

## ABSTRACT

### Community Satisfaction: The Solution for Rural Communities

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Why do people like where they live? Why do people decide to stay at their current residence? Are residents satisfied with their community? All of these questions and more have been explored and investigated for decades and in many disciplines. Furthermore, this study examines community satisfaction. This study looks at the answers to all these questions and specifically studies the rural community, an anomaly in regards to migration and economic growth. Rural communities suffer from higher than average rates of poverty and high levels of out-migration, due to an influx of people to cities and suburban areas, which leads to decreased levels of community satisfaction. The predictors of community satisfaction can be applied to rural communities in order to increase resident satisfaction. Research has found that having friends as neighbors, feeling safe in your neighborhood and a positive perception of the state of the economy are all significant positive predictors of community satisfaction.

Community Satisfaction: The Solution for Rural Communities

by

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A Dissertation

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Community satisfaction has been studied for decades in order to form an understanding of why individuals choose to live in a certain place and why they choose to stay, and unfortunately, sometimes leave. In these last decades, there has been a shift in the way that people make a living, from agriculture to manufacturing, and now technology. The shift that has occurred has not only been a shift in industries, but a shift in where people live. This has resulted in a decline of rural communities in the United States and therefore, an effect on community satisfaction. Rural communities are under studied in community satisfaction literature. This research fills a much needed gap in the satisfaction of residents in rural communities, especially regarding the economic impact that has taken place, as well as bringing this research into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rural communities experience lower incomes, higher levels of unemployment and underemployment, and larger percentages of individuals who live below the poverty line (Chadwick & Bahr, 1978; Nilsen, 1979). Current research shows that residents of communities that experience economic stress are less satisfied (Brown et al., 2003), as well as communities that are predominately rural (Long et al., 2012).

Hummon's 1992 study found that "a substantial majority of Americans evaluate their communities favorably when directly asked if they are satisfied with their place of residence" (Dassopoulos & Monnat, 2011, p. 624; Hummon, 1992). These positive results suggest that it is important to find out exactly why residents are satisfied with where they live, and why rural residents, in particular, are so different.

The main goal of this study is to expand the understanding of community satisfaction and make recommendations to rural communities in order to improve the satisfaction of their residents. In order to do that, the factors that contribute to a person's satisfaction of their community, regardless of the type, must be discussed. This study explores a variety of questions and topics that past research (Sundblad & Sapp, 2011; Goudy, 1990; Crowe, 2010; Dassopoulos & Monnat, 2011; Wasserman, 1982; Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974; Sampson, 1988; Liu, Ryan, Aurbach, & Besser, 1998; O'Brien & Hassinger, 1992) has said predicts and impacts resident satisfaction. Does the type of community you live in determine your satisfaction? Are people that live in rural communities or suburbs more satisfied than individuals that live in cities? Does volunteering increase an individual's community satisfaction? Are more educated individuals more satisfied with where they live? Are there gender differences in community satisfaction? How does the economic situation of a respondent's community impact their satisfaction? What about the level of crime? Does the number of friends that a respondent has that are also their neighbor impact how satisfied they are? All of these questions will be explored.

It is expected that there are varying levels of satisfaction for the different types of communities. Individuals that live in cities will be less satisfied than residents of the suburbs. This relationship stems from the early findings of George Simmel regarding the metropolis and mental health. Simmel wrote extensively on the psychological impact of the continuous stimulation of the city surroundings. His theories discussed the relationship between an individual's mental health and how it is negatively impacted by

living in a city, or a location that has large populations or high density areas. This relationship also stems from the early research of Wirth (1938).

Wirth described cities as large, dense, permanent settlements of heterogeneous individuals engaged in anonymous, superficial, and transitory relationships. Wirth expected that citizens living in larger, more dense communities would feel less close to each other than would citizens in smaller, less dense communities. Big cities, Wirth expected, would be rife with alienation and anomie (Hindman & Yamamoto, 2011).

Therefore, individuals that live in suburbs should be more satisfied than individuals that live in cities. Rural residents will be less satisfied as well, due to a lack of friendship networks and community involvement, in addition to financial strain.

It is expected that volunteering increases an individual's satisfaction. Volunteering in one's community increases a person's connectedness to their community and the residents of that community. People that volunteer become invested in the future of the community, its residents, as well as the businesses and attractions of the community. People that are more connected and invested in where they live and their community are more likely to be satisfied (Hummon, 1992; Janowitz, 1967; Park and Burgess, 1921; Filkins, Allen & Cordes, 2000). Results should show that a community's economic situation greatly determines an individual's satisfaction with where they live. The easier it is to find a job, the more satisfied the individual; the better the perception of the economy, the more satisfied the individual (Florida, Mellander, & Stolarick, 2009).

Social scientists among many disciplines have tried to explain community satisfaction by first studying why individuals move. Naturally, economists focus on economic and financial factors for why people decide to relocate. Economists investigate the financial motivations for migration, specifically job opportunities and advancements in income. Tiebout (1956) researched how individuals express their community



satisfaction and found that people “vote with their feet.” This means that community satisfaction and migration function similar to a market place; individuals have certain demands for services and instead of trying to change what is present, they “find the community that best fits their preferences” (Florida et al., 2009). Some people may be looking for a place to live that has high-end shopping. Others may be drawn to areas with lots of outdoor activities and public parks, while others are focused on finding residential areas with a high police presence. Affordable housing also plays a key role in residential preferences. Essentially, individuals treat their choice of where to live similar to other choices that they make, weighing the pros and cons and evaluating where each residence ranks on their list of must-haves. And just like any other choice, this is limited by financial means. So people find the community that best fits all of their needs and wants inside the bounds of what they can afford.

More extensive research on community satisfaction has revealed that migration is driven by individual characteristics such as “education, age, gender, and income, and how these traits differently affect expected utility gains from a change in location... Individuals with lower anticipated gains from migration are more likely to remain in regions to which they aren’t attached” (Florida et al., 2009). People with higher levels of education are more likely to have higher levels of income. Both of these factors can significantly affect an individual’s ability to migrate. People may become more complacent with age, in regards to their residence. Even if a community does not meet all of their must-haves, they are more likely to stay due to long-term friendships, memberships, and connections to their community. Both of these paths, one based on a

market place structure and one based on individual characteristics, as an explanation of community satisfaction will be examined.

The Great Plains region (mostly rural areas) of the United States is readily experiencing the out-migration of rural areas. The populations of almost two-thirds of the region's counties peaked just prior to 1950 (Rowley, 1998), and have been declining ever since. The problem of out-migration in rural communities has not fallen on deaf ears. Henry (1999) wrote, "To succeed in sustaining regional economic development, policy should be designed to do two things: provide high quality education and [provide] training for human resources... [in order to] prevent a 'brain drain' to competing regions" (p. 39). This statement reflects the idea that people move to areas where there are "employment opportunities, occupation, income, and available education" (Long, Faught, & Johnson, 2012). Referencing our beginning discussion, rural communities have been impacted by a shift in the industries that provide income and employment improvement (Shaffer, 1992), therefore, making other urban places more desirable as a residence. However, one's level of satisfaction with where they live can greatly impact a person's decision to stay (Long et al., 2012). A rural community is at a disadvantage in terms of financial benefits, but may be able to retain residents based on other factors that impact satisfaction. These factors may be the friendship networks that the individual has in their neighborhood, or their involvement in a philanthropic organization. Low levels of perceived crime relative to other areas can deter people from relocating, as well as an individual's length of residence. Simply, the longer someone lives in a certain location, the less likely they will be willing to move (Sundblad & Sapp, 2011). An individual may desire to improve their financial situation, but their choice to move elsewhere is "likely

deterred based on the satisfaction and connection residents have with the community... [this relationship] might be used to assist communities in trying to decrease the out-migration of residents and to create a stronger bond between the current residents and the community, which could effectively improve the current economic conditions of the region” (Long et al., 2012, p. 4). Researchers are not alone in this finding: “community development practitioners, community leaders, and other local stakeholders see ‘community cohesion,’ ‘a strong sense of community’ and similar concepts as having both intrinsic and instrumental value” (Filkins et al., 2000). The longer someone lives in a certain area, the more time they have to establish social, philanthropic and work networks. These kinds of relationships and connections to one’s community will likely increase community satisfaction, and they could also be a catalyst for decreased satisfaction in their absence. The relationships that children form in their community, both by going to school and being involved in extra-curricular activities, can deter migration and increase satisfaction. Residents may also be less likely to move and more likely to be satisfied if their family members live in their area, especially if their family members are reaching an age that requires assistance.

Overall, in this study I explore a number of aspects that can determine community satisfaction. Using the SAS data analysis program and the Knight Foundation’s 2010 Soul of the Community data set, a variety of regressions will be examined. As found in previous literature, it is predicted that friendships, crime, and the economy are important predictors of community satisfaction. In addition, the type of community (city, suburb, or rural) the respondent lives in, as described in the next chapter, needs to be taken into consideration. Other expected and important variables include gender and race, marital

status, and an individual's levels of education and income. This study will take these important predictors of community satisfaction and make recommendations for action for rural communities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

Community satisfaction, and other predictors of social attachment like community sentiment and social participation (Crowe, 2010), has been studied for many years in multiple disciplines (Altman & Low, 1992; Hildago & Hernandez, 2001; Hummon, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Trentelman, 2009). These studies can be traced back to Wirth (1938) and his study of urbanism and social attachment as well as the foundations of community research from Tonnies (1887/1957). Researchers have been intently interested in resident satisfaction, why people decide to live in a certain place or rather why they decide to stay there. Theories have been explored that cite the size of the community or heterogeneity of the residents as predictors of community satisfaction, while other researchers focus on the more individualistic characteristics of the residents, for example, the length of their residence or level of involvement with the community. However, many would say that these characteristics are inherently related; the heterogeneity of a community can affect your ability to get to know and get along with your neighbors, and the more you have in common with your neighbors, the more likely you are to be satisfied. The size of the community also can have an impact on your level of satisfaction; larger communities are at a greater disadvantage for being able to know all of their neighbors. This literature review seeks to outline the many explanations for community satisfaction.

A major predictor in the literature (Long et al., 2012; Crowe, 2010) of community satisfaction is community attachment. Community attachment refers to “an individual’s

commitment to his or her place of residence” (Crowe, 2010, p. 624; Liu et al., 1998).

There are two types of attachment: subjective and objective (Gerson, Steuve & Fisher, 1977). Subjective attachment is an individual’s sense of belonging to their community, “a belief that one can have an impact on the community, a feeling that the community can meet personal needs of its members and is satisfying those needs, and expressions of emotional connections with the community and its members” (Crowe, 2010). An individual’s sense of belonging can be impacted by the length of their residence and how many friends they have in the community. It can also be impacted by an individual’s ties to organizations and churches, in the community, as well as the relationships that one’s children form in their school, church, and extra-curricular activities. An individual is more likely to feel that they belong somewhere when relationships are formed and maintained. Subjective attachment, sometimes treated as a predictor of affective attachment, refers to an individual’s participation in community organizations like volunteering. If an individual feels that they can have an impact on their community and feel that they belong there, they are more likely to participate in civic engagement.

Attachment to one’s community generally develops when a person’s physical, emotional and social needs are met (Dassopoulous & Monnat, 2011). Attachment stems from feeling safe and secure in your environment as well as having adequate housing and food. Getting along with your neighbors is also a component of attachment. One of the rungs in Maslow’s (1943) ladder (or hierarchy of basic survival) includes physiological and safety needs, as well as love and belonging, all of which are addressed by your place of residence. Studies have shown that mental and physical health and life satisfaction are closely related to community satisfaction (Dassopoulous & Monnat, 2011; Sundblad &

Sapp, 2011; Prezza et al., 2001; Eyles & Williams, 2008). Individuals that are able to fulfill each of the components of attachment, or the hierarchy of basic survival, are more likely to be satisfied with their life and therefore, more satisfied with where they live.

Objective attachment comes from more tangible or physical items, like the infrastructure of the neighborhood (Dassopoulos & Monnat, 2011). These physical items may be things like a community's parks and trails, or even their highway system. Many people focus on the quality of schools in their neighborhood and signs of safety, like a high police presence. Depending on the age group, a vibrant night life may increase attachment, while others view the quality of healthcare in the community as essential to their attachment. Community social events are also cause of attachment to one's place of residence. All of these physical factors, related to one's environment, provide opportunities for residents to be engaged in the community. The more engaged they are and the more they interact with other community members, the more their level of satisfaction with their community increases. Research says that subjective attachment is more important in predicting neighborhood satisfaction than objective attachment (Bruin & Cook, 1997; Cook, 1988; Lu, 1999; Oh, 2003). This study looks at both subjective and objective attachment as a way to address community satisfaction, including variables such as the number of friends in one's community and whether or not someone volunteers as subjective measures, and variables such as the perceptions of crime and the economy as objective measures.

It is also important to discuss why researchers care about community satisfaction, and why it is worthy of being explored. One of the most important reasons to study community satisfaction is resident stability. Individuals are more likely to stay in their

current residence if they are satisfied. If an individual is dissatisfied with where they live, this can usher in a variety of problems related to the economy and personal life. For example, communities that are predominately transient populations are unable to sustain economic growth and the residents do not form relationships with their neighbors because of their mobility. Long term residential stability allows for strong interpersonal relationships. Sociologists and other researchers have devoted a large portion of community satisfaction research to the role of interpersonal relationships and social interaction in terms of predicting satisfaction. Putman (2000) builds his argument around the need for social capital as a determinant of community satisfaction. Simply said, individuals need relationships with other human beings in order to be satisfied in various areas of their lives. Social capital, according to Putnam, “refers to the collective value of all ‘social networks’ and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other” (Putnam, 2000). His book, *Bowling Alone*, focuses on the decline in ‘community’ due to lower levels of trust and civic participation. He blames part of this decline on urban sprawl. Therefore, social interaction, and the social capital created from this interaction, is also noted as a key player in community satisfaction (Nisbet, 1969; Sarason, 1974; Hunter, 1975; Fischer, 1977; Grillo et al., 2008) and its effect on rural communities.

Researchers that study Social Disorganization Theory would point to the need for solidarity to solve a community’s problems and increase satisfaction. Those communities that have solidarity (share common goals and values) are at a greater advantage for desirable change “through informal social controls and formal community organizing” (Dassopoulos & Monnat, 2011). This community action generally leads to



community organization, and therefore, lowers levels of crime and other signs of social disorganization (Sundblad & Sapp, 2011). There is a cyclical process in effect: if people have things in common with their neighbors, they feel attached to their community and are more willing to participate in civic engagement, which in turn improves community satisfaction. Community participation will be discussed in greater detail later in this literature review.

There are two main models that seek to predict community satisfaction: The Systemic Model and The Linear-Development Model. The Systemic Model, the more popular model as of late, views the community “as a complex system of friendship and kinship networks and formal and informal associational ties rooted in family life and ongoing socialization processes (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974, p. 329). Simply, the Systemic Model looks at the effects of an individual’s length of residence, social status and age on their ability to develop and sustain social ties. The Systemic Model also seeks to examine levels of poverty, residential mobility, and racial or ethnic heterogeneity and the impact of those factors on an individual’s ability to support lasting and vast friendship networks.

The Linear-Development Model takes a more traditional route and builds on the work of Tonnies (1887/1957) and Wirth (1938) by examining the relationship between population size and density and community satisfaction (Sundblad & Sapp, 2011). Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) found that the length of time an individual resides in their community has a stronger effect on satisfaction than both population size and density (Crowe, 2010; Sampson, 1988). Goudy (1990), on the other hand, in his study of rural communities argues that “because social bonds and sentiments are the products of

individual choice, as they are in urban areas, then individual characteristics are better predictors of community sentiment than community characteristics, such as size and density” (Crowe, 2010, p. 623). However, Buttell et al.’s (1979) study of Wisconsin found that size of place is most important when determining satisfaction. This finding is consistent with Fischer’s (1973) study that finds a link between the size of the community and an individual’s distrust and social isolation.

Goudy (1977) concludes that “residents find most satisfying those communities in which they think they have strong primary group relationships, where local people participate and take pride in civic affairs, where decision making is shared, where residents are heterogeneous, and where people are committed to the community and its upkeep” (Goudy, 1977, p. 380). This research and others suggest that social measures of satisfaction of residence are more important than physical measures (Sundblad & Sapp, 2011; Brown et al., 2003; Herting & Guest, 1985). The Systemic Model could be considered the more contemporary approach that focuses on these social factors and measures, like a resident’s social network and involvement in their community (Hummon, 1992; Janowitz, 1967; Park and Burgess, 1921; Thomas, 1967; Filkins, Allen & Cordes, 2000). The following analysis and review of the literature follows the Systemic Model due to its contemporary outlook and agreement with more modern literature. The Systemic Model aids this study by contributing a more holistic approach. It looks at community satisfaction in terms of a more “community” approach, rather than just the dimensions of a community. In the following sections, the variables that impact community satisfaction are explored.

### *Crime and Community Satisfaction*

For those individuals in law enforcement or interested in neighborhood crime patterns, perceptions of safety are more important than the actual levels of crime. Individuals that perceive themselves to be in danger in their neighborhood are more likely to be dissatisfied with where they live and are more likely to move. The majority of the literature on crime discusses Social Disorganization Theory. This theory states that “poverty, residential mobility, and ethnic or racial heterogeneity lead to a decrease in informal social control that, in turn, increases the probability of crime” (Warner & Rountree, 1997, p. 520). The Broken Windows Theory theorizes that the appearance of broken windows or run down areas increases the negative perceptions of crime, whether or not that crime actually exists. The Systemic Model is used frequently to discuss crime and the effect of community structural characteristics on an individual’s relationship with their neighbors, and therefore, the effect on informal social control and levels of crime. The findings, however, are mixed regarding the relationship between neighborhood ties and official or self-reported crime rates; some studies find that there are no significant effects (Greenberg, Rohe, & Williams, 1982; Simcha-Fagan & Schwartz, 1986).

### *Friends as Neighbors and Community Satisfaction*

Findings have shown that feelings of “social integration and trust are significant predictors of neighborhood satisfaction, net of the effects of the economic, physical, and demographic characteristics of the neighborhood” (Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2006; Parkes, Kearns, & Atkinson, 2002). This would suggest that most people, if asked why they like living where they live, would probably mention something about their neighbors. The reason for this could range from just liking their neighbors to having frequent get-

together with them. Generally, neighbors become more than just people that live next door to each other. If children are involved, this relationship intensifies. The reverse is seen in Fischer's (1977) findings that show that individuals without children are less attached to their neighborhoods. According to Hummon (1992), "community attachment is an emotional investment in a locality that is strongly rooted in involvement in local social relationships" (Dassapoulos & Monnat, 2011, p. 548). The homogeneity of a community can play a huge role in an individual's satisfaction since people tend to get along with and feel more comfortable around people that are similar to them (Crowe, 2010). Homogeneity occurs when the social, economic, and demographic characteristics of the residents of a community are similar. A community that is predominately white or a community where majority of its residents live near or below the poverty line would be considered homogenous. Individuals that live in homogeneous areas, with people similar to them, are more likely to be satisfied. This is due to an increased ability to get along with and share common interests and goals (and struggles) with their neighbors. Beyond that, how many people an individual knows in their community (Goudy, 1990; Sundblad & Sapp, 2011) as well as how many friends they have (Goudy, 1990) are very important to a person's satisfaction with their residence. Increasing one's connections to the community, by friendship, philanthropic and work relationships, increases a person's satisfaction with their community. Knowing the members of the community by name increases one's attachment to the community. Having close friends as neighbors, as discussed earlier, results in a variety of positive effects: "Individuals who know many community members by name are more likely to be attached to the community than those community residents who know few people in the community by name; as expected,

individuals who have a high proportion of their close friends residing in the community are more likely to be attached to the community than those community residents who have few or no friends in the community” (Crowe, 2010, p. 625). Sampson’s 1988 study showed an individual’s local friendship networks has a greater (double) impact on community attachment than how long the individual has lived there. Lewicka (2010) cites neighborhood ties as the strongest indicator of place attachment. Neighbors also provide social support (Dassopoulos & Monnat, 2011). In the event of a death, neighbors often provide social support in the means of food and comfort.

As discussed earlier, social capital is an important predictor of community satisfaction. Putnam (2000) discusses at great lengths the need for social capital in creating ‘community’. But before Putnam, Coleman (1993) suggested that “trusting networks” were necessary to create social capital and encourage cooperation among individuals in a community. “A group whose members manifest trustworthiness and place extensive trust in one another will be able to accomplish much more than a comparable group lacking that trustworthiness and trust” (Coleman, 1990, p. 304; Anderson, Machida, & Burkink, 2010). Basically, having friends as neighbors does more than provide ‘community’ for its residents. Having friends as neighbors builds trust and allows for community goals to be achieved more efficiently and effectively. Trust is often defined depending on the type of trust applicable: particularized trust or generalized trust. Particularized trust is most often seen in families and religious organizations (Anderson et al., 2010). Generalized trust, more applicable here when talking about communities, encourages people to “think of themselves as part of a larger whole comprised of others” (Anderson et al., 2010, p. 362), even if those others are people that

they have never met. However, individuals have the ability to engage in particularized trust by having friends as neighbors and being involved in community organizations that require face-to-face interaction. Putnam (2000) also discusses “thick” and “thin” trust (Anderson, et al., 2010).

Trust embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent, and nested in wider networks is sometimes called “thick trust.” On the other hand, a thinner trust in ‘the generalized other,’ like your new acquaintance from the coffee shop, also rests implicitly on some background of shared social networks and expectations of reciprocity. Thin trust is even more useful than thick trust, because it extends the radius of trust beyond the roster of people whom we can know personally. (2000, p. 136).

Therefore, individuals that are connected to their community, either by knowing their neighbors, having lived in the same residence for many years, or by being actively involved in a community organization, have the ability to engage in particularized trust that bleeds into generalized trust when people care about their community. Community organizations work to help and provide for those people that one has not seen or met. Both of these forms of trust increase the likelihood of community satisfaction. Individuals that engage in particularized trust by having friends as neighbors are more likely to be satisfied with their community. In this study, having friends as neighbors, how often you talk to your neighbors and volunteering all behave as proxies for aspects of trust.

### *Volunteering and Community Satisfaction*

Volunteering is important to discuss because it is a demanding form of civic engagement (Uslaner, 2002). It requires more of the individual than just donating money or joining an organization to say that you are a member. Instead, volunteering requires a donation of time and dedication to either the organization or the cause. Although many

people associate their involvement in voluntary organizations with their religion, research has shown (Uslaner, 2002) that the most important predictor of volunteering is the perception of a common bond or link with other people. This bond generally forms out of trust in others. People who have trust in others, especially for those people they have not met and are likely different than themselves, are more likely to engage in civic behavior (Uslaner, 2002).

Volunteering is also more likely in communities where there are common interests and homogeneity. The more people have in common with their neighbors and the more they converse and participate in similar activities, the more likely the individual will feel connected, invested, and therefore, committed to their community. This type of commitment often leads to a desire to be involved in decision making in the community, or to be “part of the change.” The discussion on volunteering and community satisfaction is destined to return to Putnam’s (2000) research and the necessary component of social capital in order for people to feel connected to their place of residence and therefore, a decrease in out-migration. Volunteering and community activism provides the social capital component necessary for social integration and community connectedness. Volunteering can be as simple as serving food to the homeless, or collecting canned goods for them. Individuals may get involved in their community by leading the neighborhood association or the PTA.

Being involved in your community is beneficial not only to your community, but also to your own well-being. Researchers, Nisbet (1969) and Sarason (1974), investigated the connection between social interaction and integration and the mental health of individuals. People that were involved in their community and had friends in

their community had higher levels of mental health. The results of volunteering, social cohesion, has effects on the perceptions of a neighborhood. Social cohesion decreases residents' perception of danger. Local involvement also provides residents with a sense of control (Dassopoulos & Monnat, 2011). Individuals who experience social integration are more likely to trust other individuals (Dassopoulos & Monnat, 2011), and studies have shown that voluntary association membership and participation in community groups and organizations, as well as social networking and social bonding, are significantly related to community satisfaction (Wasserman, 1982; Matarrita-Cascante & Luloff, 2008).

Community activism and high levels of community involvement can decrease social disorganization. Theorists place a high importance on neighborhood and community satisfaction because of its inherent advantages for the community. Not only does the perception of crime decrease with community involvement, but actual crime rates have the potential to decrease based on the type of community activism. If individuals take pride in their residence and make crime prevention a goal, it is likely that actual crime will decrease. If individuals take pride in the people and children of the community and decide to focus on providing wholesome extra-curricular activities after school, it is likely that crime will decrease and education rates will rise. Cuba and Hummon's (1993) research found that social participation in an individual's local community is crucial for an individual's community identity. Overall, community involvement is beneficial to the community, the individual, and the community's members.



### *Role of the Economy and Community Satisfaction (Macro-Structural Factors)*

There is a dearth of literature on the relationship between the status of the economy and community satisfaction. Instead, researchers tend to focus on the relationship between an individual's economic well-being and their individual satisfaction. One could generalize these kinds of findings to what would be expected when looking at the community level. A 2009 study by Shields et al. uses the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey to investigate the relationship between neighborhood effects and life satisfaction, with economic status being one of their main focuses. Their study showed that unemployed individuals, regardless of gender, have the lowest levels of life satisfaction. However, unemployed individuals that live in high unemployment areas tend to have higher levels of satisfaction in comparison to unemployed individuals that live in low unemployment areas. This phenomenon was discussed in the earlier section regarding the relationship between neighbors and the impact on community satisfaction. People are more comfortable, and therefore, are more satisfied when they are surrounded by like individuals. If one is dissatisfied in life, in general, then they will likely be dissatisfied with their community. An individual's unemployment status greatly impacts all other areas of their life. However, their level of employment is closely linked to income. People with higher incomes tend to have high levels of community satisfaction. Individuals that are renting their home report lower levels of life satisfaction (Brown et al., 2003). Home ownership, or the lack thereof, implies transience or low income, or the opposite, stability and high levels of income. A renter is not rooted in the community and can move away more easily than a home

owner. If a renter knows that they are living there only temporarily, they are less likely to be engaged in the community.

As discussed earlier, there is relationship between transience, economic and financial stability, and community satisfaction. Researchers have determined that people “vote with their feet,” (Tiebout, 1956; Florida et al., 2009) which means that people move to where they are going to be the most comfortable, and therefore, the most satisfied. They also tend to move to the best community that they can afford, thus reinforcing the homogeneity of a community. Individuals seek out the community that best fits their preferences. Economic mobility is a huge determinant of an individual’s likelihood to move, if other areas in their life are unfulfilled.

The common link between the majority of the predictors of community satisfaction that have been discussed is the trust in others that is necessary. An individual must trust in others to create social capital, participation in civic engagement and having friends as neighbors and talking to those neighbors frequently creates the trust in others that is necessary for the end result of community satisfaction. Trust is also a key player in economic growth. Knack and Keefer (1997) investigated the relationship between social capital and economic performance. They measured economic performance as the production of wealth at the national level, and found a significant relationship between economic performance and social capital. Other research (Rupasingha, Goetz, & Freshwater, 2006) has found evidence that suggests that “networks that foster trust are related to wealth and health at a local or community level” (Anderson et al., 2010, p. 361). Participation in social groups leads to “interpersonal trust” (Hindman & Yamamoto, 2011), which in turn, results in economic growth. Mutz (2005) says that

when parties are united by mutual trust, “transaction costs” decline and economic growth can occur. The effect of trust and mutual reciprocity on the economic growth of rural communities will be discussed in the next section.

### *Rural Communities and Satisfaction (Macro-Structural Factors)*

The rural community tends to be an outlier when discussing community trends. Instead of experiencing population and economic growth like other community types, many rural communities have witnessed population and economic decline (Flora & Flora, 2008; Crowe, 2010). These types of changes beg the questions, how are the residents of the rural communities affected by these changes? Has their satisfaction with their community changed? As discussed earlier, residents of rural communities experience lower incomes, higher levels of unemployment and underemployment and larger percentages of individuals who live below the poverty line (Chadwick & Bahr, 1978; Nilsen, 1979). Many predictors of community satisfaction still hold true for rural residents, like friendship networks and ties, but changes to the racial composition of rural communities has caused friendship networks and community organization participation to be impacted. People tend to prefer to be surrounded by individuals that are similar to them. An infiltration of “different” people causing heterogeneity will result in lower levels of satisfaction with one’s community and place of residence. The level of community satisfaction relative to other community types (cities and suburbs) will be investigated in this study.

Trust and its effect on economic growth are especially important when discussing rural communities. Rural areas are at a great disadvantage in terms of being able to keep residents and provide amenities that entice others to move there. However, Anderson et

al. (2010) discuss how trust can address the economic impact that the changes in dominant industries and subsequent out-migration:

For instance, if community members helped their neighbors harvest, such mutual assistance would be more productive but that kind of assistance would only have a limited economic impact. If, on the other hand, people in trust communities were more likely to engage in broader forms of economic cooperation, such as doing most of their retail shopping in town in order to help the community, it would mean that trusting relationships can help produce wealth in more than one way. In effect, community members who both shopped in town because of their community ethos (based on some notion we might typify as “self interest rightly understood”) and in order cut transaction costs (by providing mutual assistance) both would lend to a more substantial impact upon community wealth. (p. 362).

Rural communities have would benefit the most from this type of trust and mutual reciprocity. Contrary to cities, and sometimes even suburbs, rural communities do not suffer from a lack of interpersonal relationships or simply even knowing your neighbors. Using the trust that most likely already exists in rural areas would result in the production of wealth.

### *Individual Characteristics and Community Satisfaction*

The most talked about predictor of community satisfaction is the length of time the individual resides in their community (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Wasserman, 1982; Goudy, 1990; Crowe, 2010; Brown et al., 2003). Other researchers, though, have found social class to be a major predictor (Janowitz, 1967). According to Wasserman (1982), educational attainment also seems to play a large role in an individual’s satisfaction with their community. The more educated an individual is, the more satisfied they are with their place of residence. Income has also been found to be strongly and positively related to community satisfaction (Goudy, 1990). This could be due to the fact that individuals with high levels of income have a seemingly unlimited array of options in terms of

residence. An individual with a higher income has the ability to buy in a better community that has lower levels of crime and is more likely to be surrounded by other individuals like themselves, therefore, increasing satisfaction. Age is also a positive predictor of satisfaction. The older someone is, the more likely they are to be satisfied (Goudy, 1990; Crowe, 2010). The relationship between age and community satisfaction could be explained by increased levels of complacency over time as well as the likelihood that older residents have lived in their current residence for quite some time. Race is also discussed as a predictor: minority groups tend to be less satisfied (Dassopoulos & Monnat, 2011) due to their tendency to be under-educated, under-employed and have relatively higher levels of poverty. Neighborhoods with higher percentages of minorities have higher levels of crime and lower rates of home ownership, all of which predict lower levels of community satisfaction. Areas that are considered heterogeneous are associated with dissatisfaction (Wasserman, 1982). People tend to be more satisfied with their residence when they are surrounded by people that are similar to them. Home ownership has also been found to be a predictor of community satisfaction (Brown et al., 2003). Home owners are more invested in their community and cannot quickly leave a community. If a problem arises, a home owner benefits from working on a solution, and thus becoming more integrated and invested in their community. And as discussed earlier, people that are highly integrated and invested in their community have high levels of satisfaction with their residence. Also, people that own homes tend to be more stable economically and financially, and therefore, have higher levels of income and live in areas that are relatively non-transient.

### *Summary of Predictors of Community Satisfaction*

The past paragraphs have discussed the literature on community satisfaction and its predictors. Researchers have been interested in resident satisfaction and why people decide to live, and stay, in a certain place. Some theorists have investigated reasons like the size of one's community or the homogeneity of the residents. Others focus on how long someone has lived in their residence, and therefore, how connected they are to their community and the other residents. Social capital and civic engagement have been discussed as predictors of community satisfaction. High levels of crime and the negative perceptions of crime have both been found to influence a resident's satisfaction with where they live. The positive perception of the economy, as well, plays a huge role in community satisfaction. To be expected, literature has found individual characteristics like education and income to be associated with community satisfaction, as well as an individual's race or ethnicity. The type of the community a resident lives in, such as a rural area or city, has been found to be linked to a resident's satisfaction. Residents of rural communities tend to be less satisfied and suffer from high levels of poverty and low levels of economic growth. All of these predictors will be investigated using the 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey and dataset in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Data and Methods

The data used in this study are from the 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey, consisting of a random, representative within each community, sample of 400 adults (males and females, 18 years of age and older) in each of the 26 Knight communities, interviewed by Gallup. The total number of respondents for 2010 is 20,271. The Knight Foundation also conducted this survey in 2008 and 2009, but for the purposes of this study, the data from 2010 is sufficient.

#### *Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable, *community satisfaction*, is derived from the question “Taking everything into consideration, how satisfied are you with your community as a place to live?” The respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 5 being extremely satisfied. The responses were then recoded into a 0,1 relationship. Those individuals who responded with a 4 or 5 are considered “satisfied” =1 and those individuals who responded with a 1 or 2 are considered “not satisfied” =0. Those individuals who responded with a 3 are excluded from the main regressions due to their neutrality. These 4,585 neutral respondents are, however, included in the later multinomial regressions.

## *Independent Variables*

### *Community-Specific Variables*

The Knight Foundation asked many questions regarding the respondents' neighborhood characteristics. The majority of these variables are based on the perceptions of the individual. For instance, one of the main variables in this study is whether or not the respondent feels safe walking alone at night in their community. Other variables of interest are the perceived crime level of the respondent's community, the perceived ease of finding a job in the respondent's community, and the perceived state of the economy of the respondent's community. The respondent was also asked to self-identify whether their community was a city, suburb, rural, or something else; suburb is used as the reference category in the regression models. An individual's connectedness to their community is measured by the number of close friends the respondent has in their community, how often they talk to their neighbors, the number of years the respondent has lived in their community<sup>1</sup>, whether or not they participate in volunteer organizations in their community, and the permanency of the respondent's residency (year-round versus seasonal) and if they own or rent their home.

Since many of the variables are based on perception, issues may exist in trying to explain perceived satisfaction (the dependent variable). It may be a "what came first" problem. Were residents satisfied with the community and therefore, decided they needed to be satisfied in other factors? Or were the residents satisfied with the various

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<sup>1</sup> Seven hundred and seventy individuals responded that they had lived in their community "all their life." Those respondents were excluded from the data analysis because the length of their residency could not be determined.



areas and therefore, that led to overall community satisfaction? Both scenarios were explored and models were run for both types of explanations. Ultimately, theoretical and statistical explanations justify the current dependent variable as community satisfaction. Collinearity tests were conducted and issues of collinearity do not exist.

### *Socio-demographic Variables*

Other important demographic variables included in this study are the marital status of the respondent, gender, race, education level, income level, age, employment status, and existence of children in the household. See Table 1 for the operationalization of the variables.

### *Methodology*

The first analysis examines the relationship between community satisfaction and the independent variables using binary logistic regression. Using a binary logistic regression made it possible to clearly examine the factors that contribute to community satisfaction and those that do not. In order to further examine this relationship, multinomial regressions were conducted that include the neutral responses of the community satisfaction dependent variable. This analysis is incorporated to justify the use of a binary logistic regression, where the dependent variable does not include neutral responses. Due to the inclusion of perception-based variables and the literature that shows that aggregate variables have an impact on a resident's community satisfaction, Hierarchical Linear Modeling was conducted using 2010 Census data on each of the 26 communities in the Knight Foundation Soul of the Community study. Each of the aggregate variables was attached to the respondent based on their respective community and binary logistic regressions were run. However, the Hierarchical Linear Modeling

analysis did not supply any further significant or surprising findings, so it is only included as a section in the appendix. The binary logistic model is the main source of findings for predicting community satisfaction.

### *Expectations*

- I. There will be varying levels of satisfaction for the different types of communities.
- II. Volunteering will increase an individual's satisfaction with their community.
- III. As the positive perception of the economy increases, the individual will become more satisfied with their community. Education and Income will be statistically significant.
- IV. As the negative perception of crime decreases, community satisfaction will increase.
- V. The more friends an individual has that are also neighbors, the greater the satisfaction with their community.
- VI. Older individuals have higher levels of community satisfaction.
- VII. White individuals have higher levels of community satisfaction.
- VIII. Longer residency is associated with greater satisfaction.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

The following paragraphs discuss the results from the binary logistic regression, the multinomial regression, and the binary logistic regression with percent variables, and show which variables are statistically significant in predicting community satisfaction.

Table 1 contains the operationalization of the variables that were included in the study and how each of the variables was measured. Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of the sample population. Eighty-five percent of the respondents consider themselves to be satisfied with their community as a place to live. Eighteen percent of the respondents surveyed are residents of rural communities, 38% live in cities, 40% live in suburbs, and 4% are residents of something else. The average respondent has lived in their community for almost 31 years. This average is a little higher for rural and city residents at 32.96 and 31.02 years, respectively. The average suburb resident has lived in their community for 29.86 years. Fifty-five percent of respondents volunteer locally, and 98% are year-round residents. Eighty percent own their home; 87% of rural residents own their home, while only 73% of city residents own their home, and 85% of suburbs residents.

Fifty-six percent of the respondents are married, 44% are male, and 76% are white. The average respondent has attended “some college,” has an income between \$45,000 and \$54,999, and is 56 years of age. Forty-seven percent of respondents have either full-time or part-time employment, and 26% have at least one child under the age of 18 living in their home.

*Table 1: Operationalization of Variables*

Variable	Measure
<i>Dependent Variable</i>	
Community Satisfaction	The level of community satisfaction of the respondent (1=satisfied, 0=not satisfied)
<i>Community-Specific Variables</i>	
Safe at Night	The perceived safety of walking alone at night in their community (1=not at all safe, 5=completely safe)
Crime	The perceived crime level of the respondent's community (1=extremely high, 5=extremely low)
Find a job	The perceived ease of finding a job in the respondent's community (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)
Economy	The perceived state of the economy of the respondent's community (1=very bad, 5=very good)
Type of Community	The type of community the respondent lives in (rural, city, all else compared to suburb)
Friends	The number of close friends that live in the respondent's community (1=none, 6=all)
Talk to Neighbors	The frequency of how often the respondent talks to or visits with their neighbors (1=never, 7=almost every day)
Years	The number of years the respondent has lived in their community
Volunteer	The respondent's participation in local volunteer work (1=yes)
Permanency of the Resident	The permanency of the respondent's residency (1=year-round, 0=seasonal)
Own	The home ownership status of the respondent (1=own, 0=rent)
<i>Socio-Demographic Variables</i>	
Marital Status	The marital status of the respondent (1=married, 0=all else)
Gender	The gender of the respondent (1=male, 0=female)
Race	The race of the respondent (1=white/non-hispanic; 0=all else)
Educational Attainment	The educational attainment of the respondent (1=grade school, 2=some high school, 3-high school graduate, 4=some college, 5=college graduate, 6=post-grad)
Income	The income level of the respondent (1=under \$15,000, 2=\$15,000-24,999, 3=\$25,000-34,999, 4=\$35,000-44,999, 5=\$45,000-54,999, 6=\$55,000-74,999, 7=\$75,000-99,999, 8=\$100,000+)
Age	The age of the respondent (continuous)
Employment Status	The employment status of the respondent (1=employed, 0=unemployed)
Child	The existence of dependent children in the household (1=yes, 0=no)

Source: 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	St. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	N
<i>Dependent Variable</i>					
Community Satisfaction	0.85	0.36	0	1	15,565
<i>Community-Specific Variables</i>					
Safe at Night	3.54	1.33	1	5	15,293
Crime	3.40	1.18	1	5	15,315
Find a job	2.33	1.09	1	5	15,112
Economy	2.82	1.03	1	5	15,294
Rural	0.18	0.39	0	1	15,304
City	0.38	0.49	0	1	15,304
Suburb	0.40	0.49	0	1	15,304
Else	0.04	0.19	0	1	15,304
Friends	3.41	1.61	1	6	15,348
Talk to Neighbors	4.94	1.73	1	7	15,311
Years	30.79	20.49	1	96	14,518
Rural	32.96	20.90	1	96	2,619
City	31.02	20.69	1	96	5,481
Suburb	29.86	20.03	1	96	5,776
Volunteer	0.55	0.50	0	1	15,370
Year-round	0.98	0.15	0	1	15,304
Own	0.80	0.40	0	1	15,177
Rural	0.87	0.34	0	1	2,794
City	0.73	0.44	0	1	5,716
Suburb	0.85	0.36	0	1	5,990
<i>Socio-Demographic Variables</i>					
Marital Status	0.56	0.50	0	1	15,209
Male	0.44	0.50	0	1	20,271
White	0.76	0.43	0	1	17,312
Educational Attainment	4.39; some college	1.19	1	6	17,073
Income	5.16; \$45,000-\$54,999	2.26	1	8	13,390
Age	56.22	17.14	18	99	19,901
Employment Status	0.47	0.49	0	1	15,174
Child	0.26	0.44	0	1	15,284

Source: 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey

The following table 3 shows the percent of individuals by variable that are satisfied. Of those individuals who are satisfied, 57% are married, 83% own their home, 58% are male, and 79% are white. Ninety-eight percent are year-round residents. Eighteen percent of satisfied individuals live in rural communities, 38% live in a city, and 40% live in a suburb. Of those satisfied individuals, 45% are employed, 24% have dependent children in the home, and 56% volunteer. Using only the top two categories of the response choices<sup>2</sup>, 66% of satisfied individuals feel safe at night, 55% perceive low levels of crime, 17% feel that it's easy to find a job in their community, and 33% feel the economic conditions in their community are good.

*Table 3: Crosstabs of Community Satisfaction*

Variable	Percent Satisfied
Married	57%
Own	83%
Female	58%
White	79%
Year-round	98%
Rural	18%
City	38%
Suburb	40%
Employed	45%
Children	24%
Volunteer	56%
Safe at night*	66%
Crime*	55%
Find a job*	17%
Economy*	33%

\*Used only the top two categories

Source: 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey

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<sup>2</sup> The respondents were asked questions about their safety at night in their neighborhood, their perception of crime, ease of finding a job, and how they would rate the economic conditions in their community. Those that responded with a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale, with 5 meaning you feel very safe or the economic conditions are very good, etc. were included in the crosstabs.

Table 4 shows the final three variables. Of those individuals who are satisfied, 28% have some college education, 26% are college graduates, and 23% have a post-grad degree. This distribution shows that majority of people who are satisfied with their community have at least some college education. Twenty-three percent of satisfied individuals have an income of \$100,000 or over. Thirteen percent have an income between \$75,000 and \$99,999 and 15% have an income between \$55,000 and \$74,999. This distribution, similar to the distribution of educational attainment, shows that the majority of people who are satisfied with their community also have higher levels of income. The distribution of the respondent's friends that are also neighbors is relatively more evenly spread. However, those respondents with no friends as neighbors are only nine percent of those respondents that are satisfied. The highest percentage, with 24%, is the "a few" category.

In order to understand the relationship between community satisfaction, community-specific variables, and socio-demographic variables, binary logistic regressions are run and the coefficients and odds ratios of the variables are reported.

The first regression<sup>3</sup> of community satisfaction results in quite a few interesting and expected statistically significant variables seen in Table 5. These significant variables include safe at night, crime, find a job, friends, economy, years, year-round, rural, male, white, and age. A one-unit increase in the respondent's feeling of safety at night results in a 37% increase in community satisfaction. A one-unit increase in the respondent's perception of crime in their community results in an 18% increase. Overall, a respondent's feeling of safety and low levels of crime in their neighborhood

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<sup>3</sup>Multiple interactions were run but none were statistically significant.

lead to greater community satisfaction. A one-unit increase in the respondent's feeling of an individual's ability to find a job in their community results in a 46% increase, while a one-unit increase in the respondent's positive perception of the economy leads to almost 3 times (2.71) of an increase in community satisfaction. Economic well-being in a respondent's community leads to greater satisfaction. If a resident perceives their community as having economic stability, they are almost 3 times more likely to be satisfied with where they live. A one-person increase in the number of close friends the respondent has in their neighborhood results in a 14% increase in community satisfaction. Since the regression used suburb as the comparison group, the results show that residents of rural communities are 34% less likely to be satisfied than residents of suburbs. Based on the literature discussed earlier, this is an expected result. A one-year increase in the number of years the respondent has lived in their community results in a 1% decrease in satisfaction.<sup>4</sup> This result is contrary to the literature; longer residency usually results in being more embedded. Year-round residents are eighty-six percent more satisfied than seasonal residents. Males are 44% less satisfied than females, and whites (white/non-Hispanic) are 26% more satisfied than other races and ethnicities. A one-year increase in the respondent's age results in a 3% increase in community satisfaction.<sup>5</sup>

Performing a block-modeling logistic regression of community satisfaction revealed a few variables that fell out of significance as variables with a stronger impact

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<sup>4</sup> Years-squared was included but resulted in years and years-squared becoming insignificant.

<sup>5</sup> Age-squared was included but upon its inclusion, age was no longer significant. It is impossible to interpret the curvilinear relationship without a significant age variable.



were added. In the first regression of the socio-demographic variables, male, white, education, income, and age were statistically significant.

*Table 4: Crosstabs of Community Satisfaction*

Variable	% Satisfied
<i>Education</i>	
Grade school or less	1%
Some high school	4%
High school graduate	18%
Some college	28%
College graduate	26%
Post-grad degree	23%
<i>Income</i>	
Under \$15,000	6%
\$15,000-24,999	8%
\$25,000-34,999	11%
\$35,000-44,999	11%
\$45,000-54,999	11%
\$55,000-74,999	15%
\$75,000-99,999	13%
\$100,000+	23%
<i>Friends</i>	
None	9%
A few	24%
Some	17%
About half	15%
Most	21%
All or nearly all	14%

Source: 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey

As some community-specific variables were added, income dropped its significance and safe at night, crime, find a job, friends, talk to neighbors, volunteer, economy, years, and year-round became significant. Including rural, city, and else with the community-specific variables resulted in the loss of significance for education, talk to neighbors, and volunteer, while rural gained significance.

Table 5: Block-Modeling Logistic Regression of Community Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
<i>Socio-Demographic Variables</i>						
Married	-0.01		-0.04		-0.002	
Male	-0.29*	0.75	-0.57*	0.57	-0.57*	0.56
White	0.30*	1.35	0.21*	1.24	0.23*	1.26
Education	0.08*	1.08	0.07*	1.15	0.05	
Income	0.11*	1.11	0.04		0.03	
Age	0.02*	1.02	0.03*	1.03	0.03*	1.03
Employed	0.002		-0.10		-0.08	
Children	0.01		0.03		-0.03	
<i>Community-Specific Variables</i>						
Safe at Night			0.31*	1.36	0.31*	1.37
Crime			0.16*	1.18	0.17*	1.18
Find a job			0.38*	1.47	0.38*	1.46
Friends			0.13*	1.14	0.13*	1.14
Talk			0.04*	1.04	0.03	
Volunteer			0.06		0.07	
Economy			1.00*	2.72	1.00*	2.70
Years			-0.01*	0.99	-0.01*	0.99
Year-round			0.62*	1.85	0.62*	1.86
Own			0.15		0.17	
Rural					-0.41*	0.66
City					-0.09	
Else					-0.34	
Intercept	-0.25		-5.95		-5.73	
Pseudo R-squared					0.30	

\*p-value<.05

Source: 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey

As discussed earlier, it is necessary to investigate the difference between those individuals who are satisfied, those who are dissatisfied, and those who are neutral regarding community satisfaction, in order to justify the use of binary logistic regression that excludes neutral responses. Table 6 shows the results of a multinomial logistic regression. The first set of columns shows the results when satisfied individuals are compared to individuals that are dissatisfied.

The main purpose of the multinomial logistic regressions was to confirm that the same relationships are maintained even when including the neutral responses. This

consistency would validate leaving the neutrals out of the binary logistic regression. The decision to leave the neutrals out of the binary logistic regression was reached because people that respond indifferently to a question of community satisfaction have no contribution to community satisfaction research. Only those individuals that feel one way or another are of interest when studying community satisfaction. As expected, the variables that are significant in the binary logistic regression are significant in the multinomial logistic regression. People who feel safe walking around their neighborhood at night are 57% significantly more likely to be satisfied with their community than neutral. They are also 30% less likely to be dissatisfied than neutral. The same pattern is true for an individual's ability to find a job. Lower levels of crime translate to a higher likelihood of satisfaction than neutrality. The state of the economy plays a large and significant role in satisfaction: more positive feelings about the economy result in 12 times the likelihood of being satisfied versus dissatisfied, 4 times the likelihood of being satisfied versus neutral, and 66% less likely to be dissatisfied than neutral. Rural residents are 62% significantly less likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied and two times more likely to be dissatisfied than neutral. These results support omitting the neutral responses from the binary logistic regression.

In order to further explain the components of community satisfaction, binary logistic regressions were run with the addition of percent variables using 2010 US Census data: percent white, percent bachelor's degree, median income, and the poverty rate. When using data that has geographical identifiers or data that have hierarchical or clustered structures, it is important to include aggregate measures of the community as whole (Dai et al., 2013). Each person in the study was clustered in a community, and

each community has identifying variables that make it different from other communities in the study. For example, how does the poverty rate impact their satisfaction with that community? How does the overall educational attainment impact a person's satisfaction with that community? These aggregate variables contribute more information and demographic data on the respective community than what is readily available through the respondent's perceptions. This analysis allows for a more accurate representation of the community the resident lives in, based on Census data.

*Table 6: Multinomial Logistic Regression*

Variable	Satisfied vs. Dissatisfied		Satisfied vs. Neutral		Dissatisfied vs. Neutral	
	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
<i>Community-Specific Variables</i>						
Safe at Night	0.35*	2.24	0.2*	1.57	-0.15*	0.70
Crime	0.19*	1.55	0.13*	1.35	-0.05	
Find a job	0.39*	2.45	0.22*	1.67	-0.17*	0.68
Economy	1.08*	12.02	0.62*	4.15	-0.46*	0.34
Rural	-0.42*	0.38	-0.11		0.31*	2.04
City	-0.09		-0.03		0.06	
Else	-0.31		-0.03		0.28	
Friends	0.13*	1.35	0.1*	1.26	-0.03	
Talk to Neighbors	0.02		0.02		0.00	
Years	-0.0002		0.01		0.01	
Volunteer	0.07		0.11*	1.28	0.03	
Year-round	0.65*	4.47	0.22		-0.43*	0.37
Own	0.22*	1.66	0.16*	1.43	-0.06	
<i>Socio-Demographic Variables</i>						
Married	0.01		0.08		0.07	
Male	-0.58*	0.26	-0.23*	0.58	0.35*	2.23
White	0.24*	1.74	0.14*	1.39	-0.10	
Educational Attainment	0.06		0.03		-0.03	
Income	0.03		-0.01		-0.03	
Age	0.00		0.00		0.00	
Employment Status	-0.01		-0.06		-0.05	
Child	0.00		0.04		0.04	
Intercept	-5.85		-4.12		1.7316	

\*p-value <.05

Source: 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey

Table 7: Binary Logistic Regression with Block-Modeling Percent Variables

Variable	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
<i>Community-Specific Variables</i>								
Safe at Night	0.30*	1.35	0.30*	1.35	0.30*	1.35	0.30*	1.35
Crime	0.17*	1.18	0.17*	1.18	0.17*	1.18	0.17*	1.18
Find a Job	0.37*	1.45	0.37*	1.45	0.37*	1.45	0.37*	1.45
Economy	0.92*	2.52	0.89*	2.44	0.90*	2.47	0.89*	2.44
Rural	-0.55*	0.58	-0.53*	0.59	-0.48*	0.62	-0.46*	0.63
City	-0.17*	0.84	-0.17*	0.85	-0.19*	0.83	-0.19*	0.82
Else	-0.46*	0.63	-0.45*	0.64	-0.44*	0.64	-0.43*	0.65
Friends	0.12*	1.13	0.13*	1.13	0.12*	1.13	0.12*	1.13
Talk to Neighbors	0.03		0.03		0.03		0.03	
Years	-0.01*	0.99	-0.01*	0.99	-0.01*	0.99	-0.01*	0.99
Volunteer	0.06		0.06		0.06		0.06	
Year-round	0.57*	1.77	0.54*	1.72	0.53*	1.70	0.52*	1.69
Own	0.13		0.15		0.16		0.17	
<i>Socio-Demographic Variables</i>								
Married	-0.03		-0.02		-0.02		-0.02	
Male	-0.58*	0.56	-0.57*	0.57	-0.57*	0.57	-0.57*	0.57
White	0.08		0.09		0.09		0.09	
Educational Attainment	0.06		0.05		0.06		0.06	
Income	0.05*	1.05	0.04		0.03		0.03	
Age	0.02*	1.02	0.02*	1.02	0.02*	1.02	0.02*	1.02
Employment Status	-0.11		-0.11		-0.11		-0.11	
Child	-0.03		-0.04		-0.04		-0.04	
<i>Percent Variables</i>								
Percent White	0.02*	1.02	0.01*	1.02	0.01*	1.01	0.01*	1.01
Percent Bachelor's Degree			0.02*	1.02	0.004		0.01	
Median Income					0.00*	1.00	0.00	
Poverty Rate							-0.02*	0.98
Intercept	-5.96		-6.08		-6.31		-5.46	
R-squared	0.23		0.23		0.24		0.24	

\*p-value <.05

Source: 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey

In Table 7, each individual was attached their respective percent variable based on their community. The inclusion of the percent of white individuals in the community resulted in three more statistically significant variables than the original logistic regression: city, else, and income. City residents are 16% less satisfied than suburb residents, while respondents living in other types of communities are 37% less satisfied than suburban residents. A one-unit increase in a respondent's income results in a 5% increase in community satisfaction. A one-unit increase in the percentages of white individuals in the community results in a 2% increase in community satisfaction.

Communities that have a higher percentage of white individuals are more satisfied. With the inclusion of the percent bachelor's degree, income is no longer significant. A one-unit increase in the percentage of people with a bachelor's degree results in a 2% increase in community satisfaction. Communities that are more educated are more satisfied. Including the poverty rate along with the other percent variables resulted in a 1% decrease in the effect of percent white, while a one-unit increase in the poverty rate results in a 2% decrease in community satisfaction. Communities with lower levels of poverty are more satisfied. An HLM regression was run with these percent variables but it did not result in significant percent variables. See appendix for regression.

### *Results of Expectations*

- I. There will be varying levels of satisfaction for the different types of communities.
  - a. Rural residents are less satisfied than residents of suburbs.
  - b. With the inclusion of the percent variables, city and else residents are less satisfied than suburb residents.
- II. Volunteering will increase an individual's satisfaction with their community.
  - a. In the satisfied versus neutral column of the multinomial logistic regression, volunteering is positive and statistically significant.
- III. As the positive perception of the economy increases, the individual will become more satisfied with their community. Education and Income will be statistically significant.
  - a. Education and income are insignificant.

- b. Find a job and the perception of the economy are both statistically significant, and positively related to community satisfaction.
- IV. As the negative perception of crime decreases, community satisfaction will increase.
  - a. Safe at night and perceptions of crime are both statistically significant. As an individual's positive perception of safety increases, community satisfaction increases. As an individual's negative perception of crime decreases, community satisfaction increases.
- V. The more friends an individual has that are also neighbors, the greater the satisfaction with their community.
  - a. Friends as neighbors is statistically significant, and positively related to community satisfaction.
- VI. Older individuals have higher levels of community satisfaction.
  - a. Age is positive and statistically significant.
- VII. White individuals have higher levels of community satisfaction.
  - a. White is positive and statistically significant.
- VIII. Longer residency is associated with greater satisfaction.
  - a. Longer residency is negative and statistically significant. Year round residents are more satisfied with their community.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

The previous chapter discussed the results of the binary logistic regressions and therefore, the significant predictors of community satisfaction. Many of the variables that were expected to be predictors of community satisfaction were statistically significant in the regressions. A resident's belief of how easy it is to find a job and how well the economy is doing are significantly and positively related to community satisfaction. Those individuals that feel comfortable with the state of the economy in their community are more likely to be satisfied. An individual's perceptions of safety at night and crime in their community are significantly related to how satisfied they are; high levels of perceptions of safety result in higher levels of satisfaction, while high levels of perceptions of crime result in lower levels of satisfaction. Based on the literature, these trends are to be expected. How long you live in your community, although the direction of the relationship is opposite to what was expected, is a statistically significant predictor of community satisfaction. The longer someone lives in their community, the less satisfied they are. This may be due to the fact that the longer someone lives in a community, the more time they have to analyze the problems associated with the community. However, other factors may deter them from moving such as friendships networks and community connections. Interpersonal relationships prove to be significant in predicting community satisfaction. The higher the number of friends an individual has that are also neighbors is more beneficial to an individual's satisfaction, as expected. Being a year-round resident increases an individual's



likelihood of being satisfied with their residence. Male individuals are less likely to be satisfied, while white individuals are more likely to be satisfied with their community. Older residents are also more satisfied than their younger counterparts. It is possible that older residents have fewer requirements for where they live and have become complacent because they have retired or are in the later stages of their lives. They may be secure with the relationships and support systems they have in their current community.

As discussed earlier in the literature review, there are two types of community attachment: subjective and objective. Subjective attachment is described as an individual's sense of belonging in their community, which could be influenced by the individual's length of residence, involvement in their community, and the relationships they have with other members of the community. Objective attachment refers to the more physical or tangible items in a community, like police presence or an abundance of parks and outdoor activities. This study looked at both types of attachment and the results demonstrated that both types of attachment are important in predicting community satisfaction.

### *Rural Communities*

Rural residents have low levels of community satisfaction due to apparent low levels of community, a slow economy and a tendency towards transience. Residents of rural communities experience lower incomes, higher levels of unemployment and underemployment and larger percentages of individuals who live below the poverty line (Chadwick & Bahr, 1978; Nilsen, 1979), as well as population and economic decline (Flora & Flora, 2008; Crowe, 2010). The results from this study reinforce the relationships between predictors of community satisfaction and rural communities in past

literature. Income and the perceived economic well-being of the community are both significant predictors of community satisfaction, as well as the perceived levels of crime.

### *Crime and Rural Communities*

Truly, perception is reality. What matters is what people believe to be true. There could be a drug lord living in the white picket fenced house on the corner, but without knowing he exists, the neighborhood feels safe. These perceptions are what draw people in. As discussed in the Data and Methods section, variables in this study measure the respondents' perceptions of their community. The individual's negative perception of crime in their community has a significant impact on their satisfaction. The individual's perception of economic stability has a significant impact on their satisfaction.

The implications of a study like this have much to do with community research. The Broken Windows Theory is overarching in this study. "Dilapidated buildings, littered streets, graffiti-laden walls, and so on may lead to further decay within the community as "disorder" turns to crime" (Wilcox et al., 2004). Even if a community has little to no crime, a broken window here, a run-down building there, can drastically impact the feeling of safety in a neighborhood. The Downtown area of a previously-researched Texas town was deserted, years back, when the hurricane came through; however, over time, little by little, restaurants and businesses have made their way back. Unfortunately for the Downtown, these efforts have not drawn the people in. It is not because the area is incredibly dangerous or the restaurants are not good. It is because the building on the corner has peeling paint and a broken window up top. The factory building that used to hold a thriving manufacturing firm has not been touched in over a decade; the brush is overgrown and the fence is falling down. These things are not

inherently related to increases in crime. The sign of peeling paint does not mean you are going to be robbed when walking to your car. However, it does not make you feel safe; it makes you feel a lack of community. Once again, perception is reality. The feeling of a lack of community and a lack of solidarity, as seen in Social Disorganization Theory, or the appearance of crime is more important in determining someone's satisfaction with where they live. The lack of community and the appearance of desertion have resulted in the "brain drain" that was discussed earlier. People have "voted with their feet" and moved to areas that fulfill all the requirements on individuals' wish lists. They have moved to areas with more flourishing downtowns, job opportunities, and opportunities for educational and financial improvement.

### *Rural Economies*

This analogy can easily be applied to rural communities. People left rural communities for different industries, or just a different way of life. Rural communities have been known for farming and the agriculture industry. A huge part of maintaining a farm is the participation of all the family members. As the shift in industries from agriculture to industrial to technological occurred, residents of rural communities began to move to the booming metropolis. Those residents included children of the farms. Without the additional help, family farms began to struggle and were unable to survive. This left vacant rural store-fronts and run-down areas of town.

Economic growth and booming job markets are not as easy to tackle as replacing a window but this study proves that they are just as important, if not more important than the perception of safety. Most of the time, if an individual has a choice, he will not move to a place that he knows would be a bad financial decision. As discussed earlier,

individuals “vote with their feet,” and people moving out of rural areas shows that there are more desirable places to live elsewhere. People are looking for areas and communities that satisfy all the needs and wants they have, within their budget. Their wants and needs may revolve around the job market or affordable housing, or they may be focused on the parks and activities in the communities. Overall, individuals make their decisions about where to live in a similar fashion to many other decisions they make: a cost-benefit analysis. Parkes et al. (2002) in their study of why people are dissatisfied with where they live, identified five factors that result in dissatisfaction: financial hardship, poor neighborhood resources and reputation, exposure to neighborhood problems, social marginalization, and depressed expectations (Florida et al., 2009). Unfortunately, rural communities suffer from majority of these factors and the factors discussed in this study, like the perception of crime and friendship networks. The following paragraph discusses how rural communities can address the variables in this study and thus, increase community satisfaction by fulfilling some of the potential wants and needs of a rural community.

There is a cyclical effect at work with the variables included in this study. If you fix the broken windows, repaint the façade, trim the bushes, fill in the cracks on the sidewalk, add signage, install street lights, and paint the lines on the streets, people will be more drawn to an area. The path to community satisfaction begins with perception. Adjusting the appearance of a place, just adding streetlights, drastically affects the perception of crime. It will feel safer and more welcoming. This attraction of people will bring businesses. Hopefully, there will be cafes on the corners with outside seating areas where dogs are welcome. The little boutique across the street now sells the best designer

jeans and fashion jewelry in the city. Fixing the appearance of the community should bring people, people bring money, money attracts businesses, and now the economy is rising (Florida et al., 2009). This opens up jobs for those individuals who cannot find work.

There is much literature that addresses the link between community satisfaction and aesthetics. Some authors, Andrews & Withey (1974), Zehner & Chapin (1974) and Newman & Duncan (1979), describe how a well-maintained community has a positive and significant impact on community satisfaction (Florida et al., 2009). A resident's perception of the beauty of his community affects community satisfaction (Widgery, 1982). White, in his 1985 study, found that the aesthetic qualities of a community are just as important as the social support, belonging, and friendship networks to community satisfaction. More recent research (Glaeser et al., 2001; Carlino & Saiz, 2008), has found that the presence of amenities in addition to community satisfaction could have an effect on the economic growth and development of areas (Florida et al., 2009).

The most discussed, and truly the most important behind economic stability, are the relationships, friendships, connections, and memberships that residents maintain in their community and the impact of those on community satisfaction. Rural communities have always been known for being tight-knit. Everyone knows everyone, and everyone knows everyone's business. Having friends as neighbors has never been a problem. But with this discussion of economic growth, a rural community can have all the makings of a suburb or city without the hustle and bustle. Rural communities have the ability to maintain residents based on the feeling of "community." Improving the appearance of an area, drawing in "community"- all of these things will increase the attachment of the

individual to the community. They will feel invested, be more likely to contribute their time and money, and as the literature discusses, people that are invested are more satisfied. People that feel connected to their residence are more satisfied. People that feel that their most important needs and wants are met in their residence are more satisfied. People that have friends in their neighborhood are more satisfied.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

Community satisfaction is a widely discussed topic in the social sciences. Researchers predominately focus on trying to find explanations for why people are satisfied with where they live, why people decide to stay in their place of residence, and especially why they decide to leave. This study seeks to investigate the same questions and answers, but takes it a step further by highlighting the community most impacted by transience, mobility, economic depression, and out-migration: the rural community.

As previously discussed, there are multiple predictors of satisfaction. They can be as simple as the age, gender or income of an individual, or as complex as the economy and the relationships with one's neighbors or the perceived levels of crime in the neighborhood. The results of this study have shown that an individual's perceptions of safety at night and crime in their community are both related to how satisfied they are with their community as a place to live. An individual's perception of how easy it is to find a job and how well the economy is doing are also both significantly and positively related to community satisfaction. How long you have lived in your community (negatively related to satisfaction), how many friends you have that are also your neighbors, and being a year-round resident are all significant predictors of community satisfaction, as well as being male and white. Older residents are also more satisfied. Rural residents have low levels of community satisfaction.

It is very clear what factors, both individual and community-related, significantly impact a resident's community satisfaction. Future research can expand this and explore

the decline in rural communities in the United States. This study formulates an explanation for rural communities that uses Social Disorganization Theory, Broken Windows Theory and the Systemic Model of Community Satisfaction as its backbone. The main premise behind this exploration is to rejuvenate the physical appearance of the towns, focusing on the storefronts, the windows in the buildings, and the signage. If a rural community is able to improve the appearance of the town, a cyclical process will begin to take place that will draw individuals in. Perceived levels of crime will decrease, so people will feel safer and more comfortable walking alone in the area. Due to the familiarity with one's neighbors that already occurs in rural communities, rural communities have the personal relationships and connections that literature and research shows to be linked to community satisfaction.

Future research on the topic of community satisfaction, and rural communities, would include using the same dataset and running the same regressions on a rural subset of the data. This would allow the ability to investigate the direct predictors of community satisfaction for rural residents. It would also be important to add in variables regarding the amenities in the communities. This would give more depth to the objective predictors of community attachment and therefore, community satisfaction. Future research would also include the investigation of a longitudinal study of community satisfaction to examine the effects of the economy and increases of heterogeneity in communities.

The results of this study have confirmed the findings of previous literature and research on community satisfaction and its predictors. An individual's connectedness to their community based on how many friends they have that are also neighbors is a significant predictor of their satisfaction with where they live. Identifiers of economic



stability, like how easy it is to find a job and the perception of the state of the economy, are also significant predictors of community satisfaction. The perception of crime in the community and how safe someone feels walking alone at night are both significant predictors of community satisfaction. Residents of rural communities are less satisfied with where they live in comparison to residents of suburbs. Rural residents have been impacted by economic decline that has caused an out-migration of residents to the cities and suburbs. Residents of rural communities have a path to community satisfaction by addressing the factors in this study that increase community satisfaction.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

*Table A1: HLM Regression of Community Satisfaction*

Variable	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
<i>Community-Specific Variables</i>		
Safe at Night	0.298*	1.258
Crime	0.165*	1.152
Find a Job	0.389*	1.322
Economy	0.090*	1.593
Rural	-0.406*	0.499
City	-0.19	
Else	0.398	
Friends	0.127	
Talk to Neighbors	0.032	
Years	0.005	
Volunteer	0.062	
Year-round	0.54	
Own	0.20	
<i>Socio-Demographic Variables</i>		
Married	0.009	
Male	-0.57*	0.232
White	0.109	
Educational Attainment	0.046	
Income	0.03	
Age	0.023*	1.023
Employment Status	0.101	
Child	0.021	
<i>Percent Variables</i>		
Percent White	0.005	
Percent Bachelor's Degree	0.011	
Median Income	0.0	
Poverty Rate	-0.028	
Intercept	2.34	

Source: 2010 Knight Foundation Soul of the Community Survey

## APPENDIX B

### *List of 26 Knight Communities*

Aberdeen, South Dakota  
Akron, Ohio  
Biloxi, Mississippi  
Boulder, Colorado  
Bradenton, Florida  
Charlotte, North Carolina  
Columbia, South Carolina  
Columbus, Georgia  
Detroit, Michigan  
Duluth, Minnesota  
Fort Wayne, Indiana  
Gary, Indiana  
Grand Forks, North Dakota  
Lexington, Kentucky  
Long Beach, California  
Macon, Georgia  
Miami, Florida  
Milledgeville, Georgia  
Myrtle Beach, South Carolina  
Palm Beach, Florida  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
San Jose, California  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
State College, Pennsylvania  
Tallahassee, Florida  
Wichita, Kansas

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