitely couldn’t hurt. Short of that, if she would just have an open forum and invite people for the neighborhood to really make changes instead of them just being invited to bring their kids so she can look good and make more money. Have some type of democratic voting instead of like if your kids are [bad] like this here, we’re not going to have them over here anymore. Have some kind of alternative. Like if your kid is bad, have special people set up to work with the bad kids. You never know the person’s situation. You don’t know the reasons behinds these kids behavior all the time because you don’t know exactly what’s going on with their mother or if they’re hungry or whatever.” (Dante, 11/06/03)

“It’s like this... a lot of people have had bad vibes and incidents with Kandra and it has turned a lot of people away and like one time this magician wanted to come, this guy B Magic, and she had some kind of beef with this guy and I told him he had to squash it because it was for the kids. He told me that she didn’t want him around the center. I told him that it isn’t her center. It’s owned by the city of Gainesville. It belongs to the community. So I had him bring the magic show down to my house.” (Jenny, 11/04/03)

Regarding other parents in the neighborhood, the interviewees seem to have conflicting interpretations. On one, hand they felt badly for the situations of many other parents in the neighborhood and that there wasn’t enough of an indigenous social support system for those who really don’t have sufficient personal or familial resources.

“These kids need some tutoring or mentoring around here because a lot of their parents are single moms so we’ve got babies having babies. I noticed there are a lot of situations where kids get put out of school. I’m in a situation right now with a kid down the street and they’re talking about taking him away from his mom so

we're thinking about adopting him and bringing him into our house. He's in kindergarten and they're talking about putting him out of school. It's insane, I've never heard about that kind of thing. It's his environment. His mother is involved in a relationship with a drug dealer and all this guy's friends are in the house and the kid has nothing to do and he has no one to look up to. When he comes around here he calls me daddy." (Dante, 11/06/03)

"The kids want that attention and they want that love but again back to the street mentality, that's all Anje (a local girl with behavior problems) really sees in her life and therefore that's all she really knows. I always try to give her an outlet to show her that that's not all that life's about. Like at the Halloween party last week I let her come over here even though we both knew she wasn't supposed to be over here and before the night was over with she end up you know getting in trouble for fighting with one of the other kids. She's acting out about something, something is not right at home, you know kids will show you things like that." (Jenny, 11/04/03)

On the other hand, there is also good indication that people in the neighborhood simply feel as though the parents aren't taking enough personal responsibility for their own lives, especially regarding their children. Residents who do take time to try to help local children are discouraged by parents who are not fulfilling what they see to be their own responsibilities. Unluckily, this is also conducive to people lording their efforts over these children's parents as good deeds gone unreturned due to supposed character flaws.

"I went over there and talked with their mom about her children's problems and I tried to encourage her to send them over, but she was just making some crazy excuses. She better know it's going to be her fault when those boys flunk this year. I don't know, people like that who are lazy, well, I just don't consider them my responsibility." (Jared, 9/27/03)

"The problem is that you've got a lot of parents who just don't do the right things for their kids. Like with Anje and her mom, I'd work with them for the longest but I just had to give up. I went down that road with them but some kids just can't be helped. They're more concerned with who's got this and who's got that. Materialism, money, and jealousy. It doesn't make any sense how grown-ups act like children. Your child did this or yours act like that. Some of them, I can tell you, they're not [concerned], the kids come home and these kids are right back out the door. The school may even call and they'll be like, "whatever". (Jenny, 11/04/03)

Many believe conditions can't improve unless parents stop bickering over petty differences amongst themselves and step up to take responsibility for getting their

children the things they need. Still, others acknowledge that there are other forces besides poor character at play here. These two interviewees recognize that the social system in place for parents in the neighborhood does not do a good job adapting to their needs.

“I think the parents are too busy caught up in their own little worlds. I don’t think that it’s that they’re too busy. I also don’t think there is enough information out there to motivate them to think that they need to get out there and do this because they should. Make it interesting for them and let them know exactly what they can give out because when I was doing this my friends told me that they would help, especially those who have children involved in the program. But still, you’re not going to get many.” (Jenny, 11/04/03)

“Jealousy over how much money you have or how much money you don’t have or how your kids speak and how their kids speak. It comes from ignorance and a lack of bonding in the community. We don’t have a neighborhood watch or nothing neighborhood with neighborhood people. You get a conflict between people interacting in the neighborhood and they think this one is talking bad about them or this one has more money than them. We don’t know much about each other’s situations where if we all got together and had a forum about what the kids are doing or if you’re having trouble paying your light bill this month then maybe we could help each other out. We need a more helpful situation. We always feel as though people are out on their own.” Dante (11/06/03)

Despite reservations about the character of individual parents, general consensus builds around the idea that the social structure in the neighborhood isn’t very helpful for getting parents the help they need. There is little mutual aid, representation, motivation, or responsibility of which they could take advantage of even if they wanted. This leads to an environment where individual desires and disputes can run roughshod over the interests of many needy residents and children. The backbiting from other parents and residents does not serve parents in making the best of their state of affairs. Their situations are too unstable to risk going out on a limb in search of a superior social arrangement with other residents. They may have neither the resources nor the skills to

take on such a task. Thus they remain cloistered and disempowered. Perhaps it really is a vicious environment in the neighborhood and the rational choice is to not rock the boat.

“Yeah, quite a few kids and parents are afraid of disappointment in these programs because it’s not solid enough that it won’t start and then stop. We need some type of structured programming that’s going to be there all the time. They can’t depend on their kids being able to be there between three and six o’clock. Parents are scared and they’d rather have something definite where they know where they know exactly where their kids are so they don’t have to be worried about them wandering up and down the street because the center closed early today or they’re not allowed over there at the moment or this particular day. Basically, as I found out since the time I’ve been in the neighborhood, the people around here are afraid to experience anything new. One is financial reasons because they don’t think they have enough money to afford it and two, because they think that the community or the city or whatever program gets started and they get involved and they start to enjoy it, it gets cut off. So they feel like they’ll eventually just be left out in the ocean paddling with nothing else to do.” (Dante, 11/06/03)

Their fears of inconsistencies in programming have merit. Many neighborhood improvement programs have been very short-lived, much like the current situation with local churches continually closing and reorganizing under new names and new leadership. Two powerful programs catering to youth in the past both ended up dissolving in under a decade. One was university sponsored and the other was city run. Many residents and former participants remember them fondly, but also harbor resentment that they stopped serving local youth who had no other real alternative. Each had their heyday, but inactivity throughout the 1990s led up to the current situation with operations at the center. Many feel this is better than nothing at all.

“I feel as though even with the parents around here, they feel that everybody is getting something out of it but them. If they could feel as though this is their program and they could get some recognition for volunteering their time, its not so much money, but that they feel like they’re not doing it. If the program did well and got a write up in the paper, it would be the director that gets featured for what she did and what the city did to help. Parents need to feel as though they’re a real part of the operation. Let them do some paperwork. Give them elected offices. Make them take charge of handling an issue that comes up. Let them become more involved and not so much out on the outside feeling like they’re being used. I think they’re motivated to participate on the basis that they’ll be in charge of something.

If Kandra could just step outside for a second and be like okay, ya'll got this here.”
(Dante 11/06/03)

Parents are said to feel alienated from dealing with outside agencies whose standards for their children they have to live up to without direct rewards. Traditional child-care arrangements are a one-way street. Parents are only the recipients of indirect rewards in that their children are taken off their hands and put in safe and productive learning environments for a period of time. However, these parents can't really feel that they have had any part in this process besides just getting their children involved. Their responsibility ends at this point, as does the possibility of more personal rewards that might come to them if they were more deeply involved. It is believed either Kandra's personality or the nature of her position, is not conducive to her relinquishing decision-making power over the operations in the center. She would then run the risk of losing current rewards for playing the “hero” in a poor neighborhood. However, this overall mentality precludes the possibility of a situation whereby both Kandra and residents could work together in such a way that rewards for both parties could be increased.

“It's the whole mindset that a whole lot of them out here got that coming to meetings means something negatively automatically when it would actually would be much more positive if they came. The parents need to feel secure. The center has never promoted itself as that kind of a place, which is why there are so many parents who put their kids in day care. Ease and security are the buzzwords. The parents don't even want to be on the street themselves, so they don't want their kids out there either. Parents are scared of being cussed out and intimidated by the drug dealers and now they have Kandra to worry about too. Either they keep their kids inside or they send them to day care. They're also scared that these programs are gonna disappear or not be open to them anymore. That university program years ago was wonderful, but they left and people are scared that their kids are gonna fail by either of those paths. They know the city don't care about them and they doubt that they can even get along with their neighbors half the time.” (Jenny 11/06/03)

“If you want people to come, you know, offer refreshment. Set it up where it's enjoyable to come and it's not just a bunch of people sitting up there with pens and

papers and everybody is sitting there looking at each other. Offer some donuts and coffee too. Then we could set up something. Maybe even an election process where we people can delegate authority like a job. Get people really involved and offer them rewards for performance. Get their names on the walls if they do a good job.” (Dante, 11/06/03)

As to how other residents and other social forces in the neighborhood affect the ability of parents and children to cope with their often-difficult circumstances, it seems as though the odds are again stacked against them. Jenny believes that some of the greatest dividers and sources of inactivity in the neighborhood are residents who gossip amongst themselves and regularly commit character assassination on others. There are many stories swirling about how peoples’ past conduct evidences their continued poor character traits. In such an environment, especially with younger single-mothers being broadly segregated from the older and more “decent” residents, the line blurs between what is considered to be appropriate behavior and what is considered “street” or “ghetto”.

“The drug presence and the police might not directly cause the parents not sending their kids to the center, but they have a certain mentality because of these conditions. You know, if you snitch on this here person or somebody else, you ain’t down with the clique, as they call it around here. I try to teach them that the police are not their enemy, even though lots of parents will tell their kids that the police are just out there to lock their family and friends up.” (Jenny, 11/04/03)

“Everybody has a story in their life and a past but if a person is willing to give freely out of their heart for as activity for the kids, then let them. Just watch if you think something is going to go wrong. Don’t let child abusers help out or let people do drugs there. We’ve got a lot of good people in this neighborhood, but we’ve got so many people who put other’s characters down and knock a person’s past. All the negativity makes people not want to do these kinds of things. We can’t tell by a persons past whether them helping out in some way might also make an impact on their life. Whatever they’re going through, it might be good for the adults in this way too. I thank Kandra for giving me a shot around there because when I used to spend a lot of time shut up in this house and she gave me the opportunity to do what I really wanted to do around in the neighborhood. It made me come out more and gave me the opportunity to see what else I could do for the neighborhood. I definitely learned some things.” (Jenny, 11/03/06)

As for the people in the neighborhood who don't live near the projects, the kids, or the single mothers, it is still thought that they feel the repercussions of poverty and the drug trade. They take the impressions that they get of such "street problems" and then apply them to the entire population of the apartments and those parents who live near there. It is believed that older residents think much of this younger generation embodies disrespect, irresponsibility, and trouble in the end. It is likely that they also feel these ill-effects are a threat to their investment in the neighborhood.

"In this neighborhood, the people who don't live over here in these apartments are the only ones who consistently don't have kids and they're kind of elderly. They're very put off by the drugs. The dope guys disrespect their elders around her. The elders have lost their trust. When the dope boys are out in front of their houses and they ask them to move on they get cussed out. The kids are what they see as the future of that mentality. I used to try and get the kids out to give the older people a hand with things to show them that maybe the kids aren't so bad and maybe they could get involved with them. Still, the police and the dealers throw a lot of those efforts off track in the end." (Jenny, 11/04/03)

However, Dante says,

"I think they'd love to get involved if you get their motives straight. If they're concerned about their property in the neighborhood then they'd want to get the kids on the right track so they aren't destroying stuff or selling drugs on their front yard. Maybe we could all get involved in an entrepreneurial venture with the kids. Give them something to do to help bring back the way our older folks remember [First Street] thriving back in the day" (11/06/03).

CHAPTER 4 OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE LOCAL PROGRAMMING

The ability to utilize local social support networks to enhance community-based enrichment programs is recognized as an asset in field of youth development. When this view is taken seriously at the neighborhood level, it may help answer many of the larger socio-political dilemmas of overcrowded, understaffed, and under funded municipal initiatives. It may cut reliance on politically beholden and often-unstable levels of professional social services. Perhaps the largest drawback to such purely extra-local programs is the instability of funding sources. Programs such as these are often the first to be jeopardized and cut back in times of budget shortfalls, such as the one federal and state legislators are currently encountering. Additional grant monies that help fund many after-school programs are also vulnerable. Even when such programs are not being scaled back, waiting lists often serve as a reminder that most still cannot accommodate the sheer number of children and parents who desire this type of service (Norris 2003).

Furthermore, neighborhood-based initiatives may also provide an opportunity to alter community social norms and attitudes to encourage the utilization of untapped resources and skill development activities in the interest of local children. This holds the added promise of simultaneously strengthening local relationships and capacity to act cooperatively. Collective efficacy refers to a group's perceived ability to mobilize their available capabilities and resources in an effort to attain a conjoint aspiration. Collective efficacy rests on the larger dynamics and overall character of communities' social and emotional cohesion - their sense of trust, solidarity, and shared identity. This points to

unforced consensus within the community on value positions and especially strategies of conjoint action (Tilly 1973). In most cases, the observed factors inhibiting collective efficacy are not normally that of disconnect over core value judgments within the community (i.e. drugs, violence, crime), but over specifics concerning the deployment of resources to enforce such value consensus (Kornhauser 1978; Selznick 1992).

Levels of social competence, another dimension of collective efficacy, rely on the abilities of individuals to use their perceptions of social environments to provide feedback to the group which may allow more motivated and goal-oriented planning to occur in a realistic fashion. Social competence, as structured by Gladwin (1967), involves increasing the ability to learn to use different behavior patterns to realize goals, negotiating to utilize resources embedded within a social network, and using contextual skills to assess social realities. The quality and context of communication across varying social terrain within the community directly moderate exchanges that produce normative consensus (Small and Supple 2001). These ingredients are all necessary to develop, maintain, and improve supportive relationships within a social network (Rohrle and Sommer 1994).

The concept of social capital refers to tangible and non-tangible resources found within social networks that individuals or groups can utilize to attempt to achieve certain aims (Lin 2001). Social capital revolves around the dynamics of giving and receiving within relationships. It is a dynamic resource that can be created, maintained, and dissolved, based on courses of action taken by individuals within a social system. Social capital is created when relationships change among actors within the contexts of social systems in ways that facilitate action (Coleman 1990). Thus, a model of social capital

zeroing in on the neighborhood level needs to first understand the dynamics of how it is accessed in a specific social context. Only then will it be able to characterize the processes of resource mobilization and investment in such a social structure, and thus accurately predict the returns on such actions (Lin 2001). Furthermore, social capital does not have to be thought of in the context of a closed social system of a community, but can be open to outside resource development and deployment. Specifically, individuals and groups may mobilize their social capital with other actors in congruent social systems to give them access to resources outside of their immediate control.

If heightened levels of social capital and collective efficacy can positively affect youth development outcomes within communities, then we must strive to find methods by which to optimally promote these traits within communities. The key in this equation is to find strategic means to do this in such a way as to add to aggregate resiliency to a specific ecological context, especially those in greatest need. Building the capacity of communities to provide enhanced mutual aid requires the instilment of such values not only in the adult population, but also in ingraining such qualities and their rewards within youth. An “interactional” approach views youth as both active recipients and providers of various types of support. Furthermore, more malleable interventions originating below the bureaucratic radar may provide opportunities to fashion programs that more implicitly understand the specific needs of different individuals and groups within a community. The burning question remaining is how to optimally fashion such networking systems and resource allocation techniques to a specific ecological context with its particular needs (Nestmann and Hurrelmann 1994).

The answer many overburdened after-school enrichment programs are looking for may lie in larger community building efforts; that is, the efficient use of indigenous social resources to make the best of macro-determined ecological settings. However, the superficial nature of most recent sociological studies focusing on the neighborhood level does not seem to help us find strategies for enhancing localized support networks. Most of these studies rely almost completely on correlation research attempting to untangle complexities of confounding census-based variables. Many such findings could be applied to already existing conditions within First Street, but do not help answer the final posed in this study. They are too contextually shallow to take into account mediating community-level variables that determine the actual effects of social structure in specific neighborhoods. They can really only serve as inanimate guidelines for theorized locales.

Even when a decade's worth of such findings are reviewed under a larger contextual umbrella, their ability to generate insight for future interventions (not just more research opportunities) is dubious at best. Top researchers utilizing this type of approach to measure neighborhood effects remain skeptical of the induced superficiality within current designs. Robert J. Sampson and his colleagues (2002) admitted after a meta-analysis of such literature over the last decade that,

“Despite progress, fundamental questions remain. Even when directly focused on social processes, the many differences in research design and measurement across studies [reviewed herein] make it difficult to provide an overall estimate of the magnitude of associations. We also know little about the causes of key social processes or whether they are responsive to neighborhood policy interventions. For example, what produces or can change collective efficacy and institutional capacity? Although much effort has been put into understanding the structural backdrop to neighborhood social organization, we need a deeper focus on cultural, normative, and collective-action perspectives that attach meaning to how residents frame their commitment to places. (pg. 473)

These shortcomings have been acknowledged before. Commonly used census-tract or zip code data generally do not approximate boundaries of what have been called “functional communities” (Coleman and Hoffer 1987). In trying to use easily accessible large data sets that may overemphasize the importance of individual-level characteristics, many studies have overlooked contextual community-level processes (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Aber 1997).

One of the most impressively intensive studies conducted in this field over the last few years comes out of a mixed methodology research project in some of Philadelphia’s disadvantaged neighborhoods. Furstenburg and colleagues (1999a) used both detailed regression analysis and qualitative interview methods to again try and gauge the strength of variables predicting youth outcomes and reported back in book called *Managing to Make It: Urban Families and Adolescent Success*. This contextual study is superior to others using solely cross-sectional data, because it involves an analysis attempting to determine effects of changes and exchanges in individuals and communities as they change over time. Also, Furstenberg’s study was able to pick up on measures of mediating processes operating in the smaller institutional settings within schools, families, and community organizations. Still, the analysis of indicators picked at the census-tract level to measure academic performance, behavioral problems, and mental health found no reliable means to predict cross-tract variation in neighborhood race/class composition or levels of social capital. Neighborhood-level predictors of family management strategies could not reliably predict adolescent success. However, when levels of normative consensus between neighbors, institutional connections, and family climates were high, the strength of informal social networks and locally managed

organizations fared significantly better in predicting levels of the three above indicators of youth success.

What do these researchers have to say about what should be done to aid disadvantaged families and communities via public policy? Furstenberg and colleagues (1999) close their book with the same types of incredibly brief and general propositions common within this field. They place emphasis on finding means to help parents to better access institutional support systems such as schools and community centers. They advise the construction of “functional communities” that give parents a place to involve their children in co-socializing processes with like-minded neighbors and their children. They advocate for increased government involvement at some level of this amorphous “institution-building” process, but summarily acknowledge the subsequent federal and state cutbacks for this type of social spending. The final half of this paper seeks to apply new methodological techniques to attempt to further the search for answers in this field.

CHAPTER 5 ACTION RESEARCH THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

One of the oldest and most durable theoretical paths within sociology centers on attempts to more fully delineate the rational processes by which individuals and groups create and change their systems of social relationships to better the life chances of themselves and their closest relations. This approach is historically grounded in the efforts of the early 20th century Chicago school to implement a community-based methodology in their research. This “process sociology” attempts to buttress the perceived weaknesses of pure “mechanical” or “organismic” models by adding an extra dimension of socio-structural adaptation in response to ever-changing external conditions. The focus is thus placed on the analysis of social conditions that lead to such structural elaboration and the continually shifting strategies of interaction and accommodation in complex social environments (Buckley 1967).

Anthony Giddens (1979) elaborated his concept of structuration in order to emphasize the structural properties of social systems as both the medium and the outcome of active, agentic processes constituting such systems. In this, he refused to conceptualize any pragmatic differentiation between systems’ statics and dynamics by utilizing agency as the conceptual link between action theory and structural analysis. This points to the inquiry process within the social sciences as a means to utilizing “lay practical consciousness” that must involve “tacit knowledge skillfully applied in the enactment of courses of conduct, but which the actor is not able to formulate discursively” (pg. 57). Structuration thus refers to specific patterns of purposeful actions

and their perceived justifications that govern the continuity or transformation of social systems.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) paradigm offers us a means by which to conduct more viable forms of community-level inquiry. At its core, PAR can be seen as a democratizing, pragmatic, social change agenda via social science research. Action research distinguishes itself by refusing to privilege the pure vs. applied distinction in science and the corresponding gulf between thought and action. It attempts to produce more valid forms of social knowledge via immersion in groups' attempts to organize means to address and resolve perceived deficiencies (Greenwood and Levin 1998).

This current research endeavors to create what William Foote Whyte called in his 1981 address to the American Sociological Association, "social inventions for solving human problems." The grounding for such inquiry methods lies in the conviction that the most valid social knowledge can only be gained by attempting to change a social environment. This can be thought of in terms of the most powerful research in the biological sciences. A more full understanding of any environment can be achieved by observing how certain stimuli cause change in an environment. Even using the most complex tools, a biologist can only learn a finite amount of pragmatic information when simply observing and measuring dynamics of an organic system. However, when the environment of the organic system is changed by adding some form of stimulus, one can see how such a system responds, thus opening up new avenues of understanding that were unattainable from the stance of the removed observer.

PAR requires conjoint participation of the researcher within a social system as a means to demonstrate solidarity and acquire a first-hand perspective. While biologists

cannot communicate on a higher level with the organisms they attempt to understand, action researchers commit themselves to being “friendly outsiders” who work hand-in-hand with the people who have the most intimate knowledge of any particular social landscape. Action in democratic concert with these stakeholders is thus seen as the most powerful way to generate intricate knowledge of a particular social world (Greenwood and Levin 1998). This paradigm does not altogether shun the data of more “hands-off” social science inquiry, but renders its methods and findings secondary to primary corroborating evidence from ground-level feedback within communities.

Only by attempting to change current realities in this manner can we hope to understand the true meanings behind the conceptualizations we create as social researchers. This idea represents the PAR paradigm’s attempt to bridge theory and praxis. It not only collects data to cross-reference with earlier findings, but goes a step further and attempts to assess the effects of certain types of “inventions” on the behavior of the social environment as a whole. Community members, who represent fully collaborating co-participants in any legitimate PAR project, gain knowledge and empowerment through formulating and carrying out such “inventions” in pursuit of goals legitimate to them (Stringer 1999).

A participatory process provides a much more valid standpoint from which to collect data that potentially increases understanding of the phenomena at hand. The reasoning for this is the common inability of outside parties to fully comprehend the embedded meanings and contexts engendered in non-local environments. There is great need for normally passive participants in social science studies to be placed in a position where they can become full co-investigators of issues that affect their own well being.

This must involve suppressing the classical distinction between researcher and subject and reorganizing this relationship into one of mutual initiative and shared control of a continual action and reflection cycle. For example, without the full involvement of local stakeholders, researchers might interpret a subtle strategy of resistance as passivity, quiescence, or apathy without the perspective of an acclimated insider. This would hamper possibilities for successful change-oriented research and distort the realities of a situation for later application of such knowledge elsewhere. However, attempting to understand the complexities of conjoint efforts in diverse group settings normally means that the PAR approach requires more time, effort, and commitment from social scientists compared to a basic or pure research methodology (Greenwood and Levin 1998).

PAR can also be described as a form of co-operative experiential inquiry along the lines of the philosophy first presented by John Heron and Peter Reason (1995). This is based on the notion of aiding groups of stakeholders to more fully actualize their desires within an integrated community setting. Such a process aims to expand the boundaries of a collective consciousness (“conscientization”) and allow stakeholders to expand key forms of knowledge that allow them to execute plans that better their life situations. This concept dovetails with another put forth by Bill Torbert (1991), “action inquiry”, which focuses on transforming communities and the organizations that serve them into more efficient, collaborative, and especially self-reflective entities. This entire perspective focuses on the creation of knowledge that has high external validity in action.

CHAPTER 6 ENTRY TO ACTION: ASSESSING RESIDENT INITIATIVE

Sociology undergraduates from the University of Florida assisted in conducting 60 open-ended interviews with residents. By January 2003, my professor began teaching the class he had incorporated the First Street action research ideas into. The students helped devise two distinct semi-structured interviews for residents with and without children living in their homes (See Appendix B). I pre-tested and continually refined the interview questions with a few of my neighbors over the next month. Beginning in early February and continuing through early April, pairs of students went door to door in the neighborhood conducting a total of 60 interviews with residents in their homes. We utilized snowball sampling to get a representative segment of people living with and without children in different parts of the neighborhood.

The specific ideas for questions emerged partly from ongoing discussions with residents in neighborhood meetings and on the street as well from my own areas of curiosity and from sociological spheres of interest residents may not have cared to touch upon. The measures we attempted to assess in this survey unintentionally fell very much in line with what Coulton, Korbin, and Su (1995) used to assess qualities of neighborhood environments that were deemed especially relevant to children and their families. A recent study built on the aforementioned process by concluding that the measurement of neighborhood norms can be strengthened by assessments utilizing resident perceptions of parenting strategies adopted by others in the neighborhood (Caughy 2001). Such norms assessed within these studies and our own should not be

emphasized in a “should” or “should not” light, but instead as the routine of behavior patterns within a neighborhood.

Following this train of thought, our questions mostly pertained to residents’ perceptions of neighborhood social interaction dynamics, provision of social services, residential stability, organizational participation, pride in the neighborhood, presence of crime and social disorder detrimental to children, behavior of parents and children, and value consensus across the neighborhood on such measures. Aggregating individual responses on such measures can reliably assess all such aspects of neighborhoods with the exception of social interaction patterns. Lack of cross neighbor connectedness and communication may bias responses towards personal experiences only when assessing levels of neighborhood social interaction (Caughy 2001). Our questions zeroed in on patterns of child care and youth activities within the neighborhood. They also attempted to open the door to resident suggestion concerning what had gone on in past after-school enrichment and what might now be appropriate to improve opportunities for positive youth development.

The 28 parents we interviewed in First Street had an average of about three children residing with them in the household. We interviewed mostly mothers, but fathers, grandparents, aunts, and uncles were also represented. On average, residents with children had much shorter residential tenure periods than those without children. They were also much more likely to be renting as opposed to owning their homes. About half of respondents with children were single parents and three quarters were female.

About half of parents interviewed reported that their children have some kind of structured after-school activity, these mostly pertained to school-based sports programs

or day-care centers. Others reported lots of generalized play activities, either in the house with TV/video games or out in the streets. Some of these parents said they were not able to supervise such play activities since they are working during these hours. A significant number of parents who reported that they are able to supervise keep their children either very close to home and/or family-bound. During after-school hours when they can't keep an eye on them, the children are with their extended families for supervision. One half of the parents interviewed had family residing in First Street and tended to utilize them fairly heavily for child-care. In these relationships, there was low reporting of reciprocal involvement and/or formal compensation.

Over three-quarters of parents interviewed claimed to know nothing about the after-school programming at the neighborhood center. Most of those who knew about the programs already had their children involved. This may be reflective of the fact that very few respondents in the total sample had any involvement in groups or organizations within the neighborhood. Those who did were primarily church-based. Less than half of respondents identified "close friends" living within the neighborhood, and those who did relied on them only marginally for child care when compared with extended family use. Around half of the parents claimed to know the parents of their children's close friends well (more than just their names), but many respondents tended to use the names of their cousins with children. They tend to trust other parents outside the family far less with the care of their children and only rely on them for basic supervision around their homes.

As for how parents interpret the neighborhood environment, safety issues are not so much a concern as exposure to the drug trade. They believe that bad influences abound, from both adults and children. A significant proportion cloisters their children at home to

prevent contamination as much as possible. Others think “exposure with parental explanation of the circumstances” may be beneficial for children, and still others contend that “it is the same everywhere.” Most parents believed that their children had enough positive adult influences in their lives, with these mostly stemming from family and church ties. Some concede that they believe that there simply aren’t enough around to be had and that sometimes over-protection might get in the way. Most parents also believe that their children simply have too much unstructured free time on their hands.

Our interviews found a low overall level of communication between parents living in First Street. In the small number of interviews in which genuine communication networks were found, there did seem to be consensus on the issues of poor neighborhood social environment and little structured activity opportunities for children. However, there is a certain degree of underlying suspicion in these interviews that many other parents in the neighborhood are less concerned with the well being of their children than they should be. The words “lazy”, “ghetto”, “irresponsible” and “untrustworthy” came up on occasion. This is often attributed to a poverty or “street” mentality associated especially with single parents living in the housing projects.

Some interviewees deferred the question of whether they thought parents in the neighborhood agreed about child rearing practices because they did not know many other parents personally. Still, most said that they would like to have more cooperation with other parents in the neighborhood. Most were unable to say exactly what kind of system or intervention they would like to see put into place to make this a reality. A few claimed that such support systems already exist for them and others, but not among the single mothers who need them most. It was acknowledged that the center and the churches are

the only neighborhood organizations working with children and that they are not as well organized or utilized as they had been in the past.

There was total consensus among parents that children in the neighborhood needed and would benefit from more local educational and recreational activities. The main problem they saw with bringing this kind of programming to fruition was that people in the neighborhood, especially parents, were very difficult to motivate. Parents were doubtful that people could be brought “out of their own little worlds” to cooperate on such a level and build a structure for improvements. Some respondents thought that parents would be too “defensive” of their current strategies (the implication being that they haven’t been doing a good job) to think critically and try something new. Everyone would like to see improvements happen, but they were more apt to appeal to outside experts and staffers from city government or the university apparatus.

When asked if they would be willing to help plan or participate in improvement efforts in the near future, the majority of parents responded that indeed they would be available to take part in at least one of the two, barring scheduling constraints. Many were very enthusiastic about such an initiative and proposed personal skills and ideas that they believed would be particularly helpful in building successful programming. When parents were then asked how they thought they would personally benefit from such efforts, many suggested an undefined kind of aggregate benefit for themselves and their children. This normally revolved around a sense making the neighborhood an overall nicer place to live. Some mentioned structured activities for children making them feel safer about their children’s future in the neighborhood. Others thought positive change

might come about through changing residents' isolationist attitudes and providing for the needs of the neighborhood's more elderly residents through service projects.

The 32 individuals we interviewed living without children in the neighborhood tended to have much longer residential tenure, averaging about 20 years. They were also far more likely to own their homes. The vast majority of these people had somehow been intimately involved with children in their lives, whether the role was that of parent or extremely close family member. Only about a quarter of respondents confirmed the presence of kin currently residing in First Street. This was said to be much less than in the past, and especially few people had related children living in the neighborhood. A significant number of respondents made a point of mentioning that family bonds seemed to them to have weakened during their time living in the neighborhood, concomitantly with the tightness of community bonds as well.

Most respondents reported a strong sense of pride in the First Street neighborhood, stemming primarily from long-term personal/family connections and its historical legacy and prominence in the city's African-American community. Many residents say it is hard to maintain this sense of pride in the face of powerful detractors such as the drug/policing blight and the structural effects of poverty evidenced in the neighborhood's overall dilapidation. When asked about feelings of personal responsibility for the neighborhood, responses gave the distinct impression that in the vast majority of cases, actions were confined to the personal domain around one's home or on their side of the block. Many people said the problems of the neighborhood are more than they feel competent to confront on any larger level. Some examples were given of instances where individuals looked out for mischievous children or marauding crackheads, often intervening in street

disputes where people became too loud or belligerent. Many respondents reported calling the police on occasion.

When asked whether they felt other residents held the same sense of personal responsibility for the neighborhood, answers were divided in thirds. One third deferred the question by responding that they did not have sufficient experience or connections with other residents these days to make such a judgment. Another third felt that most people probably felt the same and had fairly decent intentions as well. The other proportion strongly voiced concern about the nature of other residents' commitment. There was a feeling among some of these respondents that there is a distinct division in the neighborhood between those who have lived in First Street a long time and have long-term interests in mind (property, family) and those who are transient (renters).

Individualism in the neighborhood is thought to prevail over cooperative attempts at neighborhood improvement projects with other residents. Personal responsibility tied to work, family, and church commitments were especially prominent. Social functions at churches aimed at larger-scale service projects were more commonly cited examples of working together with others than neighborhood clean-ups, meetings, or yearly festivals.

Respondents seemed to feel that the sense of community in First Street is declining. This is linked to historical community dissolution from desegregation and the problems linked to what one resident referred to as "the other PCP" (poverty, crime, and policing). There was a lack of connection reported between newer (younger) neighborhood's core of older residents. In addition, two respondents mentioned serious infighting between the more disadvantaged families in the neighborhood. Some people seemed genuinely distrustful of the newer residents' moral fiber and their allegiance with the problems of

the street i.e. substance abuse, drug dealing, sexual promiscuity, adolescent childbirth, and poor parenting practices resulting from “babies raising babies”.

Half of respondents could not name a single neighborhood child they know because they claimed that none lived near them. It is assumed that they all live in or near the housing projects, which is also considered the epicenter of most of the neighborhood’s problems. Almost all said they were concerned about effects of the neighborhood on children in terms of drugs especially. Other problems addressed were too much exposure to poor role models on the street who may fight, have “dirty” verbal arguments, and have altercations with the police. Outside of school and church, these residents expressed worry over children’s lack of structured activities and parental supervision in a neighborhood that was described by one respondent simply as “bad news”. Many people gave examples of witnessing far too many children just “hanging out” on the street near the “drug boys”, even at night in some instances.

All residents interviewed wished that children (adolescents in particular) had a place that they were proud to attend where they would be offered mentoring, tutoring, and a variety other supervised activities. However, almost none of these respondents had any conception of the programming currently running at the center. Those who did had participated in one or more in the recent past. In addition, none could name any other organizations that put on after-school activities for children. One resident believed that what the neighborhood really lacked was a mechanism for contacting, organizing, and persuading parents to take a keener interest in improving conditions for their children.

Most respondents thought that neighborhood residents as a whole probably agree on child rearing methods, although some voiced concern about incidents of excessive

corporal punishment and neglect that had witnessed among poorer parents. The consensus of respondents was that they thought about half of the children growing up in First Street today will live here as adults. Most would also consider staying a negative outcome and a result of young black people being “stuck” in Gainesville with a poor education and little hope of finding decent jobs. A few interviewees gave examples of how people they watched grow up here and stay haven’t done so well themselves. As an example of this mentality, some respondents encouraged field trips outside of the neighborhood as activities for children’s programming.

In these interviews, there were lots of suggestions made for children’s activities that they would like to see implemented in the neighborhood, and 60% of respondents said they would want to be involved. Still, some of these interviewees made qualifying remarks and caveats that gave the impression that people were more obliged to step into an existing organization with prearranged structure and resource allocation than to help formulate a new one themselves. Others felt the city and/or the police were likely to co-opt such an endeavor. Some simply doubt that parents in particular could ever get their act together enough to make programming workable. As for how they see this project possibly benefiting them, most of these residents just want their neighborhood and the people who live in it to look and feel more respectful.

CHAPTER 7 A NARRATIVE OF ATTEMPTS

I spoke with Kandra about the problems of low child attendance and volunteer participation quite a few times. I came to understand through our interactions that she did not feel much could be done to immediately improve the situation. When I suggested that we go door to door in the neighborhood in an effort to recruit more volunteers and children for the programs, she supported my initiative, but indicated that she would not be willing to participate in this effort. Kandra seemed to have little confidence that residents could be brought into the fold in such a manner, if at all. While her long history working in the city's African American community led me to trust her judgement to a certain degree, I could not bring myself to completely accept such an assertion. By this time, I was quite familiar with the social patterns of the neighborhood. I had gotten to know quite a few of the parents of children I tutored on a personal basis and her characterizations of them as uninvolved and obdurate were now slightly unsettling to me. Her quick dismissal of them as possible resources seemed to reflect more a self-constructed barrier between herself and the population than genuine disinterest.

She did, however, encourage me to bring my friends and student associations to aid in the programming. I tried this route. Friends of mine came for a while, but they were often unreliable due to distance constraints and other personal obligations. Also, I noticed that many of my white, college-educated counterparts had trouble relating to the children they were tutoring (the hip-hop generation), both from a socioeconomic and cultural standpoint. Their attendance eventually tapered off into non-attendance. While I

felt that when utilizing this volunteer group, such shortcomings would always be the case, I pushed forward towards creating what I hoped would be a more institutionalized and consistent framework within the university's offices of community service.

Approaching this organization was not difficult since students who were my peers ran most of its operating branches with the oversight of a single university employee. However, I came to find that even in middle of the Fall semester, they were unwilling to change their already strained volunteer apportioning for that semester or the next to accommodate the needs of First Street that I articulated. Despite the neighborhoods' relative proximity to campus in relation to their other volunteer sites, the students I dealt with had never heard of it. They specialized mostly in service projects for the large tracts of public housing in the far eastern portion of the city. My neighborhood was not as poor nor as visible as these other locales. Also, they had trouble understanding why First Street needed one of their programs if it already had one in place. Supplementing existing frameworks did not seem to be in their playbook. Still, I continued to push through the bureaucracy to try and get Kandra what she wanted. I went as far as to apply for a summer internship position in which I believed I might be able to personally ensure support for the next Fall. The more time I spent in the neighborhood and with the kids at the center, the more I felt personally responsible for making improvements happen.

Following a flyer left at my doorstep one evening, I began to regularly attend monthly neighborhood association meetings at the center. There was always a visible core of about five older neighborhood women who controlled the flow of the meetings, but initially there was a handful of other concerned residents who attended. The issues were consistent, mostly revolving around police reports on their strategies to stem local

drug trafficking, discussion of dilapidated homes needing to be razed with associated property code violations, and planning for special occasions. Issues concerning children or families were never mentioned. Being a white student outsider, and recognizing that there was already a patterned routine in place for these meetings, I did not initially bring them to bear. There were those in attendance who were noticeably more radical than the core members on issues of neighborhood blight. These folks wanted to see all the drug dealers arrested and imprisoned or all the run-down houses demolished in one fell swoop. Their impassioned outbursts were sometimes well received, but none of the officials in attendance from the city or the police seemed capable of accommodating their vision. Thus, they became frustrated with the inaction and the way the meetings were run and permanently retreated from the setting.

Seeing this pattern, I was careful to try and introduce my concerns for local children in such a way that I was not perceived as a threat. I offered this problem as a topic of discussion only as a side note when the other issues had passed their allotted time, as not to co-opt their designated prominence. At the meeting in which I spoke up, there were only two parents in attendance, but they eagerly approved of my interjection. Kandra was not in attendance for this particular meeting. As in all other issues brought to bear in such meetings, the response was directed at the city. Members lamented the poor facilities for children in the neighborhood. The “tot lot” on First Street’s main drag had long languished in disrepair. The basketball hoop outside the center was bent and had not been fixed for years. In addition, the city’s department of parks and recreation had closed off a building directly adjacent to the center to use as a storage facility for their other, better funded recreation centers. Kandra had told me in the past that the only reason the

center was open to the public at all was because a non-profit group she had helped found was under contract from the city to operate at a fraction of the cost of their other centers. People at the meeting came out and said the issue was historic patterns of discrimination.

In response, the chairman of the meetings, a man who had once been mayor, but who was no longer a neighborhood resident, was designated as a special envoy to our district's city commissioner on this matter. The next month, the regularly scheduled neighborhood meeting was surprisingly co-opted altogether by a special meeting on something called the "model block program". This was billed as an attempt to start a cascade effect of structural rehabilitation throughout the neighborhood by selecting a small number of blocks and pouring grant money into making the property more attractive. Our district commissioner, Mr. Wally, had walked into the wee hours the night before hand delivering flyers door to door in the neighborhood to encourage attendance. A remarkably large number of residents showed up to hear the developers in charge speak about their plans and receive feedback from residents. While the attendees were mostly composed of long-term, older residents, there were so many people that there was no more space left in the center's meeting room. This attendance gave me hope that when something big seemed to be happening that residents cared strongly enough about and were duly informed of (even on short notice), they would come. This made me think that perhaps the meetings were simply not advertised well enough. Thus, I volunteered to distribute flyers throughout the entire neighborhood for the next month's meeting.

The older residents who consistently attend the meeting are the closest things to representatives for the eastern side of the neighborhood. The monthly residents'

association meetings have been poorly attended as long as I have been going to them. The characteristics of attendees has not really changed. There is a small group of committed older men and women who dominate the forum. They are highly organized in that they are versed in local political happenings and formal meeting mechanisms. They have interest in the future of the neighborhood with their property holdings and/or remember it in its glory days and would like to see it revived. However, there were other, younger, and more contentious voices at the meetings last year during the uproar over lack of children's summer programs and a drug escalation in the neighborhood. Within a couple of tries, these folks eventually became frustrated with the suffocating formalities of the meetings and realized that either no one wanted to hear or no one felt compelled to act on their radical vision and strategy.

The police tend to dominate the meetings because the principal area of interest to the people who come to the meetings has always been the drug problem. Older residents see it as a new blight on their community to add to the poverty they grew up with, and they would like to see the police simply remove it. Their age means that for the most part, they didn't grow up with the drug culture close enough at hand to understand the nature of this beast, which spans social, political, economic, and cultural realms in the community and in the nation at large. Thus, they are always appalled by the perceived inability of the police to eradicate the problem for good. The issue of drugs is always followed up by concern with the physical dilapidation of the neighborhood, which has worsened. This is where codes enforcement comes in. They believe they can simply destroy or punish people into hiding the effects of historical elements of poverty.

The only other thing that gets substantial airtime in these meetings are special event planning sessions. There are the holidays; there are neighborhood cleanups, and the annual arts festival of which Kandra is in charge. These things, which make the neighborhood look and feel better superficially and sporadically, are prime topics of interest and bones of contention over the right ways for them to be done. However, addressing issues that concern the general population of the neighborhood, which often do not coincide with these middle class older women, like police harassment, finding jobs, bettering educational situations for children and adults alike, and helping out the single mothers and grandparents with child care, are almost uniformly ignored. These are hard questions that require sustained and seemingly selfless efforts to accomplish for a group of people these women have far less commonality with.

Disappointingly, despite my delivering flyers to all the homes in the neighborhood, the same traditionally small number of people attended the next month. To make matters worse, when the chairman was reminded of the responsibility he had been charged with and why he had been chosen (his insider ties to city government officials), he reported that he had forgotten to request an audience with the city commissioner at all. The issue was once again dead on the floor, drugs and demolished houses having seemingly trampled and forgot about it in the end. There being no one else to designate responsibility to, I was given the go ahead to try and secure a meeting with the commissioner myself. I couldn't help but wince when Kandra later said to me, "See, that is what I'm talking about. Some people are simply unreliable."

While I was waiting the standard two weeks for my appointment with Mr. Wally, an opportunity arose. One of my sociology professors expressed an interest to me of

doing an action research project as part of his next class on the American family. We talked over the possibility of using the problems with after-school activities in my neighborhood as a platform. I went back to discuss the possibility with involved parties. Kandra had no problem with the idea of the initiative when I explained that it would potentially bring more resources to her programming. However, apart from this tacit endorsement, she did not commit to any support or involvement at this point in time. My feeling was that she wanted to see the current of the idea before taking the plunge herself.

My meeting with Mr. Wally was quite receptive, considering that I myself (a white student transient) was unrepresentative of his constituency within the district. I told him of problems associated with the tutoring program in First Street, emphasizing the fact that low volunteer support in the programs was constraining the number of local children Kandra could adequately serve. I then explained to him the idea of using students to interview neighborhood residents as to the social climate in the neighborhood that might be preventing their participation. I told him my hope was to be able to find ways to promote a programming system within the neighborhood that would encourage more adults to volunteer and involve their children. He made a point to second my concerns wholeheartedly and endorse any future efforts that I would undertake. His impression of the challenges that the children faced, however, were still focused much more on the problem of drugs in First Street than mine had been. He switched the topic of conversation to a south Florida anti-drug crusader whom he had been courting to lead a resident protest past some of the known drug houses in the neighborhood. His plans on the drug war front were much more specific and thought out than his platform on the educational and recreational needs of children in the area.

The same could be said of the local police lieutenant who I also consulted on the matter. His ideas for the children involved providing small monetary incentives for good grades on their report cards, a technique he had applied in the past when the department had more disposable funds available for disadvantaged children. In an attempt to consult all of the stakeholders involved in this arena, I also consulted with the members of the First Street Neighborhood Association at one of their meetings. In the same manner, they voiced their support for improvements, but did not offer any concrete assistance to such efforts. Still, all parties seemed to be pledging their support of any initiative which would help get the children the after school opportunities they needed to keep them off the streets and involved in productive and supervised enrichment activities. My hope was that the initial exploratory nature of the project would help make us aware of avenues that could be utilized to normalize local support patterns in the after school realm.

During the April neighborhood association meeting, a few neighborhood parents voiced concern that the city was not offering a First Street branch of their summer recreation program. These parents voiced concern that they would have to transport their children to and from another city program miles away and that other less fortunate children would have to walk. In turn, it was thought that this would lead to less total children from the neighborhood being able to attend the city programs at all. This was because many of the disadvantaged parents were expected to not allow their children to make such an unsupervised daily commute and instead place them in locally available daycare or simply keep them around the house. The neighborhood association members, especially the chairman, were outraged that the city had not earmarked First Street as a

location for their programming. They saw this as another act of ongoing discrimination and vowed to force the city into complying with their demands for the programs.

In response, the next month's meeting featured the presence of the city's assistant director of parks and recreation, the agency responsible for the summer programming. After listening to the grievances of the board and parents in attendance, the man justified the apportioning by claiming that budget shrinkages had forced the agency to cut back their most poorly attended recreation site, First Street. He showed the board the average attendance numbers from the summer before as proof. Kandra brought to light during the meeting that the same problem had happened the year before (unknown to the association members) and that she and other concerned residents had been forced to go door to door to collect enough applications themselves. Kandra claimed that the applications had been far too complicated to complete and that this deterred parents from registering their children. The man from the agency re-emphasized that the city had no choice in this matter and proposed that perhaps a transport van could be sent from First Street to get children to the next closest recreational center and back. The people in attendance that night were still miffed by their neighborhood's exclusion and began to organize an appeal to the higher-ups at the biweekly city commission meeting.

At this time, I began circulating a petition with the help of a neighborhood resident and a few of the students from the class who had signed up to continue working on the project through the summer for individual research credit. We did so not to gauge or display neighborhood support on the issue (who wouldn't support children having local recreational opportunities), but more to get an idea of how many children and parents in

the neighborhood wanted the services. In the process, many people were informed of the situation at hand and a few even volunteered to help.

By marshalling the collective resources of the personal information on the interviews, the petition, and Kandra's connections, we were able to make a strong showing at the city commission meeting in the first week of May. A large contingent of about 30 neighborhood parents and children made a big effort by carpooling to the meeting to make a stand on the issue. When our time to speak came, there was a parade of parents in attendance who pleaded with the city commissioners to grant their neighborhood a program. Knowing beforehand that the overstretched resource argument would be employed, we parlayed a position whereby we were willing to complement city staff for the programming with local resident and student volunteers. The mayor, who presides over the city commission meeting, was enthused by the grassroots showing and commended our caravan for our efforts. He immediately called for a response from the only official from the Department of Parks and Recreation in attendance.

This person relayed the same message to the mayor about their budget shortfalls and their inability to operate another summer activities site within such limitations. Hearing this, the mayor then chided this official for not listening to our proposed plan of action in the manner that we deserved. He said that what he had been hearing was a desire to work together with the department on the issue from a community-based perspective. This, he believed, was an outstandingly fresh and creative notion that needed to be explored. Since the matter could not be properly discussed at the time without the top director of the department present, the mayor called for one of the commissioners to start a motion to take up this matter anew at the next meeting. This

was jumped upon by Mr. Walnut and was summarily seconded by two other commissioners. The mayor gave us a final endorsement and had the issue promptly scheduled. The dozen or so children in attendance sensed victory and began clapping and yelling ecstatically, prompting an “order in the court” type response from the mayor.

With these new developments afoot, the second week of May seemed to be the appropriate time to hold a general neighborhood meeting with special invitation to the past interviewees. A few students who stayed to work on the project over the summer helped me flyer the neighborhood to advertise for the Wednesday evening meeting. In addition, we attempted to call back all of the interviewees who had said they would be interested in attending the meeting. When the time came, only a handful of parents and residents showed up for the meeting, which was utterly disheartening for the organizers. It looked much like a monthly meeting of the neighborhood association, but with different faces. There were a couple of long winded and enthusiastic speeches given by people present who had worked with neighborhood children in the past, but little concrete planning occurred. In response, those in attendance collectively decided that it would be a good idea to make these meetings a weekly scheduled event so that perhaps interest would grow and people who were unable to attend tonight would be able to in the future.

However, the next Monday night, we were back on the city commission roster to resolve the matter once again. This time, the director of Parks and Recreation for the city had prepared a rebuttal to our case. She said that her numbers from the summer programs from the year before showed that the First Street site had the lowest attendance of all the city’s sites and thus was the obvious place to start cutting their budget costs. The neighborhood group had shrunk considerably from the previous presentation and

now included just Kandra, myself, and one resident. I presented census information at this meeting showing that the number of children living in First Street was actually larger than the number living in the next closest (and smallest) site. Kandra presented copies of the petitions we collected in the neighborhood, which showed many parents with over 60 children aggregate that were in support of a local summer recreation site. The director, getting frustrated at this point, contended three points via PowerPoint presentation: 1. Signatures are meaningless unless applications are actually completed 2. There was not enough money in their budget to open another site 3. Summer programs were set to open in under three weeks, not allowing enough time to get additional staff to cover a new site.

Again, we responded that we were proposing a volunteer supplemented programming option that would help with the budget and staffing shortfalls. The issue was hotly debated among commissioners and city staff, but with mayor still in favor of our innovative strategy, we got another chance. He allowed us the opportunity to gather a compelling number of completed applications from interested parents and opened up the possibility of using some emergency municipal funds should our endeavor prove that it had sufficient merit. In the elevator leaving the meeting, we encountered the Recreation and Parks director and her assistant, who at this point seemed noticeably nervous about the possibility of having to revamp their whole program. They scheduled a time with us to meet at the center and negotiate possible details.

In the two weeks that followed, residents living with children who had signed our petition were given the application forms at their homes. This saved them the trouble of having to go to the center to pick them up. We handed out over 60 forms to parents who specifically asked for them. Many were extremely enthusiastic about having a summer

activities center opening up in the neighborhood. Some parents even took applications for friends, family, and neighbors they thought would be interested. Kandra waited for the forms to be returned to the center so she herself could take them downtown. However, as time passed, we began to worry about the low numbers of forms being returned. Kandra revealed that she had these same problems the year before when many parents claimed to be having trouble filling out the forms. Kandra said they were “complicated.” What she meant is that the Department of Parks and Recreation operated their programs on a sliding scale fee system. This meant that parents had to prove their income to determine what they would be charged for the summer program services. If they did not prove their income, they defaulted into the highest pay bracket, which was around \$75 dollars a week per child enrolled. However, many of the parents, if they proved their income, would qualify for free tuition or very low weekly payments. Proving their income meant they had to get a copy of their tax returns for the previous year. For the lower income residents, many of them living in the housing projects, this meant they would have to negotiate the welfare system in order to procure evidence of their financial status.

In the meantime, the weekly Wednesday meetings had attracted a small group of committed parents. We had begun to plan specific activities for the summer program utilizing neighborhood residents. The list of proposed people and activities was becoming quite impressive. We had propositions for sports, arts and crafts, modeling, dance, self-defense, puppeteering, and even computer activities. However, when it became apparent that the entire endeavor was in danger due to lack of completed applications, the discussions switched to survival strategy mode. We talked about

provoking a standoff with the city whereas we would simply have the children dropped off at the center on the first day and begin activities whether the center had been recognized as an official site or not. The problem became how to accommodate large numbers of children in the small rooms in the center. The building adjacent to the center had been proposed as a sticking point to bring to the attention of the city. It had been closed for the city's storage use in staging summer programs at other city sites and was off limits to our needs until opened and cleaned out.

A few days before the next meeting with the city commission, the director of Parks and Recreation showed up at the center for our meeting. Although we had tried to remind and stay persistent with neighborhood parents to turn their completed forms in, most had not. We only had 23 completed forms in Kandra's office when she came. The director spoke to us for a while in trying to come up with strategies for our volunteer supplemented version to mesh with their more conventional program, but once she found out about the number of completed applications in, her tone changed. At this point, she had decided that the volunteers would not be able to work within their current program schemes. This was said to be because they would not be able to work more than a couple hours at a time, making the coordination of activities too difficult and contingent on punctuality that could not be expected from the general public. Also, she claimed that all volunteers would have to be evaluated by the city through fairly extensive criminal background checks, which would take more time than we had left before the scheduled starting date of the programs. When the last meeting with the city commission arrived, the small cadre of parents accompanied us to city hall. We presented the 30 or so applications we had in at the time as evidence of parental demand and asked for more

time. By this time however, a sufficient number of the city officials had lost patience and faith in our endeavor. We were told that our attempts at getting a program for First Street now seemed completely unfeasible.

Kandra set up programming at the center during the summer months, but only a dozen or so children attended regularly. Most of these were the children who had to attend summer school and didn't get to the center until noon. Many of the children from the neighborhood ended up attending the next closest center, although the city never provided the van transport they had promised earlier on in the process. Parents couldn't turn down the benefits of free lunch and numerous field trips that only the city could afford to provide. Also, Kandra believed she would now come under fire from the city for supporting the initiative in the first place and chose to consolidate her programming into total "cultural" activities. She felt that this would differentiate her programs from those of the city and in that way not invite direct competition or comparison. However, this meant that she wouldn't allow any outside athletics besides just shooting around on the one outdoor basketball hoop. She ran many of the volunteer supported programs that we had discussed earlier at meetings like puppet shows, piano lessons, dance, modeling, music, karate, arts and crafts, etc.). Still, the problem was that these activities were run so intermittently during the week that many of the children became disillusioned with waiting around the center all day for a few programmed events to happen. The number of children in attendance dropped throughout the summer months as they avoided or were banned the center (due to poor behavior) more and more and their parents were forced to find other activity options for them. Also, Kandra became much stricter with outside input on how the programs were run and she became increasingly focused on the children

learning standardized demonstration routines that could be performed at the end of the summer in her own personal showcase downtown. When the summer ended and the school year began anew, the programming at the center was much as before, if not even more strained by low participation from adults and children.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS

The title for this paper, “Recipe for Collective Complacency”, functions as a metaphor for the overarching findings within this study. The specific social characteristics and processes present in First Street comprise the ingredients, materials, and cooking conditions for collective complacency. The especially bitter aftertaste of the resulting concoction can be perceived in the lack of quality opportunities for children within the neighborhood. The social structure and dynamics of First Street tend to paralyze collective efficacy towards changing what many residents already acknowledge are problems with recreational and educational after-school activities.

The divides of age, race, and class produce what I call “segregated social capital.” That is, their respective spheres of interaction are confined to people with similar sets of characteristics along these dimensions. Within these collectivities, there are varying degrees of internal efficacy. The groups who have the most productive internal interactions seem to be those with the most demographic advantages. A good example is the middle-class older women who consistently attend the neighborhood meetings to represent their constituency. Those who have the worst interaction patterns are the single mothers living in the apartments, who constantly face unrelenting criticism and vicious gossip from their peers. There is always competition within groups, but the fiercest competition seems centered in the groups with the least personal resources. The competition between groups is less overt and is carried out by avoiding interaction with those believed to “below you” or who believe they are “better than you.” This overall

pattern of interactions can be related to the street/decent continuum developed by Elijah Anderson (1999) to explain the functions of social systems in urban neighborhoods.

Those who can remain above the fray can also exploit this pattern of relationships with its fragmented solidarities. While the city government is guilty of this in their treatment of the area, Kandra may be specifically implicated in this manner. She has either fallen into or produced a situation where there is little or no accountability for her actions. She is not originally from the neighborhood and she continues to live outside of its geographic grasp. Furthermore, she has modeled herself as someone different than any of the social groups in the neighborhood. She is a woman in her late fifties, putting her in the category for older people in the neighborhood. However, she does not fit the mold set for these individuals. She is not involved in the Christian church and is highly Afrocentric to the point of displaying rich portraits of Elijah Mohammed and Malcolm X on the walls of the neighborhood's community center.

The people who she purports to serve in the neighborhood seem distanced from her by many of her characteristics and her policies at the center. Being an older and well-respected woman in a position with a high degree of authority, she unluckily fits many of the stereotypes some parents hold about unfavorable school officials they may have to deal with. Many disadvantaged parents already have an aversion to dealing with such people and therefore may avoid engaging Kandra. Even if they do, many seem to have reported that they did not feel well treated in the interaction. If their children get expelled from the program or decide they no longer want to attend, they have little recourse within their means. It is highly unlikely that they would take such matters to the city for review.

The parents cannot accuse her of discrimination or racism like they may with their children's schools because Kandra is overtly pro-black and has a history of activism in the African American community. Parents can send their children to local day-care centers in the neighborhood, but sometimes the government may not subsidize this decision. The day care centers are not expected to be much more than a baby-sitting service and they do not serve to advance the child's skill levels in educational or recreational activities. Some parents will thus opt to keep their children at home rather than have them exposed other children at day care that might be seen as poor influences.

Furthermore, the continued use of programming activities at the center that are not particularly enjoyable or academically targeted helps to limit the number of children who attend. If more children attended the center in the afternoons, the associated stress of looking after more children might overflow onto Kandra personally. She has told me that she had past experience with being overwhelmed by too many children to serve in her twenty years of experience as a youth activity coordinator. While this is understandable, her current low attendance numbers do the neighborhood that she has been entrusted to serve a disservice. She is quite content with the status quo within her programming and is not very open to change in business as usual. Although her pay is relatively low, her position seems quite comfortable and stable. Since the city refuses to expend the resources needed to maintain a full-scale after-school center in the neighborhood, they contract lesser services out to her non-profit "cultural" organization for a fraction of the cost. These circumstances give Kandra free reign over the space and the activities that go on within. The city is not obliged to hold her particularly accountable because tacitly they understand that they could easily be shamed for racist discrimination if someone

raised questions about why the city isn't already operating a full-scale program in the neighborhood. Thus, Kandra is left to her own devices with little or no oversight from larger municipal bureaucracies. It is in her best interest to continue to push her own agenda until the balance of power somehow shifts.

It also seems this current state of affairs will continue to produce low levels of volunteer support. If there were more adult volunteers involved in the programming and more opportunity for one-on-one interaction, the children would likely have a more enjoyable experience. From my experiences, this would seem to hold true no matter what the specific activity might be. In fact, I have observed a consistent positive association between the number of volunteers in attendance and the number of children in attendance, tit for tat. Disadvantaged neighborhoods that claim to have few "positive" adult residents with time to participate in activities outside of their household are less likely to have residents involved in organized community activities where they would directly interact with children. Children in these settings are less likely to have a multitude of constructive choices regarding how to spend nearly 40% of their conscious non-school hours.

The programs at the center are not effective because the programming design and resource base is underdeveloped. The activities are not relevant or intrinsically motivating. The children have little responsibility to be in the program and the reward system of field trips fairly weak. If more children attended, eventually there would be a need for more tutors. Kandra might even have to start looking for volunteers who actually live in First Street. Perhaps she might even need to call someone who was related to one of the children attending the programs. This would contain the possibility

of bringing people into the fold who could raise legitimate criticisms about her activities and interaction strategies with children and parents alike. These volunteers might feel they have a right or a responsibility to raise such concerns since they are a part of the neighborhood. This could endanger Kandra's position of authority. Instead, she will likely continue to bring in personal friends from her ties in extralocal organizations.

Kandra favors using university students. This would seem to be a perfectly convenient fit for her type of programming. Student volunteers are mostly white and most do not live in the neighborhood. They have little or no connection to the residents or the neighborhood and are universally transient. Also, they feel that they have no place commenting on the way young black males are socialized in the programs and/or disciplined by Kandra. However, if she used students too heavily and advertised need for volunteers, it might come to the attention of one of the community aid groups at the university. While this might foster a larger contingent of student volunteers, it might also unintentionally import professional oversight that would quickly discover flaws in the programming and press for change in her midst.

No singular parent could successfully push Kandra for change with her position of power so well dug in already. The chance of a group of parents converging on this front also currently seems slim. They are for the most part too busy infighting and trying to lift themselves out of often already difficult predicaments. Many are actively trying to get out of public housing and leave the neighborhood because they fear for their children around the drug presence and "ghetto" mentality. The concentration of multiple forms of disadvantage (poverty, residential instability, high crime) suppresses collective action and expectations for social control. That these parents cannot utilize local institutions such as

community centers to address their collective problems serves as a significant indicator of community cohesion. They cannot appeal to the older and more “decent” residents on the other side of the neighborhood for help, because they have little means of connection to relate to them. These residents are already distrustful of the street aspects of these parents’ world on the other side. The street subculture that most local children embrace could be interpreted by older residents as disrespectful and thus deter them from volunteering to participate in activities with these children.

Many people in the neighborhood tend to emphasize a lack of responsibility among the disadvantaged and thereby make the effects of widespread social problems (inequality, discrimination) seem personal no matter how counterproductive this tendency turns out to be in the end. For these reasons, older people are less likely to advocate for the young mothers or their children who live on the other side of the neighborhood. They ignore their plight in the neighborhood association meetings. Even if they wanted to help these children at the center, they could have trouble identifying with the extremely Afrocentric, non-Christian, and anti-police values of the woman who runs the center. In sum, these conditions form a system of interlocking and especially pernicious barriers.

There seems to be little initiative available to motivate a qualitatively different kind of interactions between or within any of the groups involved, whether they be the parents, children, or the older residents. Kandra, acting as the de facto conductor of this currently disharmonious social symphony, is not trying to recruit the efforts of any of these groups, even if their participation would seem to help all involved. She thus stymies any hope of emergent collective efficacy by reassuring them that they need not feel responsible for anything outside their homes. This is all too easily embraced because it falls especially in

line with the “take cover” mentality of a neighborhood that feels itself under siege by drugs and police. In addition, the improvements in the neighborhood since the easing of the crack cocaine epidemic a decade ago has probably given long-term residents recourse to conclude that in fact, things are getting better, albeit slowly.

Individual and group agency in First Street is stunted partially because many residents believe that today’s forms of poverty in the African American community breed a kind of endemically (and unalterable) underdeveloped system of mutual responsibilities and social relationships. Final analysis of the data collected during my experiences leads me to conclude that there is a set of truly counterproductive relationships operating within the neighborhood that exacerbate already disadvantaged conditions. While the ultimate negative effects fall hardest on local children, it seems that the rest of the community loses the chance to utilize fellow residents as valued resources as well.

These findings are in sync with the assertions made in past research. The harshness and unresponsiveness of the neighborhood’s after-school structure seems to disempower parents, much as in the conventional school structures with which they already may have difficulties. This type of top-down power structure that is often typical of both the public education system and the after-school realm is especially alienating to disadvantaged African American populations. The conventional bureaucratic tendency is to devalue voluntary participation by labeling it “non-professional”. Here, it seems more likely that the character of local volunteers is being called into question. This speaks to the current post 9/11 push to administer background checks for all school volunteers, potentially disqualifying many low-income parents and relatives of children.

The data presented in this study again evidences single mothers' lack of parental efficacy as a lack of experience and resources. There is a fundamental dearth of reciprocal obligations having to do with the children's after school activities. Networked social capital and collective efficacy are especially shallow and underutilized in this especially important group. This impedes communication and action towards progress for the children of the neighborhood. Thus, criticism of current conditions cannot get beyond attacks on personal character and empty speculation on what systems could hypothetically work better in their situation.

Kandra often seems to act as a lightning rod attracting all criticism directed at the state of children in the neighborhood, even though no one else (not even the critics) is really pushing any other creative initiatives. Characteristics of parents and networks of residents within the neighborhood have a large impact on the type and quality of services that a community-based organization can provide. What are thought to be "adaptive strategies" in disadvantaged, high-crime neighborhoods often deter the formation of effective social capital networks among adult residents. The lack of widespread and/or reliable systems of reciprocal obligations leads to residents avoiding contact with people outside their kin and close friends (Furstenberg 1999). This in turn leads to problems in personal and collective efficacy among local residents and parents especially. Many lose belief in their ability to cooperate to create situations that will yield positive outcomes for neighborhood children. Parents may feel that they are unable to influence their children's environments and developmental outcomes.

A de-motivational self-fulfilling prophecy may take hold whereby the parent only makes token attempts to improve the situation and then confirms their powerlessness

when their efforts run into immediate difficulties due to the severity of the neighborhood and/or family disorganization. For these reasons, it is not yet clear whether offering more after-school activities for children can compensate for the problem of low parental efficacy and its negative effects on youth outcomes. It may be that the parents themselves especially lack the necessary personal characteristics and adaptive strategies to get themselves and their children involved in community-based programming in which they themselves would need to be in some way involved (Ardelt and Eccles 2001). This lead to strategies that either cloister children in the home away from often negative socialization processes occurring in the neighborhood's streets or enroll them in a sufficiently well supervised and self-sustained activity program (likely a large city run program outside the neighborhood) (Furstenberg 1999).

Older African Americans are said to lament the loss of shared community responsibility they found segregation-era neighborhoods and its institutionally contrived modern replacements. African Americans' neighbor networks now tend to be more confined to a few very well established relationships in comparison to whites' more extensive and superficial networks (Hill 1999). The decent-street divide observed in this study speaks to the fragmenting of values as well. The more variation that exists between the values and resources of actors' who can be meaningfully connected in a social system, the less likely meaningful change will occur (Sewell 1992). This leads to the question of how interactions can be structured to take into account the needs of actors with lower resource levels overall to access and maintain strong relationships within richer social capital networks.

Also, the theory of “structural holes” within actors’ perceptions of social networks may explain why some actors do not realize that gainful opportunities exist and thus are more reluctant than their neighbors to mobilize to act on latent social capital resources (Burt 1992). Coleman (1990) emphasizes that effective and knowledgeable networks are more likely to develop and sustain themselves the more they exhibit high degrees of reciprocity, cohesiveness, density, and an overarching participatory ethos. The interplay between collective efficacy and social capital lies in the group’s ability to recognize a collective need and common resources that can be accessed to fulfill resource gaps. This conjoint recognition, in a social environment with sufficiently high collective efficacy, then allows them to begin to change the nature of individual relationships within their social system in a way that addresses the larger need. This never really happened during the endeavor to secure summer enrichment programming for First Street.

There is accumulating evidence that attests to the importance of after-school and summer programs for youth and the impressive magnitude of disadvantage they face if they are denied the opportunity to participate (Entwisle and Alexander 1992). The city’s actions during the summer eventually kept a good number of neighborhood children out of the city’s well-funded programming completely. There is growing concern among those who plan, fund, and run such programs that such institutional inflexibility may stifle sustained initiative to diversify such programs and include more input from local communities they work within. The resulting lack of local participation often leads to a program where personnel responsible for the children’s growth share neither the culture nor the values of the population they purport to serve (Winters 1993).

The attitude-behavior inconsistency lies at the root of understanding the problem of formulating collective action for a common good. People saying one thing and doing another is an age-old conundrum, one that is well illustrated again in this study. Unfulfilled verbal commitments are problematic and impact the well being of the collectivity. They seem more likely to occur when an existing social structure is not conducive to holding such individuals accountable. This can be seen in terms of a “tragedy of individualism” where disconnected self-interest leads to less than optimal and largely irrational collective outcomes. A compromising solution must engender a process that realistically accounts for the needs of individuals within the shared needs of the larger community. This difficult task requires finding methods to encourage and support a group in attempting to enact such a vision through cooperation with their neighbors.

If just a few relatively isolated individuals demand the establishment of a collectively beneficial resource exchange system, this call to action will be insufficient to organize actual production of this joint good in the community at large. Certain individuals may recognize opportunities for greater sharing of costs and liabilities with a few choice others, and thus receive higher returns to scale via such collaborative arrangement. The larger question lies in how to move from such small and inconsistent start-ups to a more conclusive, coherent, and optimal programming scheme that takes greater notice of the resources and constraints endemic to the social system of the community as a whole. In concert with this work, previous research has recognized that this task is only made more difficult when powerful individuals in community institutions stubbornly refuse to allow non-professional initiatives to appreciably alter their status quo operations (Scanzoni and Hasell 2000, Greenwood and Levin 1998).

Key decisions must be made by the actors themselves in order to construct a cooperative institution that is satisfactory enough that the vast majority of group members wish to participate. Decisions about the degree to which goods produced will be private (excludable) or public and the functions by which the institution manages obligation relationships, free-riding, liability, and norm-compliance issues then rise to the forefront. Finally, the costs of working out such design issues and monitoring their implementation must be less than the anticipated benefits. However, it is a consistent finding in social science research that the more fully group members participate in collective decision making processes, the more satisfied and enthusiastic they will be about the task and the less likely that intractable conflict over differences will erupt (Epstein 1991; Parker et al., 1987, Winters and Easton 1983).

Further research in this area should focus on developing strategies from an action research perspective to confront the current conditions in such neighborhoods and empower parents to find ways to alter the after-school arrangements for their collective betterment. Action research, however, is only an applicable methodology if it is able to initially bring enough stakeholders to the table to fully negotiate possible strategies to remedy a collective concern. This too, never was able to take place in First Street. One reasons for this might be that the students and residents involved in trying to muster grassroots participation in the enrichment programs did not arrive under the banner of a larger professional institution or organization. Recall the contrasting high meeting turnout in the First Street for the discussion of the “model block” redevelopment plans backed by the city and a professional consulting group. Perhaps their message was more palpable to residents, but we should not underestimate the power of professionalized

status. Practical means of pre-testing a site for this requisite involvement would save much unproductive effort expenditure. Furthermore, in order to salvage something academically productive from ultimately unsuccessful initiatives such as this one, viable backup methodologies must be in place as a failsafe in case of participatory fallout. Otherwise, this chance of total loss will continue to deter researchers from attempting to apply these more risky “hit or miss” PAR techniques.

A possible policy implication from this study is to advise concerned city officials to keep a closer eye on the workings of contracted organizations running public programming on public property, and to consistently evaluate their performance. Also, in areas with recognized conditions that foster low parental efficacy and social capital segregation, municipalities may wish to take it upon themselves to lead the charge in getting children enrolled in summer programs. Responsible public servants should know their constituencies do not wish to pay the public costs associated with poor developmental outcomes amongst disadvantaged African American youth.

APPENDIX A
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Main Theme: Almost everyone in the neighborhood claims to want to see more constructive educational and recreational opportunities locally available to children when they're out of school. The center is available as a base for such activities. Why aren't more people taking the initiative to help structure and participate in what goes on during children's after-school activities?

1. Can you tell me what you know about the after-school programs running at the Wilhelmina Johnson Center?
2. Do you have a child involved in these programs? If so, which ones?
3. Do you know any other children that participate in the programs? If so, do you know their parents? If so, how well?
4. Tell me what comes to mind when you think about some of the neighborhood children?
5. What kind of activities would you like to see them doing when they're not in school?
6. Do you think the after-school programs at the center meet these goals? If not, why?
7. How do you think the programs could be improved?
8. Do you know any of the neighborhood children who do not participate in the programs? If so, do you know their parents? If so, why do you think these parents don't take advantage of the programs at the center?
9. What do you think might make more children want to participate in the after-school programs?
10. Why do you think that so few neighborhood adults volunteer for the after-school programs?
11. Do you think that encouraging children's relatives to participate in the programs is a good or a bad idea? Why do you think this is?
12. What kind of things do you think should be taken into account when determining whether a person is suitable to be a volunteer at the center?

13. Which adults in the neighborhood do you think would be particularly valuable to the programs at the center and what kind of things would you like to see them doing?
14. How do you think that residents who don't currently have children could be encouraged to participate?
15. Do you think that tensions and conflicts among residents or groups of residents are preventing some people's participation? If so, could you explain what you see as some of the main divisions between people in the neighborhood?
16. Do you think a neighborhood-based mentoring program at the center would be a good idea? Do you think it could actually happen? If not, what do you think would be more beneficial and realistic?
17. Do you think it would be a good idea to establish a weekly meeting forum for anyone in the neighborhood to come and discuss issues concerning children and families? If not, what do you think would be more beneficial and realistic?

APPENDIX B
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Initial Question: Do you have any children under the age of 18 living in your household?

IF CHILDREN PRESENT, USE ALTERNATE INTERVIEW FORM.

IF NO CHILDREN PRESENT, PROCEED BELOW.

Interview Code:

Date:

Name of Interviewer:

1. **How long have you lived here in the 5th Avenue Area?**
2. Do you rent or own your home?
3. Have you ever been directly or indirectly involved in the raising or activities of children at any time in your life? When?
4. Do you have any family living in the neighborhood?
If so, do they have any children under the age of 18?
What kind of activities do you normally do with them when they are around?
5. Would you say you have pride in this neighborhood? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel any personal responsibility for the well being of the 5th Avenue neighborhood?
If not, why don't you think you feel any sense of personal responsibility?
If so, could you give some examples of what exactly you would say you feel responsibility for?
7. In your experience, do other neighborhood residents seem to feel the same? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel like you have a sense of community in your neighborhood? If so, what do you think this feeling comes from? If not, why do you think that you don't?

9. Would you say that you sometimes work together with your neighbors to try and make your neighborhood a nicer place to live in?

If not, why do you think this kind of cooperation doesn't happen?

If so, what kind of things have you done in the past?

10. How many children or young adults in the neighborhood do you know by name?

If you don't know any, why do you think you haven't met any recently?

If you do know some, how did you come to meet them?

Also, do you know most of their parents?

11. Do you have concerns about children's exposure to drugs, violence, and crime in the neighborhood? If so, do you have any specific experiences you could tell me about?

12. From your own experiences, would you say that children in the neighborhood have enough positive adult influences outside of their family?

If so, who do you think are some positive role models within the neighborhood.

If not, why not?

13. From your own observations, does it seem that children in the neighborhood have too much unoccupied, unstructured, free time on their hands?

If so, could you provide some examples of this?

14. Is there anything important that we haven't already discussed which comes to mind concerning the activities of children in the neighborhood?

15. Do you think you and your neighbors generally agree on ideas about how to properly raise children, especially when it comes to their activities and supervision within the neighborhood?

If so, could you give examples of how you think children should be supervised?

If no, could you explain in what ways you don't agree?

16. Do you believe that a lot of the children and young adults growing up in the neighborhood today will still live here as adults?

If so, in this way do you feel that they will shape the way your neighborhood looks and feels in the future? How?

17. Do you belong to any kind of group or organization in the neighborhood like a church group, club, or association? If so, what kind of activities are they involved in and where?
18. Do you know about any of the programs and activities for kids that the community center offers? If so, which ones? Have you ever volunteered at the community center? If you have in the past, why don't you anymore?
19. Could you name any other groups, clubs, or organizations in the neighborhood that are working towards giving children and young adults something positive to do during their free time when they are not in school? Can you remember any being active in the past? If so, could you tell me a little more about them?
20. Do you know of any informal arrangements between groups of residents to provide supervised activities for children within the neighborhood? If so, could you tell me more about their structure and activities?
21. Do you think there is a need to have more opportunities for children and young adults to participate in meaningful and supervised activities in the neighborhood? Why or why not? Also, what kind of new things would you like to see happen within the neighborhood to improve the lives of young people?
22. Do you think ideas for activities such as help with schoolwork, sports, dance, arts and crafts, or gardening could realistically happen in the neighborhood? If so, how do you think the best way to set-up and structure these activities would be?
23. Do you think you would want to and be available to help get these kind of activities started in the neighborhood? Can you think of any personal skills you could offer? Do you think anyone else in your household or in your neighborhood might want to participate in some way or have their children participate?
24. If you were going to put more effort into improving the neighborhood, how exactly would you like to see it improve? How do you think these improvements could benefit you?

Initial Question: Do you have any children under the age of 18 living in your household?

IF NO CHILDREN PRESENT, USE ALTERNATE INTERVIEW FORM.

IF CHILDREN PRESENT, PROCEED BELOW.

Interview Code:

Date:

Name of Interviewer:

1. How many children under the age of 18 live here? How old are they?

2. How are you related to them?
3. Are you the only parent?
4. Do your children attend school/preschool/daycare? At what times during the week?
5. Do they do activities or sports at school in the afternoons? If so, what kind and when?
6. Does your schedule allow you to be around them during times when they are not in school/daycare? If not, what other responsibilities normally make you unavailable to be with them during these times?
7. Are you involved in any kind of group or organization in the neighborhood like a church group, club, or association? If so, what kind and where?
8. What are some of your children's activities when they aren't at school/daycare like on afternoons and weekends?
9. Do you know about any of the after-school programs and activities for kids that the community center offers? If so, which ones? Are your children involved in any of these?
10. When you are at home with your kids, do you normally supervise them in their free time? How?
11. Do you have any relatives living in the neighborhood? If so...
 - a. How much time do your children spend around them during a normal week?
 - b. Are these relatives involved in any of your children's activities or are your children involved in any of theirs? If so, what kind of activities?
 - c. Do they look after your children when you are not available?
 - d. For compensation, do you pay them or watch their children in return?
12. Do you have a lot of close friends in the neighborhood? If so...
 - a. How much time do your children spend around them during a normal week?
 - b. Are these friends involved in any of your children's activities or are your children involved in any of theirs? If so, what kind of activities?
 - c. Do they look after your children when you are not available?
 - d. For compensation, do you pay them or watch their children in return?

13. Do you think that other neighbors who aren't close friends or relatives play an important part in supervising your child or other children within the neighborhood? If so, how?
14. Do you know most of the parents of your children's friends? How well?
15. Do you feel they play an important part in supervising the activities of your children? If so, what exactly do they do to supervise children's activities?
16. Do you have concerns about their safety and exposure to drugs, violence, or crime within the neighborhood? If so, do you have any specific experiences you could tell me about without mentioning names?
17. Would you say that your children have enough positive adult influences outside of their family?
If so, who are some of their positive adult role models within the neighborhood?
If not, why not?
18. Do you feel your children have too much unoccupied, unstructured free time with lots of boredom, TV watching, or aimless wandering around the neighborhood? If so, can you give some personal examples?
19. Have you talked to other parents in the neighborhood who feel the same way about their children's activities? Have any parents you've talked to expressed other kinds of concerns?
20. Is there anything important that we haven't already discussed which comes to mind concerning the activities of your children or children in general within the neighborhood?
21. Do you think you and your neighbors generally agree on ideas about how to properly raise children, especially when it comes to their activities and supervision within the neighborhood?
If so, could you give examples of how you think children should be supervised?
If no, could you explain in what ways you don't agree?
22. Do you wish you had more cooperation with other parents in the neighborhood to better supervise your children and share other child care responsibilities? If so, what kind of set up would you like to see?
23. Could you name any other groups, clubs, or organizations in the neighborhood that are working towards giving children and young adults something positive to do during their free time when they are not in school? Can you remember any being active in the past? If so, could you tell me a little more about them?

24. Do you know of any informal arrangements between groups of residents to provide supervised activities for children within the neighborhood? If so, could you tell me more about their structure and activities?
25. Do you think there is a need to have more opportunities for children and young adults to participate in meaningful and supervised activities in the neighborhood? If so, what kind of new things would you like to see happen within the neighborhood to improve the lives of young people?
26. Do you think ideas for activities such as help with schoolwork, sports, dance, arts and crafts, or gardening could realistically happen in the neighborhood? If so, how do you think the best way to set-up and structure these activities would be?
27. Do you think you would want to and be available to help get these kind of activities started in the neighborhood? Can you think of any personal skills you could offer? Do you think anyone else in your household or in your neighborhood might want to participate in some way or have their children participate?
28. If you were going to put more effort into improving the conditions for your children and yourself in the neighborhood, how exactly would you like to see it improve? How do you think these improvements could benefit you?

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alex Goldman was born in 1982 to parents Mel and Ginger Goldman. Raised near Charleston, SC until six years of age, his family moved to the Jacksonville Beaches where he completed high school in 2000. He has studied at the University of Florida for four years and received his Bachelors Degree in 2003 and his Masters Degrees in 2004, both in sociology. He is currently pursuing a PhD in the department.