ABSTRACT

DYNAMIC NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITIES: GENTRIFICATION AND CONSUMPTION UPON NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY POLITICS

SC CRANGLE

Andersonville is a gentrifying neighborhood in Chicago, exemplified by rising property values. Today, Andersonville is often described as a lesbian neighborhood. Yet, it became clear during field research that lesbian identities in Andersonville were part of a more complex politics of neighborhood identity from which sexual identities could not be isolated without losing their important context. The research expanded to address the larger and more porous issues of community politics, encompassing broader cultural identities beyond lesbian, in circulation around the challenges of neighborhood gentrification. The research examined the cultural economies of community identity as expressed through, and in reaction to, the practices of gentrification and consumption. The findings suggest that lesbian space cannot be easily ‘read off’ the landscape but may be submerged in material cultural practices and politics that build upon different sexual identities, among others.
DYNAMIC NEIGHBOURHOOD IDENTITIES: GENTRIFICATION AND CONSUMPTION UPON NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY POLITICS

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1.0 Introduction of Research

Existing literature suggests that gay men and women can be expected to locate in areas particular to each group (Bouthillette 1994, Brown 2000, Castells 1983, Hindle 1994, Knopp 2004, Podmore 2001). Gay men are more territorial than gay women, often establishing visible markers of their presence (Castells 1983). Gay women, on the other hand, are less inclined to express such visual markers, which is why gay women are often thought to be ‘invisible’ in urban society (Podmore 2001). I arrived to the Chicago neighborhood of Andersonville expecting to find some sort of lesbian community, given some of the brief experiences I had in the space, the presence of some lesbian bars and a feminist bookstore, as well as having read literature that supported my suspicions. I expected to explore Andersonville as a space where lesbians lived, and to try to tease out the ways in which this invisible population affects the overall neighborhood identity. Though this thesis does explore neighborhood identity in Andersonville, it does not draw directly from a lesbian experience. Politics of sexuality are prevalent and important to the neighborhood identity, though are not explicitly clear. Rather, the neighborhood identity is complicated and of many different influences. This thesis understands that neighborhood identity is complicated, and in order to sufficiently explore even a small part of Andersonville’s neighborhood identity requires in depth exploration of both cultural and economic matters, from which some bits of sexuality surface.

Specific to sexuality, identity is even further complicated. Issues of sexuality are more personal than those of culture or economy (those central to this thesis). As a researcher I understand sexuality as part of one’s self that is not only intimate, but deeply relative and personal. It cannot be generalized, assumed, dictated or fully understood. The realm of sexuality is not so easily defined, as even normative social structures seem to fall short of establishing what it is. As Foucault points out in his History of Sexuality I, normative understandings of sexuality never mirrored its reality. Perhaps one normative perspective on sexuality is that it is only for members of the opposite sex and gender, evidenced by marriage battles between gay and straight perspectives, experienced in the last half of the present decade. Adding homosexuality to sexuality (sexuality being something this society has presumed to mean heterosexuality) is to uncover its complexities, something Foucault explores. The complications presented so immediately
around sexuality and its discourse make it difficult to understand sexuality, and as a researcher I discovered that to truly tackle the subject would require more research time than I had.

Therefore, this thesis seeks to understand how neighborhood identity is discursively and materially constructed in the Chicago neighborhood of Andersonville, “A quaint village in the middle of a world class city” (Andersonville Chamber of Commerce 2008), without explicitly focusing on sexuality as a key or central theme. Rather, I explore the physical layout of Andersonville and how individuals move within that space and attach to it, namely through ideas of local culture and economy. Understanding the constructions of culture and economy is important to understanding both the overall structure of Andersonville as a neighborhood and community. Johnston et al (2004, pg. 101) define community as, ‘a social network of interacting individuals, usually concentrated into a defined territory.’ Community is not the same as neighborhood, which is ‘a district within an urban area’ (ibid pg. 540). The neighborhood of Andersonville forms a community and I explore the material and discursive characteristics of this community throughout this thesis from a perspective of identity, or the ways in which individuals attach to and understand place. In addition I also explore gentrification, the transition of low-income neighborhoods to high-income neighborhoods; consumption, the buying of things; and cultural economy, the overlap between culture and economy. Combined these frameworks establish a basis from which to examine Andersonville as a neighborhood largely identified by local consumption patterns and threatened by gentrification.

The Andersonville neighborhood is located in the northern area of Chicago, IL (Figure 1). The borders of Andersonville fall within the greater neighborhood of Edgewater, though its exact location is debatable. The City of Chicago, Andersonville’s Chamber of Commerce and a commercial streetscaping project completed by an area architect who has worked in the area for 22 years, all define the borders of Andersonville differently (Figures 1, 2, 3). Some of the participating residents believed that they lived in Andersonville, though could not be certain. However, because they lived within an easy walking distance of the commercial district, Clark Street, they considered themselves to be a part of the neighborhood. Given the ambiguous borders, and the ways
in which residents find inclusion through the local shopping district, the borders of Andersonville are almost arbitrary. It is the accessibility of Clark Street that defines neighborhood inclusion.
Figure 1: The image data came from the City of Chicago’s website. The labels and demarcations are a product of their information.
Figure 2: The Andersonville website, Andersonville.org, establishes these boundaries, which clearly surpass those of the City of Chicago.
Figure 3: The business district of Andersonville predominately runs along Clark Street, the north/south street depicted with stars on either end. The stars represent the boundaries of Andersonville’s business district, as determined by the streetscaping project. To the north, the streetscape ends with the commercial establishments, though to the south it ends amidst commercial businesses.
The business district is a defining marker of the Andersonville neighborhood. Independent locally owned businesses line Clark Street and are hallmarks for the neighborhood. For the business district to be a signifier for a neighborhood that claims itself to be a ‘quaint village,’ illustrates how the business owners and residents interact vis-à-vis personal relationships that build a greater community and neighborhood feel. As Andersonville experiences residential and commercial gentrification, the role of the business district becomes an even stronger signifier of neighborhood identity. This is evidenced by the community’s reaction to protect the business district from the effects of gentrification. Such dedication exists within the history of Andersonville’s previous times of transition.

Andersonville has experienced three distinct residential and commercial transitions, the first beginning in the 1980s. Swedish immigrants settled the neighborhood, developing Clark Street with local businesses and occupying the surrounding residential spaces. When the owners of the Swedish businesses elected to retire in the 1980s, they opted to close their businesses and move to the suburbs. It is during this time that Andersonville began to decline commercially, though the residential stock remained solid as new residents began to gut and rehabilitate the interior of their homes and buildings. However, this time of rehabilitation did not displace any residents and therefore is not considered gentrification.

In the late 1980s, Andersonville political leaders, combined with remaining business owners and residents, initiated change by looking for new businesses to re-populate Clark Street. This effort proved successful. As Clark Street began to rebound the neighborhood became more popular, and because the housing stock was solid and rehabilitated, new long-terms residents began to move to the area. Research approximates that around the year of 2000, Andersonville began to gentrify, building from the previous decades of revitalization and rehabilitation. It is during gentrification that residents are displaced due to increasing socio-economic pressures that cannot be met. Those displaced must then relocate to different neighborhoods which are often more expensive than their original neighborhood, pre-gentrification (Ley 1981).
Andersonville’s recent history demonstrates relative instability due to the three notable transitions in as many decades. However, by examining how the neighborhood reacted to these transitions one can begin to realize the discourse and materiality of Andersonville’s neighborhood and community identity. This thesis serves as a representation of these phases, viewed as the interaction of consumption, neighborhood and community identity, cultural economy and gentrification, to better understand how Andersonville residents relate to their neighborhood, and how these relationships ultimately influence the neighborhood’s priorities and overarching neighborhood identity constructs. However, the journey to this point ought not to go without explanation.

To revisit the beginning of this introduction, my initial intention was to study Andersonville as a gay space, and I did not abandon this idea only because sexuality is complicated. Rather, I found unique challenges during the research process that, while working to overcome them, I discovered the content of this thesis. The story of how I got from there to here is valuable to this thesis, its focus and the intermittent inklings of sexuality.

I chose to research gay women for a reason. I was curious about how gay women were living in a society that is becoming more and more accepting of various sexual identities, but that continues to pay men and women unequally. At the time of this research, and at the time of this writing, women earn lower salaries than men, and the repercussions of that social dynamic are magnified when examining gay men and women, as they double their economic advantage and disadvantage within their household. In the earliest phases of research, I looked for those I perceived as lesbian by going to lesbian bars and the local feminist bookstore. Though I could see those I perceived as gay women, I struggled to access them.

My first formal interview was with a lesbian woman. I found her working at the feminist bookstore, Women and Children First. She co-authored a book about gay and lesbian spaces in Chicago, namely for gay residents or visitors of Chicago looking for gay-friendly places to go. I interviewed her and thought that I could begin to break into the lesbian crowd through her, however that did not happen. She had lived in Andersonville, but no longer did and could not think of any gay women living in Andersonville. There was one gay woman, a co-worker, who was in Andersonville, but
all attempts to interview her fell short. Though I cannot be certain why this interview never came to fruition, I do believe that the woman was relatively young and evidently uninterested in assisting in my research. I never saw her out on the street, though she was said to have socialized almost solely in Andersonville.

Somewhat frustrated and discouraged, I began to reflect on my question; how is neighborhood identity discursively and materially constructed in Andersonville? Though I proposed to answer this question by researching gay women, I wondered that if sexuality were central to the answer, would it not be more available to me? I went back to my initial question and began to reconsider how to answer it. While looking for gay women, I often walked along the commercial district that bisects the neighborhood, Clark Street (Figures 3 and 5). The street seemed to be in constant transition as new stores planned to open and existing stores planned to close. In casual conversation with a friend, he began to talk to me about the changes that had taken place in the year he had moved into the neighborhood, and how he knew from reading various publications, that this was partly attributed to rising property taxes. As we talked, we passed a pet store, and he indicated that the store used to be three independent shops that combined to create one.

On a whim I entered the pet store and asked if I could speak to the owner. My intention was to ask her about any gay or lesbian clientele and to maybe try and find a way into the lesbian population through their pets. The owner did not have much time or information, but directed me to another store, The Landmark of Andersonville.

Beginning with this interview, my research turned in a seemingly new direction. I began to hear more about consumption and gentrification than I did about anything gay. Research began to gain momentum in this direction as I gained access into a network (Figure 4). As I interviewed more people, both business owners and residents, I still inquired about Andersonville as a gay space, and consistently found it as a seemingly non-issue, even for those who were gay they did not seem interested in talking to me about it. I began to feel like I was pushing to create an issue that otherwise was not.

The lesson of this process is one that exemplifies that even as some parts of American society liberalize, gay identity is still difficult to research. Though Andersonville does house both gay men and women, they do not explicitly define space
in Andersonville in the same way that the literature describes (see Bouthillette 1994, Castells 1983, Hindle 1994, Podmore 2001). Of the gay men and women (though all men save for one woman) interviewed throughout the research, all had different leading identities that were not strictly gay in nature. I draw from the ways in which they described their lives in Andersonville, and though they appreciate gay neighbors, they seem to appreciate more their ability to be all of themselves and not just gay. Future research within this project’s parameters would do well to explore the reasons for the supposed dilution of the gay identity. As a researcher I cannot answer why gay identity was not represented as a leading identity. I cannot tell if interviewees gave me honest responses or political responses about their sexuality. Liberal society is moving in a way that is pushing for a visual and ideological acceptance of homosexuality, while perhaps simultaneously pushing homosexuals themselves to keep their sexuality out of the spotlight in an effort to push beyond it, perhaps before truly understanding it.

Public conversations about sexuality are relatively minimal for either homosexuals or heterosexual, and the strict denial of homosexuality is lapsing into social acceptance with relatively minimal discourse outside of its academic or literary niche, much like that of heterosexuality. The difference is that homosexuality was/is relegated to the margins of society, strictly rendered invisible in normative society for so long, that its new found acceptance is without much public or normative understanding. I see that many of the hidden aspects of homosexuality surface in gay spaces, like bars or gay advocacy groups, but less so in everyday public. The task of explaining one’s self to others becomes tiresome and monotonous, and I see the explanations wane as individuals age. And speaking from my own perspective and that of which I see in others, I recognize that the exploration of sexuality is only fruitful when shared with an understanding audience. It is finding that comfortable space for liberal discussions about sexuality that may still be lacking in public discourses.

Given the inaccessibility of the gay identity, I began to listen to the other topics my interviewees explored, and only brought up gay issues in non-personal ways, such as asking if during times of neighborhood transition if there was any hostility toward the gay population. Many who experienced the transitions talked about the changes, rooting much of the neighborhood in as much history as the present. Those stories often ended in
how gentrification threatens to change Andersonville. In this particular context, gentrification is particularly threatening to the commercial and residential districts. Commercially, independently owned businesses struggle to remain along Clark Street given the rising rent costs. If they cannot afford to locate along the street, chain stores will be their likely replacements, as they can afford more expensive property values. This is particularly threatening to Andersonville, as research affirm that the identity of the Andersonville neighborhood is inextricably linked to the locally owned commercial business district. Residentially, gentrification is changing the residential composite, as homes and condos become increasingly costly to rent and buy. Though conversations about residential gentrification were rather brief, I could visibly see condo conversions in process and homes selling for almost one million dollars.

Instead of using lesbians to describe Andersonville, I rely upon independent business owners and residents, both new and old, to describe Andersonville. Gentrification may be changing socio-economic diversity, but it is maintaining a social diversity in part because of an increasing number of gay men living in the area. However, as increasing land values price out socio-economic disadvantaged individuals, so too they price out independent businesses along Clark Street. The commercial gentrification is particularly threatening to Andersonville as residents described how they enjoyed shopping locally, both for the quality of uniqueness of what they could buy, but also because it allowed them access to a community. Business owners and residents perceive the possible loss of independent businesses along Clark Street as a direct threat to Andersonville’s neighborhood identity. If residents cannot interact with other residents or business owners, the small town feel of Andersonville would disappear, taking with it a defining characteristic of the neighborhood as described the Chamber of Commerce as, “A quaint village in the middle of a world class city.”

I began and concluded this research project with themes that appeared to be relatively unrelated. However, it was not until I began the finishing touches of this thesis did it become clear that themes of sexuality were more explicit than I had thought. Buried within the politics of gentrification and consumption, one can find gay politics; and not in the same old way. The link between the gay and the gentrified is not only defined by gay gentrification. For example, the feminist bookstore, Women and Children
First. This bookstore, once described by a resident as a hallmark of Andersonville, is a feminist bookstore that is struggling to remain in Andersonville as chain competition makes it difficult for them to keep pace with rising property values. As this thesis describes, Women and Children First revitalized Andersonville residually and commercially in 1990 when it relocated into the neighborhood. In 1990 Andersonville had many vacant storefronts, decent housing and affordable property values. When the bookstore moved in, it brought with it a lesbian residential population as well as more businesses to Clark Street. The present condition of gentrification in Andersonville can feasibly be linked back to the coming of this bookstore, as the revitalization it sparked never slowed in momentum, eventually leading to unmanageable success. As interviewees shy to talk about sexuality, they freely discuss Women and Children First, a feminist, lesbian-owned, independent business. Sexuality bubbles along the surface of Andersonville in this way; hidden yet apparent, and entangled in many other topics.

While reading this thesis about gentrification and consumption, I encourage the reader to also read for the gay subleties that I do not explore in detail, but that inform Andersonville as a gay/non-gay space. Drawing from interview data I recognize that consumption is the stage from which people use to be open to diversity. Namely, that most seem to leave their homes or their residential spaces to the commercial district for the diversity. Though may it be noted that much of the diversity discussed in Andersonville as a residential neighborhood, is often a code word for gay residents. Visually, I could see gay residents, and interviewees could confirm having gay neighbors. However, I could not see many residents representing other diversity, such as socio-economic or ethnic diversity. The 2000 census data supports this, as it reports Andersonville to be 47.49% non-Hispanic White.
2.0 Literature Review

To conduct an effective community analysis of Andersonville, through the lens of gentrification and consumption, also requires examination of community, identity and cultural economy. Cultural economy is a discourse that looks to understand how culture and economy overlap and to what degrees of consequence (Amin and Thrift 2004). In Andersonville, the cultural and the economic are directly tied to one another in the construction of community and neighborhood identity. To overlook the influence of cultural economy is to ignore the dialectical relationship between the residential and commercial districts that characterize neighborhood identity, and neighborhood identity stems from community and identity theorizations. This literature review will examine these discourses by grouping together gentrification and consumption, community and identity, and leaving cultural economy as an overarching framework that establishes the conceptual borders and uses of these discourses.

The most notable signifiers of neighborhood identity come from the interactions between the residential (read cultural) and commercial districts (read economy). The ways in which the residential population validates their citizenship to Andersonville relies upon the existence of the locally owned and independent businesses found along the commercial street, Clark Street. Independent businesses have historically populated Clark Street, establishing locally owned businesses as a long-standing fixture in Andersonville. The dialectical relationship between the cultural and the economic in Andersonville informs the formal neighborhood description, “A quaint village in the middle of a world class city.” This quaintness draws from the intimacy created by the independent business owners who provide locally unique products to a consumer base that consumes those products, in part, to establish inclusion within their ideal Andersonville community.

Relying on this condition of Andersonville, research looks to answer the question, how do Andersonville residents discursively and materially construct their identities? This thesis answers this question by examining the role of cultural economy, community, identity, gentrification and consumption to understand how neighborhood identity establishes under conditions of revitalization that began in the 1980s, and gentrification, which began roughly around 2000.
The risk involved in this kind of analysis is to generalize what constructs the neighborhood; to assume what pieces create its whole. Individual agency are the pieces that create the whole, as this agency constructs neighborhood identity. Therefore, it is important to rely upon what the perspectives of those who interact with the community on a frequent basis. Throughout the research process, I asked Andersonville residents to share their personal narratives, and from these stories it became evident that their perspectives of the neighborhood influence which political or economic issues the neighborhood perceives as most important. For this, research also considers the narratives of business owners and residents as one source of credible and important data to understanding discursive neighborhood identity. What follows is the theoretical framework from which this thesis builds. Beginning first with cultural economy, moving onto identity and community, and ending with gentrification and consumption, the pieces of Andersonville’s material and discursive constructions begin to come together.

2.1 Cultural Economy
Cultural economy is an approach to understanding how the cultural and the economic influence one another (Amin and Thrift 2004 and 2007, Castree 2004, Crang 1997). Geography then grounds cultural and economic interaction to place. The ways in which researchers have approached this entanglement varies, as some researchers claim that “‘culture’ and ‘economy’ cannot be seen as separate entities…the economy can be imagined only as a hybrid entanglement [of culture and of economy]’ (Amin and Thrift 2007, pg. 143). For those who recognize this hybridity, economic patterns are inherently linked to cultural values, and to study the economic void of culture is impossible, as ‘…economic transactions are sustained by habits of trust and reciprocity as well as rules lubricated by various forms of sociability’ (Amin and Thrift 2007, pg. 143).

Thrift (2000) recognizes that cultural economy has shifted from melding culture and economy together, to separating them as individual concepts, though as concepts that influence one another. The SUV is a clear example of this, as its long time popularity rooted in consumer feelings of power and safety, regardless that they are relatively unsafe, wasteful and their space is seldom utilized to full capacity. However, consumers treat these vehicles like armored cars, extending the cultural sign of the SUV to one of glamour and power (Amin and Thrift 2004). No longer are ‘culture’ and ‘economy’
separated by discourse (Crang 1997). This kind of research approach allows culture and economy to maintain their separate distinctions, while recognizing how they influence one another.

This is not without debate, as researchers toil with how to approach cultural economy. Noted above is the idea that culture and economy are ‘seamlessly intertwined’, but to reject that understanding still leaves questions about whether culture and economy are ‘linked [or] co-constitutive’ (Castree 2004, pg. 206, see also Sayer 1997). Castree believes that culture and economy are not one in the same, and to believe so is problematic (see also Barnes 1996) as it conflates independent discourses as the same discourse, of which they are not. An immediate problem to this is that it relegates the study of economy as a ‘no longer be a distinct object of analysis…that the economy can no longer be invoked as a causal factor to explain other things and…that economic geography therefore loses its raison d’être (as does cultural geography too)’ (Castree 2004, pg. 207). Therefore, for the sake of thorough spatial and economic analysis, culture and economy remain distinct from one another.

This thesis study perceives cultural economy as a way to illustrate how even though culture and economy are not synonyms, in the case of Andersonville they are dialectically linked. The identity of the Andersonville neighborhood is inextricably linked to the locally owned commercial business district. Crang (1997) characterizes this middle ground into a set of four possibilities that either put the cultural or the economic first in terms of influence. As explained by Castree (pg. 207), Crang’s ideas follow that culture is becoming increasingly economic in nature (see Harvey 1989). Cultural activities are becoming more obviously imbedded in the economic (see Granovetter 1985), such as the case with SUV sales referenced previously. As the economic is re-represented in the cultural discourses (see Barnes 1996), one can recognize the relationship between culture and economy as both relevant and, in many instances, unavoidable. Therefore cultural economy analysis establishes how the cultural and economic are linked to one another, and what affect this has upon space.

In relation to Andersonville, cultural economy analysis establishes that the culture of Andersonville, or the everyday practices of Andersonville residents, inherently relies upon the neighborhood’s economic structure. The economic in Andersonville defines its
culture, and subsequently its neighborhood identity. Residents of Andersonville define much of their neighborhood inclusion and identity through consumption, and this takes shape in the residential and commercial markets. Evidence that accounts for this particular approach to understanding how cultural economy influences Andersonville stems from how the community has reacted to, and continues to react to neighborhood revitalization and gentrification. By understanding how gentrification threatens a neighborhood, one can begin to grasp the true signifiers of that place. In the case of Andersonville, gentrification threatens the commercial business, establishing that consumption is a key component to understanding Andersonville as a neighborhood. To fully understand the importance of consumption, it is important to first establish an understanding of identity and community that build into the importance of consumption in Andersonville.

2.2 Identity and Community, Construction and Representation

The following review of literature examines the discourses and theoretical frameworks of both identity and community. I group these terms together because they are mutually influential upon one another. As people identity with a space or a place, they begin to build personal attachments with it. Stemming from these attachments comes community, or the ways in which people idealize their social connections and constructions to a place or space. For Andersonville, these are two important discourses, as people proudly and strongly identify with the neighborhood, thereby influencing the neighborhood’s general identity and, by proxy, priorities.

Identity:

Those who study identity struggle to find an un-contested way to describe what identity is, for is nothing more, identity is complicated, socially constructed and an important space between one’s own self and the world. For purposes of this study, I understand identity to be a state of self, influenced by relationships with outside others as well as how those relationships transform or inform one’s understanding of their own being. Identity is fluid, dynamic and socially constructed. In more social and geographic terms, identity is,
The subjective is ‘the reflexive interplay between body, identity’ (Häkli 2007), indicating that the subjective experience takes the perspective from the self to the world. Conversely, the objective identity comes from identification (Häkli 2007), or the ways in which the world recognizes an individual. Duggan’s definition relies on location within a social structure and this is geographic in nature. Social structures order the physical environment of cities, notably by neighborhoods that are predominately rich or poor, ethnically defined, or family centered as opposed to being young and single. For this, identity is geographically rooted, and exploring how place and identity intersect is important to any place-based study. This literature review examines identity from the theoretical foundations of postmodernism, poststructuralism and postpositivist realism, as these foundations contest what identity is, what it means and how it is socially situated in geographic settings.

Poststructuralist identity theory understands that identity, as a way to attach meaning to experience, is always socially constructed. Poststructuralist theorists use language analysis to understand phenomena, and what this means for identity is that all language used to describe oneself, and the experiences thereof, are already subject to the cultural and fictional constructs of language. Thus, we, as individuals, cannot ever know ourselves because our tools for understanding and relating are already mediated; ‘subjectivity does not exist outside of grammatical structures that govern our thought; rather, it is produced by those structures’ (Moya 2000, pg 6; see also Calhoun 1995, Haywood 2004). For this, identity does not exist (Moya 2000) because individuals that attempt to embody any identity cannot escape the socially constructions and limitations of language used to describe identity, or attach to identity. In reality, this makes it impossible to embody a natural or unique identity, creating a certain ‘non-identifiable existence’ or a non-existent identity that stems from the impossibility for individuals to truly or accurately identify themselves or others as any linguistic signifiers are always already constructed.
Critiques of poststructural understandings of identity stem from the ‘fact’ that identity does influence how individuals live in the world, experience the world and therefore, come to an understanding of their own identities, as well as the identities of others. Fact or fiction, identity has emotional and spatial effects on the world and it is important to recognize this influence (Moya 2000; see also Bouthillette 1994, Brown 2000, Cohen 2001, Fuss 2001, Harris 2007, Hindle 1994, Knopp 2004, Nagar 1997, Podmore 2001, Reed 2003, Valentine et al 2003). For Andersonville residents who attach to Andersonville, this is relevant. Andersonville provides its residents with a sense of safety and comfort, and it is from these emotions that residents dedicate themselves to their neighborhood and invest in their community.

Postmodernity ‘is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions such as truth, reason, identity and objectivity…grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation’ (Eagleton 1996, pg. vii). By doing this, postmodernism demands that individuals question their existence and the world in ways that doubt everything; this is to demonstrate how much can be doubted, that is otherwise taken as truth. Postmodernist approaches to understanding the world shake any stable foundation for identity by doubting the world, and therefore the experiences that build into Duggan’s (2003) definition of identity. Therefore, postmodernism loses the significance of experience that directs individuals and their living (re)actions.

Because postmodernist understandings of the world doubt identity, they in turn ‘see all identities as arbitrary and as unconnected to social and economic structures’ (Moya 2000, pg 11). In a world that is to be doubted, identity constructions are moot and unnecessary, for their foundation of experience is not believed or trusted as truth. For this, individual socio-spatial locations in the world are not informed by self-perceptions because there is no history of trustworthy experience to rely upon to build an identity from. Further, identity does not stem from the presumed perceptions from others onto self, because that interaction cannot be trusted or validated. However, socio-spatial locations do exist and people do react to them and postmodernism cannot account for this, marking it as unhelpful for certain kinds of social research that look to understand how individuals influence place, and are influenced by place.
Poststructuralism and postmodernism contest the validity or existence of identity in ways that dismantle it to a state of non-existence. Poststructuralists find this power in the limitations and constraints of language. As individuals try to understand themselves through the meaning-making mechanisms of language, they are inevitably denied a full understanding because language presents only pre-selected words for self-description. Poststructuralist understandings of identity begin to disregard the true emotions that are part of feeling an identity (Cohen 2001), by taking away the ability to communicate them. Postmodernism theory disbelieves/trusts worldly experiences, and for this denies the foundation of Duggan’s definition of identity, as well as the significance of self/other interactions. That the world ought to be doubted denies the emotions that individuals feel, thereby denying the validity of someone feeling marginalized by their identities. However, it is in the feelings of domination and subordination that the geographies of identity unfold (see Brown 2000, Brown 1995, Cohen 2001, Fuss 2001, Hames-García 2000, Hindle 1994, Knopp 2004, Podmore 2001 for examples).

Postpositivist realist identity theory is a middle ground for identity analysis, wherein identity is both a construction and reality. It is an approach that gives validity back to experience and emotion, while simultaneously understanding their constructions (Mohanty 2000). Postpositivist realism recognizes that theory does not exist in raw form, rather that theory is always mediated by knowledge or experience. This is not a bad or undesirable situation as this roots knowledge or understanding in experience rather than provable, reproducible fact (Moya 2000). This is a significant distinction between postpositivist realism and that of postmodernism in that objectivity ‘can be built on an analysis of the different kinds of subjective or theoretical bias or interest’ (ibid, pg. 13). In doing so, this ‘distinguishes those biases that are limiting or counterproductive from those that are in face necessary for knowledge, that are epistemically productive and useful’ (Mohanty 2000).

Being postpositivist, this framework is flexible to social influences when searching for ‘facts’, opening up the possibilities for social research by allowing what individuals believe to be true, to be true for them and for their socio-spatial placement. Therefore, personal narratives of community or neighborhood count as evidence for
place-based analysis. It is for these reasons that postpositivist realist theory is used in the writing of this thesis.

When interviewing residents about Andersonville, I listened for key phrases or examples of how individuals related to Andersonville, and why those relations were so important to them. Drawing from post-positivist realism, I waited for the residents to share with me how Andersonville influences their lives and why. Building from these narratives, I began to notice trends among nearly all participants; many of them enjoyed Andersonville because it was a community they could share in and relate to.

Community:

Andersonville residents enthusiastically supported their neighborhood, and firmly believed in the experiences found in living within the neighborhood. Individuals networked with other residents, and also business owners. The result of this networking is a community that can validate its own existence; residents understand some neighborhood and community foundations to rely upon the networks between consumers and business owners. As owners recognize consumers, consumers feel themselves as part of the community, and as consumers interact with owners, owners feel a part of the community – the cycle repeats itself. The denial of community stemming from poststructural or postmodern analysis risks overlooking the ways in which individuals self-validate their existence in the world, which would therefore lose touch with how Andersonville as a place, establishes a community for which residents and business owners bond to and make decisions about.

Johnston et al (2004, pg. 101) define community as, ‘a social network of interacting individuals, usually concentrated into a defined territory.’ Community is not the same as neighborhood, which is ‘a district within an urban area’ (ibid pg. 540). Community is a social phenomena and a neighborhood is a geographically bounded space. In many cases, a sense of community describes the content of a neighborhood, such is the case with ethnically defined neighborhoods wherein there can be a high level of inter-communal participation and reliance (Hindle 1994, Muñiz 1998). It is important to examine community structures within neighborhoods, to better understand how the two interact to create a sense of place.
Community is about collectivity, as opposed to isolation. It is about ‘people doing things, and being, together, rather than separate and alone’ (Day 2006, pg. 2). Members of communities are ‘not solely concerned with their own interests, but almost always [pay] some heed the wishes, needs, and behaviors of others’ (Day 2006, pg. 4, referencing Weber 1978). For this, the ways in which individuals integrate themselves into communities is vital in the understanding of how individuals (and their identities) relate to space and other individuals. These ideas affirm the ways in which individuals find inclusion into space, or by the same token, are excluded from space.

However, community is a hard concept to pinpoint. Questions about who defines the territory, who is participating in the ‘community’ and who is not, as well as understanding that community is not likely to end at a border, are all important questions to ask. Additionally, the extent of community is hard to measure; how many people does it take to make a community? Of different communities in one neighborhood, which community is taken as dominant and why? Given these questions, it is not out of the realm of possibilities to rely on Mitchell’s (1995) argument that culture does not exist, but relaying this to the idea of community. Community is so big, and so hard to define that it becomes too difficult to say, ‘this is community.’ Therefore, relying on the individual perspectives of neighborhood residents about their ‘community’ begin to construct how individuals understand community. Community cannot pre-exist itself, as it is in the perpetual social (inter)actions of individuals both in and out of the community that its ideology comes to be. Individuals interacting with the community then interpret this ideology, and it is from these individual perspectives, and subsequent expectations, that community begins to influence a space and the people within it. In all, community is an idea, rooted in personal relationships to other (like) individuals in space (Anderson 1991, Sharp 1996). The subsequent representations that build from these relationships are one way of seeing community as it affects space.

Another troubling aspect with community is that it disregards individual differences in favor of a common goal or interest. Geographers began to study community in the 1980s. In 1984, Hall et al., researched the connections between class and community. They argued on the basis of propinquity (proximity or nearness), property and kinship. The project looked to understand how the relationships between
class status and landownership, and the subsequent social organizations related to class and landownership. Though this research was rural in focus, it helps to establish the linkages between individual attachments to land (or space), and how those attachments influence social organizations and kinship. Morgan (1993) and Fitzgerald (1991) also explored the collusion of space, class and community by examining political slander in the promotion of one community over another and the socio-economic struggles of steel workers as steel plants began to shut down, respectively.

Gentrification literature also examines class and community development, as the gentrification process threatens existing community networks with those carried in by the new, more affluent, residents. Existing residents react to the threat of displacement by bonding together and claiming neighborhood space by defining its significance, history and ideology (see Martin 2003 and Muñiz 1998). Similarly, new residents attempt the same, typically justifying their presence via historical appreciation, often manifesting when new residents motion for historic districting (Kasinitz 1988). Whichever group can most effectively create ties to the space are those that remain – often the gentrifiers win this battle as they have more socio-economic resources than the existing residents. The conclusion for both new and old residents finds that community is important in the definition of space. Those with the power to define space are then in a position to dictate what occupies it. This power takes many forms, such as political, economic, educational and even those who have the free time to commit to the community’s cause. Community thereby becomes important, to both support and empower individuals, as well as to influence future progress or change for both space and place.

Sanders (1985) explores this in contexts other than gentrification by examining how larger state functions mediate local community projects, and the retaliation of the local communities. As the state, a more powerful force, begins to determine the future of space, local communities form in an effort to take a more active role in the definition of that space. Robinson (2001) examines how communities often bond together in the face of resistance by examining community resistance to larger development plans that would change the existing community. Muñiz’s (1998) work supports this as her research on community reactions to gentrification relied on historical connections to bond together and claim a right to their neighborhood. Mackenzie (1998) records the communal
resistance to a proposed coastal superquarry at Lingerbay, Isle of Harris (United Kingdom). Those proposing the quarry argued that it would be sustainable, however the local community retaliated by reflecting upon the historical communities of the area.

The literature referenced above examines how communities bond together in order to resist undesirable change. Gentrification literature also examines the structures of communities, and the types of diversity that accompanies spaces with socio-economic diversity. However, as areas gentrify they often go from being socio-economically poor, to socio-economically middle or upper class. What this suggests is a consistent spatial binary between the rich and the poor, especially with the process of gentrification, though not exclusively so. Kohn’s (2004) examination of gated communities exemplifies this segregation, remarking on how anymore, communities build around homogeneity, which feel safe for individuals (see also Barber 1984, Sibley 2001, Young 2003). For Kohn, this recognizes the displacement of the openness of public space in favor of controlled privatization.

Significant social issues arise with socio-economic segregation, as difference and diversity become rare as homogeneity becomes more normative. Ultimately, this leads to measures of social exclusion occur, dictating who is allowed to be in what space, dividing society along arbitrary and otherwise invisible lines (see Young 2003, see also Fischer and Poland 1998, Schofield 2002, Sennett 1970). When individuals establish communities with similar others, there a process of self-affirmation that encourages actions or lifestyles that are known and comfortable to the individuals, while simultaneously distancing the unknown and the uncomfortable from them. What this does is instill a spatial order of social segregation that discourages the presence opposing views, and it is these views that demand individuals to perpetually consider the meanings and implications of their actions. Therefore, as society continues down a path of self-segregation powers of exclusion increase, ensuring that the segregation continues as the unwelcome are kept away by social pressures, and increasingly, legal pressures (see Harvey 2006, Jacobs 1998, Low et al 2005, and Mitchell 1997 for more about legal acts of social control, influenced by ‘normative’ social pressures). The result of this is the decline of public space and the rise of privatized and socially controlled ‘public’ space; a privatized society (Kohn 2004).
The literature above recognizes how people establish active communities in order to define their territory, and with reference to gentrification or other urban analysis, this territory is a neighborhood. Communities sometimes espouse historic ideology to claim rights to an area, by a group, or community of individuals who wish to keep it a certain way (Muñiz 1998, see also Jacobs 1998). However, this like-mindedness excludes those who carry different ideas or opinions. Individuality is lost in favor of a common goal (see also Cohen 2001 and Hamés-Garcia 2000).

For Young (2003), this structure relies too much upon similar people creating a community, and this overshadows the importance of diversity. Young describes how urban communities must anticipate difference and diversity, even if they do not agree with or understand said diversity. There is a challenge presented by seeing difference that one does not understand, as it forces individuals to see other ways of being in society. Podmore’s (2001) work in Montreal supports this, as she describes a lesbian community in Montreal that embeds itself within an already diverse neighborhood. She comments that though not everyone agrees with lesbianism, they do not try to restrict or control it, thereby keeping the neighborhood as a more public space than a private one. Further, Podmore explores the spatial ordering of diversity, by observing where people go and why, who they expect to see and at what times. In all, she exemplifies how diversity and community can come together. Her research finds that there is a lacking of social pressure to conform or be a certain way within that particular neighborhood. The residents are equally subaltern, in that each embodies identities that normative society marginalizes, such as ethnicity, socio-economic standing, sexuality, age or dress. The lack of any dominant social status leads to a social harmony unseen by Kohn (2004) or Jacobs (1998) and for which Young (2003) holds a high amount of apprehension for. Some Andersonville residents recognize a shift away from what Podmore describes as gentrification homogenizes the neighborhood.

Considering this, community can be both homogenous and diverse. There is a social danger to this homogeneity, in that exclusion is unavoidable, and with regard to urban demographics, this may result in violence (Sibley 2001, Young 2003). Jacobs (1961), Kohn (2004) and Young (2003) favor diverse communities, in that the face-to-face encounters with difference are important for social fluidity and self-awareness. It is
in these differences that the self is perpetually questioned, requiring individuals to constantly re-affirm who they are and who they are not. In homogenous communities, this is less likely to occur, as those different from one another are difficult to find. This makes it easy for people to avoid difference, and thereby avoid encountering what they are not, as identity is both who we are and who we are not.

For Andersonville residents, ideas of community exist in ways that establish community ideology as a reality. Most research participants agreed on what kind of community Andersonville is, often commenting on its openness to diversity and residential dedication to the local business district. The networks that exist between residents and business owners establishes a representative form of this community, in that residents and business owners alike feel included in their community vis-à-vis these relationships. Often times, research participants would comment on their neighborhood, but proceed to describe a community. This implies that participants feel that Andersonville is relatively homogenous in that many of its residents value many of the same things they do.

As gentrification begins to make greater changes in Andersonville, the socio-economic and ethnic diversities begin to wane. However, long-term residents and business owners affirm that throughout many of the neighborhood transitions, Andersonville has not changed significantly. What this implies, and what I will later prove, is that the community (as presented by research participants) does not thrive from residential diversity. Rather, the stabilizing community factors are the independently owned businesses found along the neighborhood’s commercial street, Clark Street.

2.3 Gentrification and Consumption in Andersonville

The following section is a review of literature concerning both gentrification and consumption. Following from the existing literature of these two discourses, they are typically distinct from one another. I combine them here because as gentrification occurs in Andersonville, it threatens more the commercial business district and less the residential, as presented to me by the research participants. The reason for this relies heavily on the fact that as a neighborhood Andersonville currently identifies more of itself from the local business district, and less from its residential composite. However, gentrification literature focuses on residential gentrification, not commercial. Therefore,
I will review residential gentrification literature, and tie those concepts to what I recognize as commercial gentrification. This commercial gentrification links directly to consumption, the second literature review of this section, as consumption is how residents include themselves within their neighborhood and community. I conclude by bringing the two together in a way that is most suitable for my work in Andersonville.

Gentrification:

Before I begin to introduce gentrification, I would like to point out why I am careful to detail the ways in which gentrification exists. I separate revitalization from gentrification, as the two discourses are not the same and therefore do not have the same affects on place. I do this because it is in the details of gentrification and revitalization that I link residential gentrification to commercial gentrification. Further, this helps to establish why cultural economy is important to the analysis of Andersonville, as the consequences of gentrification directly threaten the local business community, and thereby the overall neighborhood identity. Here, the culture of Andersonville is reliant upon the types of economic activity that take place within its borders.

Gentrification is the transformation of low-income, depreciated inner-city areas to wealthy, rehabilitated, residential areas. This process entails a high level of residential displacement, as the socio-economically advantaged economically, and at times socially, force low-income or existing residents out of the neighborhood (Bryant and Poitras 2003 and Van Criekingen and Decroly 2003). Van Criekingen and Decroly (2003) acknowledge there are different kinds of transition neighborhoods go through, and not all lead to gentrification. Such processes include marginal gentrification, incumbent upgrading, upgrading and family gentrification (Karsten 2003).

Individuals, who live in lower-income residential areas, on the basis of job insecurity, early professional development or the inability to afford to own a home in a more affluent part of town, characterize marginal gentrification. Often marginal gentrification does not lead to gentrification as marginal gentrifiers consider this time of their life as a transitional stepping stone and often move to a new neighborhood with socio-economic advancement (Van Criekingen and Decroly 2003). Marginal gentrifiers do not often displace residents, though may bring minute levels of revitalization to the area. Upgrading, on the other hand, involves a population change, but does not affect the
socioeconomic status of the neighborhood. Upgrading takes place in already wealthy neighborhoods and occurs when newer and younger residents upgrade out dated home amenities to better suit their needs. Incumbent upgrading occurs when longer-term residents upgrade their homes, but do not displace the current population or drastically increase the market value of their home. Incumbent upgrading occurs when existing residents make changes to their own property without the direct intention of selling their home for profit. Family gentrifiers include those who have children, can afford to live in the suburbs, but choose to stay in the city. These individuals bring demands to the neighborhood that stand in contrast to their single neighbors. These demands often include issues of safety, closely monitored by the parents who are keen to call for change (Karsten 2003). Family gentrifiers may not displace residents, although their presence in urban neighborhoods can attract other urban families, which may in time pressure some individuals out of the space.

The differences found between marginal gentrification, upgrading and incumbent upgrading are distinct from gentrification in the fact they may work to revitalize an area, but not flip an area or neighborhood from one extreme to the other. It is within the distinctions of these different processes that one can recognize the difference between gentrification and revitalization, as revitalization improves, without socio-economically displacing many (if any) residents. However, revitalization processes can mark the early beginnings of gentrification, they are not guaranteed to do so.

Smith (1979) and Ley (1981) began the largest debate in geography concerning the leading causes of gentrification, and this debate relays the influence (or existence) of cultural economy. Generally speaking, Smith and Ley’s disagreement centered on why and how individuals were moving back to the urban, from the suburban. Ley credited a cultural movement for the start of gentrification processes. He understood that social factors lead the gentrification process using evidence of shorter commute times, more mothers working, individuals remaining single or unwed for longer periods of time, and the desire to be near cultural amenities or diversity. Smith sought to prove how the economic lead gentrification, citing that for inner-urban areas to be desirable for gentrifiers, developers must first renovate, or the city must offer financial incentives. In time, geographers began to recognize that gentrification is as much about the economy
(i.e. a shift from manufacturing jobs to a service economy; see also Curran 2004) as it is about changes in social and cultural structures (i.e. suburban avoidance or an increase in mothers in the workforce).

What many gentrification researchers agree upon is that early gentrification processes began in post-industrial cities (Zukin 1998, Bondi 1994, Smith 1979), though this is expanding to all cities with socio-economically depressed areas. The old industrial centers are often located near the heart of the city, and in some locations, near water, which often makes housing more desirable. Gentrifiers typically appreciate the historic aesthetic of the buildings, as they are something to protect (Curran 2004). Those who have the time and money to restore the old buildings stand in contrast to those individuals who may already be living in the area.

The suburban trend that attracted so many families to leave the city left inner-urban areas uncared for, and they began to deteriorate. Of those living in these urban areas, many did so because they could not afford to live elsewhere, creating a situation wherein the poor lived in the city and the wealthy in the suburbs. As gentrifiers bring capital back to the inner city, the two socio-economic worlds collide. Existing residents do not want the newer, wealthier residents to force them from their homes, resulting in confrontations rooted in class (see Bondi 1994, Bryant and Poitras 2003, Kasinitz 1988, Muñiz 1998).

It is in this urban reclamation that gentrification displaces low-income residents. In low-income areas, residents are unable to afford rising property values or standards (Bryant and Poitras 2003, Muñiz 1998, Kasinitz 1988). When gentrification displaces residents it is not common for them to find a socio-economically comparable neighborhood to move on to, creating a crisis for the urban poor (Ley 1981). Existing residents who attempt to stay are often the victims of landlord neglect, as landlords want to renovate or sell their buildings to take advantage of the investment interests (Curran 2004). Those at risk for displacement lose their social networks of peers that can take years to build and that are necessary for many residents. These social networks provide affordable daycare for working mothers, or to create a bond between individuals who share the same struggles (Muñiz 1998). For these reasons, gentrification transforms
Another social aspect of gentrification occurs when long-term residents organize together to try and resist or pacify the changes presented by gentrification (Bryant and Poitras 2003, Martin 2003, Muñiz 1998). Resistance stems from conflicting ideas about who the area or neighborhood in questions belongs to and why, as well as its social significance and identity. Bryant and Poitras’ documentary, Flag Wars (2003), demonstrates how long-term residents who will be displaced due to gentrification, fight to keep their homes and communities. A division grows between new and old residents, as the new gentrifying residents begin to pressure their surrounding neighbors to conform to a new aesthetic standard. In the case of Flag Wars, the gentrifiers were mostly gay, male, white, and affluent enough to rehabilitate a home. Those displaced were African-American, low-income, and presumably heterosexual residents. As depicted in the film, the biggest division between the two groups was largely socio-economic; issues of sexuality were relatively moot with regard to social division. Though, what does link back to the socio-economics of the situation is race; the wealthy whites taking a neighborhood for their own, that otherwise belonged to poor, black individuals. For instance, appearances of homes become important, as those non-renovated homes contrast to the beautification of another, leading to complaints.

For Bryant and Poitras, resistance comes from both the new and old residential populations. Each resists the other in an effort to sustain their ideology of what the neighborhood is and how it is defined. Gentrifiers come together and hold meetings to discuss issues of crime and safety, whereas the existing population struggles to keep a strong defense against the changes presented by gentrification, as one key character struggles with health and financial issues. There is a clear distinction here. Those who have the time and money to renovate a home also have the time and resources to come together and voice concerns and call for changes (see also Kasinitz 1988). Existing residents do not have the same luxury, as they struggle to find the resources to survive their own lives, let alone find the energy or resources to defend against, or instigate, change. However this is not a blanket condition, as gentrification research does uncover instances wherein existing residents effectively bond together to resist the changes.
brought about by gentrification. This occurs when residents counteract the ideal images of gentrification, presented by gentrifiers, with the reality of the social implications of the gentrification process, such as landlord neglect or socio-economic displacement (Muñiz 1998, Kasinitz 1988). Though this organizing does not always work, it does bring residents together in ways they were otherwise not.

In the case of Andersonville, residents that moved into the neighborhood pre-late 1990’s (now long-term residents) did not disturb or displace the existing community. Drawing from research data, Andersonville at this time was a place of incumbent upgrading, marginal gentrification and family gentrification. Residents who owned their own homes elected to upgrade for their own personal comfort, not to significantly increase the value of their home, common to incumbent upgrading. Marginal gentrifiers also began to move in at this time. Typically, marginal gentrifiers will not stay in the neighborhood for long, as they build capital from their first investment or gain access to a better paying job and move into wealthier neighborhoods. In the case of Andersonville, some the marginal gentrifiers remained because they liked the neighborhood. Family gentrifiers also began to move in at this time. Karsten (2003) understands that families, who do not wish to move to the suburbs, though are financially capable of doing so, can lead to neighborhood gentrification. However, during the 1960s-1980s, families that moved into Andersonville did not gentrify, as they did not cause displacement or raise property values. Rather, the early families of Andersonville moved in and found that the neighborhood was already family friendly given its history as a place settled by Swedish immigrants far away from the city. This demonstrates a blending of incumbent upgrading, marginal gentrification and family gentrification, none of which directly lead to residential displacement or increasing property values.

The new residents of this time assimilated into the existing neighborhood structure, in part by shopping from the local businesses of Clark Street. This is significant, as it demonstrates how Andersonville residents have a history of using the independent stores as points of community inclusion and socialization. Today, this trend continues. As research explains, Andersonville residents fight to keep their independent businesses open, but do not extend such efforts to keep affordable housing in the neighborhood. The reaction to the commercial district is similar to the residential
reactions described previously. Existing residents, as well as existing business owners, recognize that the process of gentrification in Andersonville will displace many of its local businesses, and this will thereby change the identity and culture of the neighborhood.

The most recent transition of Andersonville began around 2000, marked by a notable increase in property values and a subsequent influx of a socio-economic homogenous population (bringing with it socio-economic displacement). Relying on this evidence, it is certain that Andersonville is gentrifying. Reasons for the gentrification are fairly common. The housing stock is historically unique, and there is a motion to make Andersonville a historic district, a common movement for gentrifying neighborhoods (Kasinitz 1988). Andersonville is in the city of Chicago, which is attractive to people wanting to avoid the suburbs. It was also diverse with amenities within walking distance given the commercial district that locally owned businesses occupy. The history of Andersonville’s housing market transition explains how and why Andersonville is gentrifying today, though this history does not guarantee gentrification. In this case it did prepare the neighborhood for such a step.

The recent gentrification of Andersonville is causing community reaction, but as far as research can tell, this reaction predominately aims to protect the local business district. Neighborhood resistance to gentrification centralizes around keeping local businesses along Clark Street open, which chain stores threaten as property taxes increase rental rates. This scenario begins to suggest something important about the priorities that help establish the neighborhood’s identity, which stems in large part from practices of consumption.

Consumption:

For purposes of this study, I use consumption in a most basic form; people buying things. However, there is much more to consumption than just an act of purchase. Among other things, consumption is a way in which individuals establish and express components of their own identities in relation to those of others. A geographic perspective on consumption links various acts of consumption to the spaces of consumption, creating a tie between self, place and commodity. It is within the various processes of consuming that different spatial elements begin to manifest and influence
consumption patterns. Drawing from existing literature, I explore various consumption patterns and use them to establish a stable framework of consumption in Andersonville.


Research on consumption began in the late 1970s and early 1980s with an increase in consumer spending in places like the United States (Miller et al. 1998). Researchers recognized an increase in casual consumption by the advent of shopping malls (Cohen 2003, Jayne 2006, Zukin 1998) as well as the changing role of consumerism in the capitalist market (Crewe 2003, Clarke and Bradford 1998, Goss 2004, Sayer 2003). The research that began at this time concluded the importance of understanding consumption as a way to view the complexity of social relationships (Miller et al. 1998), referencing the many ways in which consumption works within society; as means of production, cultural signification, networks, etc. Given that this complexity is the basis for consumption research, it is not surprising that the trajectory of consumption research has a ‘bewildering set of topics, all set within a number of disciplinary frames’ (Miller 1995, pg 2).

Such areas of research include retail location and the form of the retail built environment (Goss 2004, see also Crewe 2000, Marston and Modarres 2002). Cohen (2003) traces the change in the urban environment by considering the influence of car reliance, fear of the downtown and the nearly complete circle back to downtown shopping districts because of their new urbanist taste. As cars became more prevalent in US society, suburbanization became doable for those who could afford to move out of the city. This outward migration left the central city without a middle class, leading to the decline of downtown department stores and the advent of suburban malls and other shopping centers. However, as the inner cities have begun to revitalize (Ley 1981, Smith 1979, Van Criekingen and Decroly 2003) “yuppies” are moving into city centers to take
advantage of a shorter commute and the accessibility of city amenities. With this latest trend, downtown shopping districts have begun to rebound, indicating the influence that consumption has on cityscapes.

Though Cohen’s analysis is spatially rooted in New Providence, and contains its own factual basis, Marston and Modarres (2002) are sure to point out that suburban areas are still growing and developing. Pointing to a suburban development north of L.A. as an example, open spaces around cities continue to catch the eye of developers who purchase the land, build homes (and in the LA case, 24,000 homes) and then sell them to those who are interested. It is in this style of living that shopping centers continue to pop up in suburban development tracts, resulting in edge cities. This continual development of suburban areas and the simultaneous revitalization of inner cities provide evidence for the importance of consumption research, in both suburban and city areas.

Consumption research also explored topics such as fashion (Dwyer and Crang 2000, Dwyer and Jackson 2003, Leslie 2002) and food (Friedberg 2003, Domosh 2003, Guthman 2003). These research projects all explore how social inequalities, differentiation or hierarchical structures exist vis-à-vis consumption. Much of the research cited above is relatively general in scope, i.e. ‘food’, ‘fashion’, ‘urban layout’, et cetera. It prioritizes the product over the consumer, illustrating the market’s ability to ‘culturally manipulate’ consumers (Ritzer 1993 and Slater 1997). If this is true, ‘we are led, in a classic manifestation of market-derived false consciousness, to identify our political and personal interests . . . with the mystifying games of consumption’ (Slater and Tonkiss 2001, pg. 184). In Andersonville, consumption is the game that consumers can play to feel a part of Andersonville’s “quaint village” feel. Though this may not be a provable measure of false consciousness, it is a product of what some understand the power of consumption to be, to build community and neighborhood identity.

The reaction to the generality of consumption’s cultural turn was the empirical turn, wherein researchers began looking to the more localized and specific conditions of consumption by grounding research in people and places (Crewe 2003, Goss 2004, Jackson 1999, see also Miller 2001b). In doing so, researchers began to evaluate more ‘fine-grained studies of commodities and consumption in specific temporal and spatial settings’ (Crewe 2003, pg. 359, see also Miles 1998, Mort 2000). For Andersonville, this
means that researchers can approach a neighborhood identity analysis from the perspective of consumption; to look at consumption as a meaning-maker of local places that are specific unto themselves.

For Crewe, the empirical turn is beneficial, previous consumption studies all headed in the same direction. She borrows from Amin and Thrift (2002, pg 40) to explain, and support, the concept of ‘cultural meltdown,’

...commodification is assumed to be a remorseless process, ‘a process that must end in cultural meltdown. So shopping malls have become the battleships of capitalism bludgeoning consumers into unconsciousness.’

A lack of consumer agency combined with a consumption-driven society, leads to the absence of self, and therefore the loss of culture. However, this ‘cultural meltdown’ exists with the general perspectives embodied by studies done in the cultural turn era. Crewe (2003, 2001), Jackson (1999), Jayne (2006), Miles (1998) and Popke (2006) recognize that there is significance to researching consumption on smaller scales, and that consumers do have agency and do attach meaning to their consumer habits.

Crewe (2003, pg. 355) continues; ‘[f]ocusing on the walking, touching, scenting, hearing and feeling dimensions of consumption (fun, fear, embarrassment) such work is making inroads into the world of a corporeal logic of consumption.’ Billig (2001) traces the importance of understanding emotions like embarrassment, and how it plays into social life, as consumption is increasingly becoming a bigger part of social life (Marston and Modarres 2002). The emotional situatedness of an individual in society influences consumer behavior. In Andersonville, residents describe how their consumer habits enable them to find inclusion and attachment to their neighborhood.

Empirical consumption research considers consumer agency from a physical and emotional perspective, allowing for a better understanding of the more localized processes of consumption. For Crewe (2003, pg. 359) ‘[w]hat is required is that [researchers] disaggregate apparently singular principles – about consumption, identity, value, exchange and space – into fine-grained analyses of how, why and where consumers act and interact in structured webs of significance, within material parameters.’ It is from these parameters that the ‘self’ enters into consumption, and the self in place is vital to understanding any place.
Goss (2004) offers a critique of consumption research, drawing primarily from Miller (2001a). In this critique, Miller draws attention to the fact that most consumption researchers are ‘self-serving, condescending, or even racist forms of academic production that primarily project the interest of the middle class’ (Goss 2004, citing Miller 2001a, pg. 226-227). According to Goss, Miller cites the works of Harvey, Sack and Lee to be the few to bring out the ‘hidden’ aspects of consumption, whereas everyone else is studying the disposable income of America’s middle class, and therefore excluding a bulk of the population that too is part of the consumption phenomena.

Andersonville is middle-class, and the products independent business owners make available are not cheap. For instance one clothing store (which has since voluntarily closed) sold women’s jackets and skirts, selling anywhere from $100 and up, condos were selling for $300,000, commercial buildings cannot be purchased for ‘less than a million [dollars]’ (Interview 2007), and the home décor stores sell expensive furniture and decorations. The reason the pricing is not difficult to understand, as many of the products are not mass-produced and are of high quality, and some are hand made. There are more affordable items for sale such as smaller home décor items, hand lotions, small purses, lotions, and books – items that people with disposable incomes can consider purchasing.

In response to Miller, I contend that studying the consumer habits of Andersonville residents is important for it is within these habits that residents come to identify with their neighborhood. The connections that residents make with their neighborhood are important for analysis, as they create a sense of place, but also recognize how these connections signify what these residents value. In Andersonville, this comes in the form of strong neighborhood identity attachments that build from consumer habits and the personal relationships established throughout the consumer process. This thesis is an assessment of how the middle-class of Andersonville operates, though not in a self-serving way. Rather than this research being condescending, it is a way to better understand the cogs of gentrification and the importance of consumption in relation to identity throughout the process. Instead of promoting the middle class, I am deconstructing middle class values vis-à-vis identity construction, as described by personal narratives.
In Andersonville, consumption is a key component to neighborhood identity. The loss of the local businesses would ripple through the community, as residents and business owners alike fear it would dismantle the personal connections and attachments to Andersonville that stem from the local businesses. Consumption in Andersonville is about buying inclusion into a community of peers, something not of specific focus in the literature reviewed above. Consumption, in its most basic form, is the buying of things. However, in Andersonville the buying of a thing is more about buying it from a peer or network, and less about the thing itself. For Andersonville consumers, buying things from a chain store is not a personal experience, it is not about connecting with others, it is just about buying commodities. This is why gentrification is an important factor to consumption; the replacement of local businesses with chain ones would remove the ability for consumers to buy into their ideal community. The loss of independent stores represents the loss of community and neighborhood inclusion, suggesting that the loss of independent businesses would change Andersonville in significant ways.

2.6 Methods

The question that this thesis answers is how neighborhood identity is discursively and materially constructed in the neighborhood of Andersonville. The discourses used to frame this question are those of cultural economy, gentrification, identity, community and consumption. The overlay of these discourses provides a thorough basis for the analysis of Andersonville. To gather the necessary data for this analysis I interviewed community participants and analyzed the data through the afore mentioned discourses. I conducted semi-structured interviews in order to gather smaller amounts of data to answer the larger thesis question. By conducting semi-structured interviews, I was able to hear individual perspectives of the neighborhood within a relatively open and casual format. As it stood, if I were to ask anyone the material and discursive constructs of Andersonville, I would not get the answer I was looking for, namely because I was looking for people to describe it to me in ways other than a direct answer. These other ways include personal narratives of how individuals experience Andersonville, why Andersonville is important to them and what makes Andersonville unique to them. These subquestions allowed me to compile the data in a way that is a composite of many things that build into one major
question, as opposed to getting one major answer that is void of the important and more intricate details.

This project began with an informal conversation with a business owner of Ruff and Stuff, located along Clark Street. It was from this discussion that I, as researcher, was directed to the owner of a long-standing business of Andersonville, the Landmark of Andersonville, with its roots tracing back to 1986. The owner of the Landmark opened her store as a coop, and because of this in conjunction with the store’s long-standing history on Clark Street, knew many of the other business owners along Clark Street. I conducted a semi-structured interview with this owner, looking to find information about Andersonville, from both a personal and business perspective. Upon her referrals, I began to follow a network of business owners by following the referrals of each one, known as snowball methodology (Browne 2005). Figure 4 details this networking process. The boxes that are not directly connected to any other (detailed with dashes) represent the interviews that I conducted without outside referrals.
Figure 4: The Andersonville Guide of 2006-2007 claims about 190 businesses both chain and local; of these, over 80 line Clark Street. The sample illustrated above is comparatively small.

There are two important details to gather from this chart. The first is to note how relatively small my pool of research participants are. I was in the field for approximately eight weeks, and began collected by data by following referrals of business owners to residents or other business owners. In the end I came out with then in-depth interviews of business owners. Given the +80 businesses along Clark Street, many of which are undoubtedly associated with different social networks, I can report on one network and its opinions.

The second detail of note is that the interview process began with the Landmark of Andersonville. It is from this source that nine of the 11 residential interviews were found. Here, I follow the same network as with the business owners, though with residents of Andersonville. Though some residents are former residents, for purposes of
this study I refer to all residents and former residents as residents, as all of these interviewees reflected upon their residential experiences in Andersonville. Further, Andersonville has a sub-neighborhood of Lakewood Balmoral, wherein some residents lived and attached to before attaching to Andersonville. However, because it is a sub-neighborhood of Andersonville, and because no isolated research was conducted on Lakewood Balmoral, I subsume Lakewood Balmoral residents into the greater Andersonville neighborhood.

Of the ten businesses interviewed, five belong to the Local First Chicago campaign (see Figure 4), a campaign aimed at elevating political and economic awareness of consumers to the benefits of shopping locally, rather than from chain stores, later explored in this thesis. This establishes that of the businesses interviewed, five are avid proponents of shopping locally. The remaining four were also local advocates, though were not associated with the campaign at the time of the interview. This observation begins to link businesses owner networks together politically. One non-affiliated business owner indicated he was not aware of the campaign, but had received advice from Scout’s owner when opening his own business. Green Sky received pre-opening assistance from the Landmark, and both are part of the campaign. Combined, this indicates that business owners network politically and personally.
Figure 5: This map is a sample of Clark Street businesses. All chains are included and all Local First businesses are included, and the most popular local businesses of the research participants are included. The high-density area signifies the heart of Clark Street, and the low-density areas populate areas of the street that have either vacancies or that are much larger in size.

Of the interview participants, fifteen lived in Andersonville at the time, one was looking to move to Andersonville, three had lived in Andersonville for many years and had recently moved for personal reasons, and the rest did not live in Andersonville, but lived in proximal neighborhoods. Of the participants who are living or had lived in the neighborhood, nine had lived in the area since the 1960s and 1970s, eight others moved beginning in the late 1980’s extending into 2004. Those who relocated outside of Andersonville did so for personal reasons, extending from moving to the Lakefront or getting priced out.

I initiated interview requests with business owners by approaching their place of business. After a brief explanation of my research project, the owners agreed to an interview and in all but one instance an interview was scheduled for a later date. The
formal interview began with an in-depth explanation of the research and the participant signing a contract indicating their willingness to participate. Interviews usually lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, though some did go to upwards of one hour. All business owners requested that I return to their place of business for the interview, therefore all of the business interviews took place within the business. This allowed me to observe the products sold within the businesses, as well as how the owners interacted with their clients, as consumers interrupted every interview.

Of the residential interviews stemming from the Landmark of Andersonville, all but one took place in the back garden patio of the business. The one that took place away from the Landmark occurred in the backyard of the couples’ home. It was the only interview wherein a couple was interviewed at the same time, and only one other couple was interviewed. The owner of the Landmark collected residents from her own personal contacts established from her business. She helped me by contacting residents who would be interested in participating within my research study. Of these residents, some had known the owner for years, given the number of years they had been shopping at her store. Others had only recently met the owner, but were quickly taken into her good graces and asked to contribute their time to the research project.

The semi-structured format of the interviews was intended to keep the interview conversation within the boundaries of the proposed research. The research aim was to understand Andersonville from the anecdotal perspectives of individuals who interact with the community. By asking participants open-ended questions about Andersonville, they were able to tell me how they interpreted that question and to highlight their response vis-à-vis personal experience. The data collected was then used to construct a place-based analysis of Andersonville, building from responses gathered from both business owners and residents.

Interviews opened by asking participants to explain their connection to Andersonville. The responses to this question detailed when the individual moved to the area or opened their businesses. I then asked participants what they enjoyed about Andersonville. This lead to more specific questions, which for the residents who had lived in the area for 30-40 years, this meant asking what aspects have kept them from moving away. For newer residents, discussion turned to why they moved to the area, if
they plan on leaving or how long they would ideally like to stay. With this groundwork established, interviews began to evolve around any changes the participants had noticed throughout the years and how they saw the neighborhood react. Building from this, residents were asked to comment on any threats to their community and any remedies they may believe in. In all, the stories collected from these interviews established a past, present and future of Andersonville, according to personal narratives.

There is a selection bias, as most of the residential interview participants were already well connected to the owner of the Landmark of Andersonville. Taking this into consideration, it is expected that all of the participants would enjoy the local business district, made evident by their relationship with the owner of the Landmark. Throughout the interviews, I did inquire if they knew other business owners, and in every case they did know others given their frequent consumption from other retailers and restaurants. This bias is not considered detrimental, for it allowed the research to observe how both short and long-term residents participate within the business community of Andersonville, and how it is important to them. Supported by data collected from the present director of the Chamber of Commerce, research recognizes that the opinions presented from the residential interviews extend to other residents. Additionally, this thesis details examples of local consumer commitment vis-à-vis community reaction to threatened local businesses.
3.0 The Cultural: Neighborhood Identity in Andersonville

This chapter explores the neighborhood identity of Andersonville. Andersonville has experienced three distinct periods of transition, the first beginning in the late 1970s, early 1980s, the next occurring around 1990 and the final beginning near 2000 and continues today. This chapter examines these transitions from a community perspective by examining the changes in the housing market and dynamic. Individual identity analysis follows, stemming from how both new and old residents of Andersonville identify with the neighborhood, using social inclusion as a basis for neighborhood attachment and commitment.

3.1 Formation and Change

The first phase of the Andersonville was its formation, beginning after the Chicago Fire of 1871. It was settled by Swedish immigrants who moved north of the city for two reasons; the first is attributed to the new housing code imposed on Chicago residents by the city, which proved to be too expensive for the Swedish immigrants, the second reason was because the population still practiced farming and craft trades, both of which required more space than the crowded urban environment could offer (Swedish American Museum 2007). Andersonville began from the Anderson farm (Interview with Swedish American Museum 2007). The Swedish immigrants established their enclave and opened Swedish stores along Clark Street. In the 1960’s, Andersonville’s Swedish roots were still very apparent, as discussed by two individuals who lived in Andersonville at the time,

I’ve lived in this neighborhood for more than 45 years. I saw Clark Street when it was a wonderful pedestrian street with so many Swedish businesses. It was the place I would wheel my baby buggy to, bring the kids to, stop at different places for shoes, they had a wonderful shoe store for children. (Resident 2007)

I grew up in this neighborhood so as a youngster I would say 40-50% of the businesses were Swedish owned and or operated….Going back, let’s see…1960 something. (Owner 2007)

The Swedish businesses did not begin to leave Clark Street until the 1980s when many of the business owners elected to retire and close their businesses. Upon closing their businesses, many of the former owners left Andersonville to retire in the suburbs and this left Andersonville with both residential and commercial vacancies.
The residential transition began with incumbent upgrading. Incumbent upgrading occurs when new residents upgrade their homes, but do not displace the current population or drastically increase the market value of their home (and therefore is not gentrification) (Van Criekingen and Decroly 2003). When many of the Swedish businesses closed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many of their owners left Andersonville to retire in the suburbs. These immigrants left behind them solid housing stock and cheap property values. Combined, these characteristics put Andersonville in a position of being gentrifiable, though gentrification did not begin until the turn of the 21st century. Until that point, Andersonville was undergoing revitalization, wherein there was no population change and the diversity of Andersonville (primarily socio-economic and ethnic) was a significant aspect of the community. This diversity created an openness that made many residents feel at home, rather than out of place (Interviews 2007).

Of the residents interviewed who moved to Andersonville during this transition, all recounted moving to an affordable neighborhood. One resident in particular recounts this transition, she moved to Andersonville in 1988 and is quoted at length because she explains many important aspects to the post-Swedish transition.

My husband and I were looking to buy a house and basically liked the house we saw in Andersonville and thought it was would be a nice place to raise our family. [We had] neighbors on both sides [that] had lived in the neighborhood for 30, 35 years and raised their families here. And so it was, it appeared to me, at least in my immediate area, a much older population. Over time, the owners of the old houses, not unlike mine, decided to sell. Younger generations were moving in, rehabbing these older places that had not been renovated. And so the population started to change from 30 to 35 year residents to new people on the street. The houses started to change a lot because people were really rehabbing. It was not surface [renovation], it was gut rehabbing. One of the nice things about Andersonville, uhm the houses, were built to last. And so rather than tearing down old houses that we really loved, is coming in and recognizing the beauty, actually, of the work that had been done so many years before, and preserving it. And not only our house, almost all of the facades, I think virtually all the facades both interior and exterior remain comparable to how the original had been built. (Resident 2007)

This resident is able to detail many important aspects of Andersonville, pre and post the Swedish transition. She recounts that families had already been a part of Andersonville for many years, and elected to raise her own in the neighborhood. Linking back to the first quotation in this chapter, a young mother moved with her family to Andersonville in 1964 and found Clark Street, as well as the Andersonville neighborhood, amenable to
children. Two other residents recounted the decision to raise their children in the city, though had the financial freedom to move to the suburbs.

Residents that moved to Andersonville in the late 1960s through to the 1980s reported buying homes in Andersonville because of they were affordable, ‘…thirty years ago we bought our three bedroom house, for $36,000’ (Resident 2007). Four research participants indicated moving into the neighborhood during this time, two as buyers and two as renters. All four moved to the area, intending to find long-term residency in the city, and all ended up raising their children in the area. Further, the four participants indicated that there were other families in the area, and historical narratives support that Andersonville’s early Swedish settlement was also family-centered. Therefore, Andersonville has been a family-centered area going back to the Swedish immigration era. Drawing from this data, it can be deduced that in addition to incumbent upgrading, the presence of families with the financial freedom to choose between raising their children in the suburbs or in the city, also helped stabilize the neighborhood for future gentrification (see Karsten 2003).

In 1990 the feminist bookstore, Women and Children First, moved onto Clark Street. The bookstore is a woman-owned business and its presence in Andersonville attracted other women-owned businesses as well as lesbian residents to the area, marking the neighborhood as a safe and accepting space for women and for difference.

I don’t know if [Women and Children First] so much revealed the lesbian community that was here, as [it] marked [Andersonville] as the nice neighborhood for that community. Like [a safe space] to be in. (Chamber of Commerce 2007)

Given my initial research intentions explained in the introduction of this thesis, I was curious about the idea that the bookstore would be responsible for a new lesbian population to Andersonville. When I asked a co-owner of the bookstore about their arrival to Andersonville, she confirmed the attraction of a lesbian population.

Researcher: When you moved in and did, did you attract lesbian residents? 
Participant: Yeah, I think so. I absolutely think so. (Women and Children First co-owner 2007)

Women and Children First had affected Andersonville residentially, by bringing with them a lesbian population. Some researchers consider urban lesbian populations to be
invisible (Castells 1983), whereas others insist that geographic research must look for the population differently, and to not compare their likely location with that of gay male populations (Podmore 2001). Gay male populations are often visibly prominent (Bouthillette 1994, Bryant and Poitras 2003, Castells 1983), whereas lesbian populations are far less distinct. What Podmore discovered through her research in Montreal is that lesbian populations absorb into affordable, already diverse urban areas, and do not wish to dominate them.

Both the Chamber of Commerce and a co-owner of the feminist bookstore, credit the arrival of the bookstore as the drawing point for the influx of lesbian residents. Given that many of the Swedish residents left Andersonville in the early 1980s, the neighborhood had been in a lull for almost a decade before the coming of Women and Children First. With the store’s arrival, many lesbians began to live in Andersonville, supporting much of what Podmore discovered. At this time, Andersonville was diverse in terms of population with many Middle Eastern stores, Mediterranean and Italian restaurants, as well as some of the Swedish businesses that did not close. Additionally, the fact that some of the residents at this time were older and had already raised their families in the neighborhood, combined with the newer residents who were also dedicated to raising their children in the city, created a diverse demographic.

A few months before opening moving the store to Andersonville, one of the co-owners of Women and Children First moved to the neighborhood,

You could still afford to rent around here. I rented…before we moved up here. I rented a place…and I was like, you know it was 675 or 700 for a two bedroom. Seventeen years ago it was still doable. You know uhm, and I think you know those apartments are 13-14 hundred dollars. They are really expensive.

In 1990, Andersonville’s residential stock was still affordable, allowing a diverse range of individuals to rent or buy within the neighborhood. Further, by this time much of the stock had been predominately gut rehabilitated by people looking to make a home in the neighborhood.

The residential had turned over, you know maybe [60% or] 70% [had] turned over from run down to rehabbed. And [by] people who, I think wanted to stay in the neighborhood, make their home in the neighborhood. (Women and Children First, co-owner 2007)

The Swedish population had left, but their replacements continued the legacy that Andersonville was an architecturally distinct neighborhood where people could make a
home or raise a family, and live long-term. But perhaps more importantly, the residents that constituted the second phase of Andersonville’s residential community did not displace individuals. The incumbent upgraders filled in the available housing, and those who owned their property, upgraded the interior designs, and left the sound exteriors intact.

Gentrification characterizes the third residential transition in Andersonville. Relying on interview data and personal narratives, research determines this next transition began around the year 2000. It seems inevitable that gentrification would occur in Andersonville; the historic structures found within the neighborhood are different from other city neighborhoods, it has a solid housing stock and was affordable. When conducting this interview, the format did not use the word gentrification, nor hint at the process; therefore the participant uses the term freely,

I firmly believe this. You travel in other gentrified neighborhoods of Chicago or other cities throughout the country and invariably what you’re gonna find is neighborhoods where places were bought and the place was leveled and a new thing was built. That was designed and built to maximize profit. Not [for] the aesthetic. You go down any of these streets and you will see no tear-downs and that’s because the housing stock is fundamentally so strong that when people buy these big brownstones, or sandstones or graystones, they would never think of bulldozing them. They fix the interiors. (Owner 2007)

The historic aesthetic of neighborhoods is a drawing point for gentrifiers (Kasinitz 1988) and combine this with already completed incumbent upgrading and Andersonville is ready for gentrification, as socio-economically disadvantaged residents find themselves in a neighborhood of growing popularity. New residents did not have to rehabilitate their new home, as many of the upgrading was already completed by the early 1990s.

The consequences of gentrification in Andersonville follow that many residents are getting priced out of their neighborhood as the neighborhood becomes more expensive,

But it seems like, at least with being able to purchase property here, or rent property, that’s getting narrower and narrower. I’m seeing things that I saw in Lakeview (a Chicago neighborhood) and those were the things we didn’t like. You know like selling parking spaces for huge amounts of money and renting them for huge amounts of money, two bedroom [apartments] going for $2000 or more. I can see how that affects people who can’t afford it. And I don’t like. I don’t like that. I don’t like to hear people leave the neighborhood because it’s too expensive to live in. (Resident 2007)
3.2 Identity Politics in Andersonville

The rise in property taxes affects the diversity of the area, as the high price of housing leads to socio-economic homogeneity. With this change, some lesbians have left Andersonville. In an interview with a gay woman who had lived in Andersonville on and off throughout the previous decade, she eventually moved to a different neighborhood. Her quote establishes the rising cost of Andersonville, as well as how her new neighborhood fits what previous discussions of urban lesbians spaces has discussed,

We were looking in a variety of different neighborhoods when we decided to buy a condo. And for what we could get, the price was great, the accessibility [was great] because of the brown line, and we liked the sort of funkiness of the neighborhood, that it’s still really ethnically diverse [and] really mixed in terms of rentals, home owners and condos. (Former resident 2007)

For this woman, Andersonville had lost the diversity she had appreciated, and was happy to find it elsewhere.

In the cycle of residential upgrading, gay men and women are often on the forefront of discovery (see Bryant and Poitras 2003). To get more specific, if an area does gentrify entirely, gay women will have likely lived there first, and leave when more gay men move in. An area business owner affirms this process from his own experience and observation, ‘[a]nd then of course gays or lesbians tend to lead what’s hot.’ In part this is because gay men increase property values (see Bouthillette 1994, Bryant and Poitras 2003) but also because the changes that gay men bring to a neighborhood often make the neighborhood less desirable to lesbian women (see Podmore 2001, and Interview 2007). Gay men often price themselves out of their own neighborhoods, which is happening in the nearby Chicago neighborhood of Boystown, a longtime gay male neighborhood, extending back to the early 1970’s (Papadopoulos 2006). As a consequence of Boystown climbing in value, some gay men are leaving for Andersonville, a neighborhood previously established as safe for gays by the lesbian population. This cycle explains why gay neighborhoods are mobile. It is because of this early establishment of Andersonville as a lesbian neighborhood that I attempted to find more gay women still living in Andersonville. Though I saw some gay women on the street, gay men were more visible in public, indicating that perhaps the gay turnover had already reached a tipping point.
An interview with a gay male business owner details why he moved to Andersonville,

I couldn’t afford to buy in Boystown. And I like the age demographic [here]. You know? It’s all 30 [or] 40 somethings. And people do buy in this neighborhood so it’s got a more residential settled feel, which I like. (Owner 2007)

The price of Boystown pushed this gentleman out, and the stability of Andersonville is what attracted him to the area. The director of the Chamber of Commerce (2007), who first moved to Andersonville in 1987, recounts the adult trend she has noticed in Andersonville tracing back to the late 1980’s to today,

I think Andersonville was always a place where people came to kind of settle down and raise families. Or just sort of live out their adult lives. And I [do not] think that [has] changed.

A stabilizing factor for the residential district of Andersonville is that families and mature adults decided to make Andersonville their home.

Karsten (2003) explores the role of family gentrifiers, rationalizing the phenomena by the increasing role of mothers in the workplace, and the close proximity to urban amenities, such as cultural venues or day care. Her work recognizes that of those who elect to raise their families in the city, many were previously marginal gentrifiers; individuals who at one time could only afford to live in areas of lower socio-economic status, given the early phase of careers or their inability to purchase a home in a more affluent neighborhood.

Resident participants of the Andersonville research explained their move (which is to say they came from elsewhere) to Andersonville in much of the same way, as mothers knew they would continue to work, and wanted to avoid the suburbs. However in the case of Andersonville, many of the early families moved in when housing was cheap, though remain to see the high appreciation of their property. Families gentrify because they bring a stable, consistent income to a neighborhood, and are more sensitive to the safety of the neighborhood. Andersonville was family-oriented during its Swedish time, and upon the Swedish departure, new families moved in, building on the already family-friendly environment. Research participants with families discussed their decisions to stay in the city, largely centering around the proximity to work and a dislike for the suburban environment. Hearing these stories, and the stories of other residents
without families, it became clear that the individual decisions of current residents are important to the shaping of present-day Andersonville.

By understanding the individuals of a social space one can understand why and how the space grows into a given identity. Evaluation of the shared performances, between individuals and space (see Rose 1999), within the Andersonville community uncover the why’s and how’s of the neighborhood identity, stemming from the actions and beliefs of the residents who volunteered to participate with this research project. Interviews asked residents to share how they act in their neighborhood, specifically in ways that help them to define themselves as being included in the Andersonville community.

Andersonville’s neighborhood brand is ‘A quaint village in the middle of a world class city.’ Residents understand their neighborhood to be diverse, often basing this off of different languages they hear on the street, or by the number of gay couples living and shopping in the area. Residents supported the neighborhood brand by commenting on how it felt like a small town, in ways of being close-knit and neighborly.

It is very much a neighborhood. I walk my dog and you see the same people and you say ‘hi’ and people watch out for you and if something weird happens people let you know about it, or you know that you can always call on somebody. So people watch out for each other... You know the businesses, you know the restaurants, you know the shops. You may not know the person’s name that lives around the corner from you but you’ve seen that person. And I think people really care about the neighborhood [and what’s going on] on either side of [you] or around [you].

The residential commitment to the peace of the neighborhood begins to illustrate how Andersonville residents feel committed to their neighborhood.

Of those interviewed, many individuals had identities that had been stigmatized in the past, and the openness they felt in Andersonville was a relief for them. A new resident describes how she feels in Andersonville,

I’ll be 49 next month; I’ve never been married [and] have no children. This is the first place I’ve lived where I’m totally comfortable. No one ever asks me, ‘oh do you have kids?’ Or ‘why don’t you have [a husband]?’

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1 May it be noted that looking out for one another includes area residents checking in on Middle Eastern stores and their owners directly following 9/11, as well as informing one another of robberies or muggings in the area.
Other identities include being Irish in the 1970s when landlords were not keen on renting to the demographic, entering into interracial marriages before society became more tolerant of such bonds, being half African-American or gay. One research participant described her experiences in Andersonville against her experience in a different neighborhood,

And the one thing that I really appreciate [about Andersonville] is that culturally it’s diverse. Being out [there] was a huge shift. See my mom is white and my dad is black…being out there was like, you know, everybody looked at you, wondering how you got there. And over here it’s like nobody thinks about it. Actually everybody celebrates who they are. So that’s what I wanted. I wanted to come back to that [celebration].

According to resident opinion, Andersonville allows for self ‘celebration’, not self-restriction (Interview 2007). In passing conversation about Andersonville’s attitude to individual being, one woman noted how different she feels in Boystown, the long-time gay male neighborhood in Chicago. She recalls standing out in contrast there, “[I]t’s like when I go to Boystown with my friends, its ok the straight girls are coming” (2007). She could not recall ever feeling different or standing out in Andersonville, a comforting notion for her.

From the perspectives of interviewed residents, social normativity is not a strong influence in Andersonville. Social normativity is the mechanism that differentiates between what is socially acceptable and what is not (see Sibley 2001). It can determine which identities are powerful and which are socially vulnerable, as well as which spaces are expected to host particular behavior (Calafia 2000).\(^2\) It is from this that an expectation of who is allowed in the space and who is not (Harvey 2006). Residents relied upon evidence for the lacking of social normativity, by the openness to diversity they experienced while living in the neighborhood, as well as their own personal resolves to not judge others on the basis of skin, ethnicity, sexuality or gender.

The residents of Andersonville that have identities that are, or have at one time been, vulnerable to socially dominating behavior are key to the construction of the present day community identity. They describe themselves as people who often find themselves outside of normative social expectations and who have felt social criticism for

\(^2\) Calafia’s study examines the role of sex industry as a nighttime event in an otherwise G-Rated space during the daytime hours.
doing so. Society, at one point or another, ridiculed these individuals for existing and because of this they do not wish to project the same limiting social expectations onto others. Instead they open themselves up to other ways of being and knowing. This opening up is important, as it replaces fearing difference with accepting difference, made evident by residential appreciation of Andersonville’s heterogeneous spaces.

For some who grew up in the neighborhood, this flexibility was taken for granted. A woman describes her high school experience. She was raised in Andersonville though attended a suburban high school,

The shock came when I went to high school…have you ever been to the suburbs of Chicago?… Everybody dresses the same and does the same thing…and the way we dressed was very diverse…As a teenager I realized how fortunate I was [to have been raised in the city] because of how close-minded [other] people are. (Owner 2007)

For this resident, encountering people who did not understand diversity was a foreign experience. As she continued, she recalled never being able to fill the gap between her, and her ability to understand diversity, and her suburban-raised classmates, and their inability to respect diversity.

However, to look back at her narrative, it is important to notice the phrase, ‘I realized how fortunate I was to have been raised in the city.’ Andersonville, as a city neighborhood, does not present anything entirely unique in terms of its diversity. The time from which this resident is speaking is before gentrification began in Andersonville, therefore marking the neighborhood as a city neighborhood that, at the time, likely did not discriminate socio-economically, and therefore had a more diverse population that including immigrants.

Growing up in Andersonville [was] always great, [never] realizing the diversity because as a child growing up in diversity, you’re not aware that other people don’t have that. That’s just the norm for you. So like the people who owned the building I grew up in were Syrian, and they spoke Arabic, very little English – we all communicated fine. My neighbors were Japanese, my other neighbors were Swedish. I had two friends who came from Lebanon.

Drawing from this narrative, and building from those recorded earlier in this section, the safety Andersonville offered to individuals that found themselves to be different, or feeling socially repressed. This relays that the residents of Andersonville expect difference, which is important for public space,
In public life the differences remain unassimilated, but each participating group acknowledges and is open to listening to others. The public is heterogeneous, plural and playful, a place where people witness and appreciate diverse cultural expressions that they do not share and do not fully understand. (Young 2003, pg. 348)

Though interviewed residents do see and appreciate diversity in Andersonville, much of the time this was in reference to the gay population that is socio-economically similar to those interviewed. Further, there are tensions concerning the balance of the neighborhood.

Tracing back to the residential phases of the neighborhood, Swedish immigrants predominated, and so did their traditions, namely Midsommerfest. This summer street festival began in 1964 to celebrate the Swedish heritage of Andersonville,

It’s a big festival in Sweden it’s a great way to show a little bit of our traditions, eat Swedish food, and do the Swedish dances. And so when it started it was a small festival in Andersonville and obviously now it’s grown into one of Chicago’s street festivals. (Swedish American Museum, 2007)

Today, the festival continues some of its original Swedish traditions, but the residential transitions of Andersonville have begun to dilute the Swedish ties, and have begun to celebrate more of the neighborhood’s present condition; less Swedish, middle class families, and gay men. I attended this festival and found little in the way of Swedish history, as these events are now relegated to early morning hours, but did discover many white, gay, topless men surrounding the beer tent. Clark Street was closed to vehicle traffic and merchant stands crowded the middle of the street, ranging from lesbian health services to T-Mobile cellular phone plans and city car loan/rental programs.

Casual conversations about the festival with residents discovered that not everyone was entirely happy about the topless gay male phenomena, but at the same time no one was unhappy. To some measure, those who were upset felt the festival should be more child-centric, or stay truer to its Swedish roots. More than anything, it highlighted the rising gay population in Andersonville. Referencing back to the previous section of this chapter, even though the gay male population is rising in Andersonville, many of those moving into the area are there to live out their adult lives, and to live their club-hopping lifestyle behind them. Therefore the new population is not changing the culture of Andersonville as the street festival scenario seems to only happen once a year.
For one independent business owners of Andersonville (2007), the gay population threatens the harmony they recognize to exist today,

**Participant:** I don’t know what the proper terminology is for it, but you know kinda gender, gender interest. I personally am one that likes to see it in balance. I just don’t like [it] when it feels like it’s out of balance. When it’s out of balance, that’s where it feels like ‘hmm.’ And I think our neighborhood is maybe not far from a tipping point in terms of how balanced it is.

**Researcher:** In terms of tipping into what? Are you talking more about sexuality then?

**Participant:** Yeah, I think so.

**Researcher:** Do you think it’s tipping to a more homosexual [population]?

**Participant:** Yeah, yeah. It’s definitely, that’s one of the changes I’ve seen over the years.

Further conversation about this topic explored how this business owner viewed the ‘tipping’ of Andersonville to a more homosexual population. Research believes that this woman is not homophobic, supported by the fact that two gay men looking for wedding party gifts interrupted the interview, and this owner was incredibly helpful and patient to the couple. Her hesitancy toward the rising population is not entirely unwarranted, as gay members of society often group together either for safety or for common understanding, and this can lead to a homogenization of a neighborhood (see Binnie 2004, Hindle 1994, Hamés-Garcia 2000).

The issues for this particular owner stem more from not wanting to own a business in a neighborhood perceived as gay by outsiders.

As a merchant I have to, if I stay in this area and the demographics change around me, I have to figure out a way to respond to that and offering items that appeal to that demographic...has an impact on me. If people feel like things are too strong one way or the other, they can just be intimidated [to] go in and [support] those merchants because it doesn’t feel comfortable to them. (Owner 2007)

As an individual, she is happy with the gay diversity, though does hope that it does not begin to dominate the neighborhood, as she likes having a general mix of people in the neighborhood. However, as a business owner, she does worry about her business getting subsumed into a niche market that does not represent her intentions.

Other business owning participants inadvertently verified this worry, as they recalled overhearing talk about Andersonville as a place “where a bunch of lesbians lived” (to loosely quote, Interviews 2007); this being reason enough for the discussants to not visit the neighborhood. Though each participant recalled correcting the conversation, informing the discussants that there was more to Andersonville than lesbians, the greater
social implications of a ‘gay label’ cannot be ignored, especially when trying to operate a business in the area.

Evidence of Andersonville’s neighborhood mentality of accepting diversity can be found in the publicness of streets and sidewalks. Kohn (2004) and Podmore (2001) recognize the importance of streets and sidewalks, as they are sites of public expression and interaction. For Kohn, streets and sidewalks are increasingly the only public places. These spaces are open to the residents of Andersonville, as well as to individuals from all over the city as the neighborhood is accessible by mass transportation. Drawing from my experience with walking the streets and sidewalks of Andersonville on a daily basis, a number of times each day, there is evidence for both the openness described by residents above, but there are also notable absences.

Throughout the residential transitions, Middle Eastern and Hispanic families began to get priced out of the area (Interview 2007). The ethnic diversity described previously in this chapter began to wane as property taxes began to rise. For one current resident this is becoming an issue,

**Participant:** And it’s something I’m trying to deal with because where we were living our rent was pretty reasonable for what we had and then we moved…because we wanted to stay here. We didn’t want to [leave our] neighborhood, [so] we decided to agree on a huge rent increase and it’s almost double what we were paying.

**Researcher:** This is just in the last year or two?

**Participant:** Exactly. And it’s like, that’s the price were deciding to pay to stay here.

A threat to ethnic diversity is that as property taxes rise, many residents leave Andersonville looking for affordable housing. My experiences walking around the neighborhood noted many upper-middle and middle class residents walking around the residential streets and in and out of homes. Some Hispanic families existed, and beyond restaurants or grocery stores, there was no noticeable Middle Eastern existence. Condo conversion construction was underway in three nearby buildings to the one I was staying in, as others hung banners indicating how many condos had been sold.

Relying on the narratives of how ethnically diverse Andersonville used to be, it is deducible that those individuals priced out of the neighborhood have since been replaced by residents who are socio-economically similar to the remaining residents. Relating this back to the gay discussion, of which centered on the uneasiness of the possibility that the gays would dominate the neighborhood, this hesitancy was not addressed with the same
force when it came to socio-economic status of the neighborhood. Only one resident directly lamented the loss of ethnic (and thereby socio-economic) diversity in the area due to the rise of property taxes.

Rather, discussion centered on how much residents enjoy the diversity of Andersonville, which drawing from the 2000 census is just over 49% non-Hispanic white, but in all conveyed a feeling of powerlessness when it came to residents getting priced out. For those residents who elect to live in Andersonville for its diversity now face an undesirable change,

You know and then I see people walking around with buttons that say “Save Andersonville”. And we’re like you know, we tried to save it twenty years ago [in 1987] and then you guys moved in and made it so trendy. You know [Andersonville has] changed, it’s changed. And a neighborhood can change for the worse as well as for the better. So you know like, what’s the alternative? (Resident 2007)

Furthermore, one couple debated why African-Americans were absent from the neighborhood population, while others recognized a high Hispanic population just outside of Andersonville’s borders. Too, by walking to the edge of Andersonville, African-Americans began to predominate the streets and sidewalks. Though research could not explore these situations directly, Chicago is a notoriously segregated city, so Andersonville is likely not a nodal point of racial division, as the city in general has historically, and presently, exists in that way.

The only interviewed African-American woman indicated total acceptance from the neighborhood and comfort within the neighborhood, indicating the absence might be rooted less in the neighborhood and more in outside factors. Muñiz’s (1998) explanation of why affluent Puerto Ricans elected to live within their own neighborhoods (often lower in socioeconomic status) than to mix with a neighborhood of different ethnicity. This could be a possible reason for their absence, though when asked, residents could not explain their absence.

Another notable absence includes the homeless. There is a high police presence in Andersonville, making the neighborhood the safest in the city (Interview 2007). This presence may contribute to the absence of homeless persons, as police will often keep homeless individuals out of spaces that are predominately occupied by people wishing to feel safe (Mitchell 1995). Although in early afternoons one or two can be seen
sleeping in the sun on some of the Andersonville corner benches, they are generally absent. One storeowner in particular relished in seeing the homeless resting on neighborhood benches, indicating some social acceptance.

Perhaps the biggest absence with regard to community identity, demonstrated by the research sample population, is the lack of individuals who do not support or utilize the local shopping district.

3.2 Conclusion

Having explored neighborhood identity in Andersonville, in relation to gentrification, it becomes clear that Andersonville is a neighborhood that has transitioned throughout the previous decades and is ripe to change again. However, throughout such transitions, how is it that Andersonville can continue to claim to be ‘A quaint village in the middle of a world class city?’ How was it able to retain such an ideology throughout so many significant changes such as gentrification or the coming and going of populations (like the lesbian population)?

According to long-term business owners and residents who moved into the neighborhood in the 1960s and 1970s remark that though the population changed, the ideology remained.

But you can say the neighborhood has changed, and newer people will be quicker to say that than those of us who have been here a long time, because it’s changed but it hasn’t. In the big ways it hasn’t… I’ve had the store for 21 [years]. Basically, at the end of today, if you look at the names on the charges or the checks, probably 40% would be the same, some of the same names from the first night I opened. You still have the same customers. They’re no longer two years old. They’re starting to raise their own families. You know they’re out of college and its like, talk about making me feel old! (Owner 2007)

For this owner to accept that the neighborhood has changed, but to comment that “in the big ways it hasn’t” illustrates that the residential turnover has not destabilized the neighborhood. Rather, consumer dedication has stabilized the neighborhood vis-à-vis consumer interaction with the local business owners.

I mean we’ve had customers over these years that we’ve watched [grow], we’ve done commitment ceremonies for, and who have adopted. And we’re watching their children grow.
Because locally owned businesses have always populated Clark Street, going back to its Swedish foundation, residents have bonded to them as a way of bonding to their neighborhood.

Stability throughout the residential changes stems from consumption; both in the housing market but also from shopping the locally owned businesses. The diversity that was historically part of Andersonville has begun to decline as the neighborhood gentrifies. However, instead of this transition threatening Andersonville’s ideology, participants affirm that ‘in the big ways’, their community’s core remains as it always was. Given this, the urban changes that have taken place in Andersonville demonstrate the strong relationships between neighborhood and identity. The deeply rooted neighborhood identity remained relatively intact (ideologically speaking) with the going of the Swedish population and the most recent phase of gentrification.

The following chapter details how the transitions that affected the residential district also influenced the commercial district. The details of the commercial district’s transition demonstrate how residents, new and long-term, identify with Andersonville by shopping the locally owned businesses. Because of this, gentrification and consumption link together in ways that signify Andersonville’s neighborhood identity.
4.0 “A Community of Consumption”: Economic and Retail Gentrification in Andersonville

This chapter explores how consumption establishes a community structure in Andersonville. This is to say that consumption in Andersonville is a defining marker of the community, and therefore of the neighborhood. Residents define their community involvement by their shopping habits that both support the local businesses of Andersonville, and also create networks for which residents find inclusion. For those who were not sure if they lived within the formal boundaries of the neighborhood, they determined they were part of Andersonville because of their accessibility to the shopping district. Consumption in Andersonville is about buying community – the loss of the business district’s local businesses would lead to a loss of the present community. If residents keep shopping, they can try to keep their community as is. If they do not continue to shop (or even if they do) there is a chance that the local businesses will be priced out of the neighborhood, and chain businesses will take their place.

The locally owned businesses found along Clark Street have a history of neighborhood and community importance, and this continues today. To better understand how consumers develop relationships with the local businesses and business owners helps to establish neighborhood and community priorities that inform Andersonville’s identity. The transformations that took place within the residential population also influenced the commercial businesses of Clark Street. It is within the differences found between the residential and commercial reactions to these changes that a fuller picture of the Andersonville neighborhood identity develops.

4.1 Clark Street: A History

The residential transition signified by the out movement of the Swedish immigrants led to both residential and commercial vacancies, as the Swedish business owners elected to close their businesses upon moving.

And actually there was kind of a lull in Andersonville. We had empty storefronts for a while and things were, you know. The regulars that were still here on the street were kinda like, ‘Oh my gosh’, you know, ‘we have to get our stores filled’. And uhm, the Chamber became more active then, in the pursuit of filling those spaces. And worked with the owners of properties, you know, to try and get good businesses in there. And then we started an upswing. And it began I would say with [the bookstore] Women and Children First. (Storeowner, 2007)
The reaction of the remaining business owners and residents was to revitalize Clark Street, indicating the importance of the commercial district to the neighborhood. The transition sparked by the coming of Women and Children First occurred in 1990. As noted above, Andersonville was in an economic lull, as many of the Swedish business closed in the early 1980s and new business were not replacing them. It was during this time that Andersonville was not a particularly popular neighborhood, making it more difficult to attract new businesses.

The story of how Women and Children First decided to locate on Clark Street demonstrates the neighborhood’s historical commercial commitment vis-à-vis community activism. When residents and remaining business owners wanted to keep Clark Street from further decline they actively sought new businesses. A former alderwoman and long time resident of the area described her contribution in attracting Women and Children First,

[A]fter I left the alderman’s office in ‘87 I opened a real estate office because I wanted to bring in new business. That was my idea. I retired from politics and I said, ‘what would be a great way to follow that up?’ And one of the first businesses or the first buildings I was given to lease out as a leasing agent was the building that Women and Children First is in. [The building] was a very deteriorated place…It was my first real estate job. And, with some people from Edgewater Community Council and Andersonville Chamber, we went out looking for businesses. And we always wanted a bookstore in the neighborhood and so on one of those trips we found out that Women and Children First were looking to relocate. (Resident/Owner 2007)

People believed in their neighborhood and made the effort to ensure it sustained through troubling times by focusing a great amount of attention on the business district. By helping to bring in the bookstore, Women and Children First in 1990, Andersonville gained what one resident (2007) describes as, “one of the hallmarks of Andersonville.”

The bookstore’s decision to relocate was not an easy one, given the unattractiveness of Andersonville at that time. One of the co-owners of Women and Children First details the hesitation of moving into the neighborhood,

I mean, in the 80s this place was this run down grocery store. It was hideous. And you know Andersonville didn’t have a name that was recognizable at the time really. We’ve worked really hard to make that connection for people.
The bookstore is a woman-owned business and its presence in Andersonville attracted other women-owned businesses as well as lesbian residents to the area, marking the neighborhood as a safe and accepting space for women and for difference.

    Women and Children First opened and for a while there was this whole string of women-owned businesses right next to it. There was this Woman Wild Gallery, and there was…some other business right next door to that, I can’t remember. But then there was Studio 90 and there was the Landmark of Andersonville.³ And it became a great place for women-owned businesses. (Chamber 2007)

The bookstore also helped existing residents and business owners to feel better about their community. A member of the search committee recalls, (2007), “we laid out the red carpet. I mean there was a huge luncheon.” Residents also responded, as described by a co-owner of the bookstore (2007),

    [Y]ou know the first week we were here somebody brought a cake and somebody else brought cookies, ‘we’re just happy you’re here!’, ‘we’re so happy that the old creepy grocery store is gone and we’re so happy a bookstore came!’

In all, the bookstore began a revitalization of Clark Street for both the area residents and businesses.

4.2 Commercial Gentrification

    As Andersonville began to gentrify residentially, property taxes rose in the commercial business district, as property tax assessment is the same for residential and commercial buildings.

    A few years ago, it became evident that it was becoming such a popular neighborhood that the chain stores were going to start paying attention to us. And at the same time it was around the time of the re-assessment of the property valuations for tax purposes. (Chamber of Commerce, 2007)

Assessments are done periodically, and the early stages of gentrification did not affect the commercial district. However, when the assessments were completed, gentrification had begun to affect the neighborhood, leading to a large increase in property taxes for commercial buildings, and subsequently the commercial tenants.

    Participant: Well, we’ve all been, uh, just cringing at these assessments. My brother actually is the one who handles the fiscal side of our business, and fights constantly [against the assessments].
    Researcher: Do you see this truly threatening the future of the locally owned businesses of Clark Street?

³ Note: The Landmark of Andersonville, a retail store, pre-existed Women and Children First
**Participant:** We see it as a threat to all small, privately owned businesses. Unless you’re corporate, it’s gonna be…

**Researcher:** Who can afford it?

**Participant:** Exactly.

The independently owned businesses cannot afford the same rents as large, chain stores, making independent stores more vulnerable to increasing property taxes. In areas with increasing property taxes, chain stores have interest because it demonstrates a wealthier residential population with a disposable income. Therefore, the pricing out of independent businesses on Clark Street will likely result in chain stores replacing them.

This scenario is comparable to what happens with residential gentrification, though in this instance the commercial businesses are at risk for displacement, not the residents. Residential gentrification is the transformation of low-income, deteriorated inner-city areas to wealthy, rehabilitated, residential areas, and this involves a population change that excludes along class lines (Van Criekingen and Decroly 2003). Other researchers credit gentrification as a process that robs areas of their communities (Curran 2004, Kasinitz 1998, Ley 1981, Martin 2003, and Muñiz 1998), as the new population often fails to appreciate the social history of the place, and because of this new residents begin to make the neighborhood their own, denying the historical and social attachments of long-standing residents (Kasinitz 1998). Martin (2003) argues that for neighborhoods facing transition, community organizations must form and be active, however ought not compete with one another for city funding or attention – often both suffer. These factors are also present in commercial gentrification.

There are differences between commercial and residential gentrification. Residential gentrification often occurs in urban areas that have low property values. In one form of gentrification that is economically led, developers purchase the cheap housing and rehabilitate it in an effort to turn a profit on their investment (Smith 1979, 1987). The cycle is to buy property at its lowest value and rehabilitation it with the intention of selling it for much more than the original purchasing price. This new sale price is more than enough to cover the rehabilitation expenses. This does not apply to Andersonville business district. Businesses must be able to turn a profit to stay in business; therefore they must establish themselves in areas that are already profitable for them. For independent businesses this may mean locating in places with lower property values, so
that their business profit does not suffer from high property taxes. This is in contrast to chain stores, which are acting as potential commercial gentrifiers in Andersonville. Chains can afford to locate into areas that have high property taxes, because they can afford high rents. When the area loses popularity, they will likely leave as the large consumer base needed to stay in business, will have gone.

Additionally, chain stores occupy a greater square footage of space than independent stores do (Andersonville Study 2004). Therefore, if large chains are to gain entry to Clark Street (i.e. large chain bookstores, trendy retail stores and home décor such as Borders, or Anthropologie, as mentioned by interview participants) this will limit the number of independent businesses that can also be on the street. Smaller chains, such as satellite banks or cellular phone shops, do not take up as much space, however they do present challenges to the existing business community. The case with all chain stores is that they do not contribute or participate in the community in the same ways that independent businesses do,

Well and we’ve said to banks who have come to meet with us at the Chamber. I mean we’ve been blatantly honest, you’re bringing nothing to our community. You are renting a place to put in a bank; you offer no parking, you’re taking away from the banks that are already in the area, that’s your intention. You are bringing nothing to the retail community, and it’s a threat because the more little satellite banks there are the more robberies there are. So the more people running around the streets with guns. We don’t need it. It’s a quiet little town that ended up in a big city. (Owner 2007)

Chain stores do not attend Chamber meetings or participate in community. In Andersonville, residents and independent business owners recognize chain stores as existing strictly for profit, and are not interested in building a community.

Andersonville’s independent business owners bond together vis-à-vis networks stemming from the Chamber as well as more informal acquaintances. Business owners assist one another, even if their stock is similar – they understand that to keep the community local, they must work together. It is for these reasons that chains are a threat to Andersonville, its residents and its independent business owners.

The high price for their Clark Street locations is becoming too much for some local business owners. In July of 2006, The Chicago Reader, published an article, “Too Funky for Its Own Good”, focusing in on the issue,

Eight years ago Sean Sheridan and his wife, Trina, opened the Wooden Spoon, a storefront kitchenware shop at 5047 N. Clark. Now they wonder whether they
can continue to stay afloat. It's not that business is bad--"quite the contrary, it's bustling," Sheridan says. But property taxes are killing them. "We're looking at our taxes going up almost $5,000 next year--that's almost doubling," says Sheridan. "We look at these bills and we think, how can anyone make it?"

The significant difference between housing gentrification and that of commercial gentrification is that housing speculators can afford their property as it appreciates, as they presumably expect and desire the appreciation. Conversely, independent business owners cannot always afford to keep up with their increasing taxes.

Drawing from the above evidence, it is possible the independent shops of Andersonville are all too funky for the good of Andersonville, as they make Andersonville an increasingly popular neighborhood. Maintaining the local business district is troublesome as rents continue to rise and chains are becoming interested in relocating to Clark Street.

And you kinda say to yourself, “what if that would to happen here”? And people say that it couldn’t because [chains like Anthropologie are] not interested – bullshit. [Those chains] are finding these are the areas for their growth. They’re not getting more growth in malls anymore. They want to be in vital, progressive communities that have a certain vibe going on, [like Andersonville]. (Owner, and former advertising agent, 2007)

Chains are interested in Andersonville, and it is affecting the neighborhood. In April of 2007, the bookstore, Women and Children First went public with their financial struggles. Beginning first with a smaller publication, *The Windy City Times*, and later grabbing the attention of *The Chicago Tribune*, Women and Children First announced they may not be in a financial position to renew their lease.

An interview with a co-owner of the local bookstore detailed the store’s troubles with national bookstore chains, one opening four stores within three miles of her own; perceived as an intentional move to threaten her business,

Well there’s [a Borders] a mile from us…so there are one, two three, hour within three miles of us. So yeah, it’s pretty deadly. And I think real deliberate. (Women and Children First co-owner 2007)

She continues to explain the effects of the chains moving in,

Our sales when we moved up here [from Lincoln Park] in 1990 increased 30% the first year, and they increased another, I don’t know, eight or ten percent the next year. Then in ’92 when the chains moved in, we had an 11% drop. The next year we had a four percent drop.
This scenario may be a sign of things to come, especially if chain stores are trying to bid their way onto Clark Street, as some of the most expensive spots are only affordable to chains.

The public outreach worked for the local bookstore, and their consumer base heard it,

Our people really heard it. The first four weeks after the articles, I compared to the same four weeks the year before; our sales were up 70% over the year before. (Co-Owner of Women and Children First 2007)

Residents and other committed supporters of the bookstore responded quickly and the bookstore did sign another lease. However, the question that arises with this scenario is how far can consumer preference go in dictating the larger economic market? And what is this preference even about? When asked, residents explained they did not know the bookstore was in financial trouble, however, upon discovering the news the bookstore had a healthy, better than ever expected, rebound in sales. This may indicate that consumers, including residents of Andersonville, were beginning to shop at Borders or other bookstores more frequently. The luxury of having the bookstore down the street was not always utilized. Relying upon this evidence, it becomes increasingly vague as to how far consumer dedication to local businesses like Women and Children First can go in fending off the influences of large chain stores.

Already, some chains are locating on Clark Street. Though some are welcome, others are not.

[There is] this beautiful corner of Clark and Balmoral, and what’s there? T-Mobile with these purple stripes. And the only reason they do that is because they’re the only people who can afford the rent. (Owner 2007)

For the independent business owners that are on Clark Street, the competition of winning storefront bids is getting stronger. Independent business owners must be more prepared to open a business,

I think Andersonville used to be a cheap place for someone who’s like, ‘you know I’ve had this idea and I just want to hang out a shingle’ and that’s become much harder because you need to have much more capital now…[a plan]. You just, you need to be a lot more savvy. (Chamber of Commerce 2007)

When bidding against large chains, independent bids are typically lower. However, in Andersonville, some building landlords will do what they can to favor local bids over
chain bids, thereby preserving the Andersonville community. Below are quotations from business owners, both of whom had Subway bid for their space at the same time they were. For the latter, other chains were also bidding for his space. The dedication of some building landlords preserved the local business tradition by accepting the local bid over the chain bid,

I got this the old fashioned way. I wooed, I courted the landlord. And I sent the landlord my business plans, and I sent the landlord my vision for this business and I let the landlord know that this is, this is a lot more than just [a store]. This is a way to allow my child to go to school. (Owner 2007)

Well and actually my landlord had bids from national boutiques. Like, I don’t know how you say it, BeBe. And [the sandwich shop], Subway. Subway has been trying to get in here forever. But even national boutiques that are huge chains [are bidding for space]. (Owner 2007)

There are chains in Andersonville that are not threatening, and the most notable one is Starbucks. The tolerance for Starbucks comes from a different consumer perspective that strays from the otherwise strict local-first dedication. A local business owner described how though Starbucks is a chain it is beneficial to the local businesses,

Starbucks has had the same team of workers for three plus years. It’s a family, it’s phenomenal. I think Starbucks does something that a lot of local coffee shops [don’t] do – they put out a consistently good product, clean, upgraded. You know when a Starbucks comes into the community all of the sudden there’s people on the street at 5:30 in the morning. There’s people on the street late into the afternoon. It’s wonderful. They do good stuff. (Owner 2007)

The walking traffic is good for area business exposure, making Starbucks good for the business district and not a threat. Their familial working environment is clearly evident to their patrons, for the gentleman quoted above is able to recognize its qualities. This is evidence for how chain stores can succeed along Clark Street, by adapting to the local community instead of dominating it (see Jackson 1999 for more about the creolization of the global and local). The café acts like a local establishment; “I walk in and they’re like, ‘the usual?’ and I’m like, ‘yes’. And part of me likes that, that they know what I want” (Interview 2007).

Another chain that exists is the restaurant, Hamburger Mary’s. Hamburger Mary’s is a franchise that limits its own growth by only allowing one restaurant per city. It is a gay-themed restaurant, so the opening of Hamburger Mary’s in Andersonville
marks the area as open to sexual diversity, if not the existence of gay (male and female) residents. Hamburger Mary’s occupies a great amount of space, which does crowd out the number of smaller businesses that could occupy that same amount of space. What makes Hamburger Mary’s welcome in Andersonville is that because it is a franchise, it has individual owners, of which some of the local business owners know. Further, because it is taking up so much space, it is anchoring the building by paying the brunt of the building’s expenses. In doing so, it stabilizes the rest of the building for the smaller, locally owned shops that occupy the remaining spaces.

In Andersonville, there is a high level of political and economic awareness regarding the possible changes that may be coming for the commercial business district, in terms of chain stores moving in. This stems from how dedicated the residents are to the locally owned businesses. Participating residents cherish the locally owned businesses of Clark Street, and make large efforts to ensure they remain on the street, made evident by the case of Women and Children First.

When I asked residents to explain what they enjoyed about their neighborhood, many often discussed the area’s diversity (which is waning, with the exception of gay residents) and the friendliness. When asked to comment further about the friendliness, the residents often began discussing the importance of the locally owned businesses in maintaining the neighborhood brand, ‘A quaint village in the middle of a world class city.’ A local hairdresser, who was raised in Andersonville, explains (2007),

I’m sure you’ve heard this with everybody you’ve talked to, it’s just a small town in a big city. Businesses owned by the person also [working] the business, I think that’s a big thing. You know your customer. If somebody doesn’t pay, ‘no problem! Next time!’

The ability for business owners to connect with their customers creates a certain level of trust in Andersonville that bleeds into the neighborhood’s feel. Below are excerpts of interviews with residents of Andersonville, as I try to explore how important the residential district is to Andersonville and its residents,

**Participant:** [When we moved here] there was some neighborhood feel [from] the commercial part of the community.

**Researcher:** And so would you say then that the commercial [district] has remained important to the neighborhood feel [since you moved here 21 years ago]?

**Participant:** Yes, yes.
**Researcher:** Does it feel good to know that you shop at the Landmark and that you know the owner?

**Participant:** Absolutely. Absolutely. She, you know she’ll call me and say ‘I’ve got something in that has your name written all over it’, you know? Or I come [into the store] and [a worker] says, you know ‘hey’ and you know, uhm, ‘I walked past Andies (a local restaurant) and the mater di says ‘hi how you doin?’’, you know that sort of thing. And again that kind of goes back to what we were talking about before is that the business and the residential part of this area just really do hook in together.

**Participant:** I’ve never seen [my husband] take so much pride in something [as he does in Andersonville]. Whether it’s the connections we have with certain people or particular restaurants we like to go to.

**Researcher:** It seems like Andersonville involves its residents.

**Participant:** Yes.

**Researcher:** So you’re not just someone who rents that apartment, or someone who likes that restaurant. It’s that the restaurant recognizes you, welcomes you, you welcome it?

**Participant:** Exactly.

Consumption is very important to the construction of Andersonville’s identity because it is how residents become a part of their community and feel welcome into it. It is for this reason that it is not possible to separate the commercial and residential districts of Andersonville when analyzing the neighborhood. The culture of Andersonville depends upon the local economy of Andersonville, and if either changed the neighborhood would change.

### 4.3 Economic Studies

Because consumption is so important to the neighborhood (some residents assert they will move if the local business district goes chain), the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce has spent time and money on trying to validate the importance and benefits and locally owned businesses. The action taken by the Chamber is comparable to the residential reactions to the threats of gentrification, as people begin to bond together to resist undesirable change. The community that forms around the preservation of the local commercial district parallels residential reactions to preserve their homes, as discussed previously.

Marxist approaches to consumption point out the role of fetishism and the consequent reaction of unveiling. The unveiling associated with fetishism looks to understand the production process of a commodity (Goss 2004, Jackson 1999). In the
case of Andersonville the veil of fetishism covers the economic consequences of shopping either local or chain stores. The Andersonville Chamber of Commerce began to unveil this fetishism with economic studies that detailed the benefits of shopping from local establishments, which have elevated local and city awareness to local economic politics.

The Andersonville Development Corporation and the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce with the aid of Andersonville Special Service Area #22 conducted a study in 2004 to better understand the benefit of Andersonville’s local economy against larger national chain stores, named the Andersonville Study. The acting director of the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce discusses (2007),

…it’s not just about property taxes it’s about other kinds of policy too, like, who gets subsidies. You know there’s a TIF [tax increment financing] in this area. I did just a tiny bit of digging and I don’t remember the exact numbers but its from a website called Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, which unfortunately the organization doesn’t exist anymore, but they used to track TIF money and how the spending went. And it was something like of the 200 million dollars that have been spent on business development outside of the central loop area of Chicago, only 2 million have gone towards local business.

Cities use TIFs to allocate where public investment should be directed in order to gain profit in the future. Such projects include building roads or schools, though some of this money also goes to attracting private investments, such as businesses. Though property values are dictated by the market, there is public financing to help remedy the market’s influence, yet in this case the city of Chicago is not interested in assisting local economies. It is typical for cities to attract large private investors into their city, as this is a large source of financial city investment (see Jacobs 1998, Jayne 2006, Clarke and Bradford 1998, Young 2003 for more on public financing used to attract private capital).

The Andersonville Study interviewed 512 randomly selected consumers off the street and found that 70% prefer to shop locally owned businesses, 80% prefer traditional urban districts and 40% live outside of Andersonville, though intentionally travel there to shop. The findings show that for every $100 spent in local businesses, $68 remains within the local economy, verses only $48 when spent in chain stores. With local businesses leading in economic productivity when compared to chain stores, Andersonville represents a case for which to understand the social and economic benefits of a locally owned business district.
The current director of the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce (2007) discusses how this economic situation works out,

And what [the study] found is that if you spend money at a local business, much more of that money stays in the local community and re-circulates than if you spend money at a non-local business, which makes sense. I mean a local business is gonna hire locally and their gonna spend their own profits locally and they [will] use the local service, like a lawyer, all that stuff. But it was nice to have the actual data. The numbers have shown, economically this is actually better

Further, the absolute space occupied by a local establishment has a greater economic impact than a chain one with the local leading by $71/sq. foot.\footnote{The numbers had to be adjusted because the study’s chain stores occupied more space than the local businesses, which is often the case between chain and independent businesses.} Local businesses are more profitable for neighborhoods, and compiled from neighborhood to neighborhood, for the city. Taking this into consideration, urban areas that use public funds to attract private investments (see Jacobs 1998, Jayne 2006, and Young 2003) are ignoring the benefits of local economies in favor of bigger investments.

These findings support that the consumers of Andersonville prioritize the local business district over the more common chain districts. This is a clear indication that the consumers of Andersonville are consuming more than just commodities as they are consuming commodities that have a larger economic impact for their neighborhood. This puts Andersonville in a position of being a neighborhood largely based on taste; of local consumption. This speaks to the greater neighborhood of Andersonville, as a consumer in and of itself of the city space it occupies. Andersonville becomes a conspicuous consumer of space, but working to ensure that its local economy is locally owned.

An additional campaign, the Local First campaign, launched tentatively in 2005 and citywide in 2006, pushes for consumer awareness to the benefits of local businesses, urging consumers to choose local first.

Local First Chicago is a network of locally owned, independent businesses and friends joined together to keep money and character in our neighborhoods by supporting local businesses...Locally owned, independent businesses are a crucial part of a healthy community.
(Local First 2007)
The campaign began when economic and political leaders of Andersonville realized that chain interests in the neighborhood were growing alongside property taxes,

It’s a battle we have fought in a very concentrated and deliberate manner and so far successfully. A few years ago it became evident that it was becoming such a popular neighborhood that the chain stores were going to start paying attention to us. And at the same time it was around the time of the re-assessment of the property valuations for tax purposes. There was an increase in rents and there were a couple of key businesses that were struggling a little bit. We decided that we needed to come up with some kind of campaign and gather some data to both brand Andersonville as local and also prove economically why it was better.  
(Resident and former Chamber President, 2007)

A business owner (2007) recalls the formation of the campaign,

…it started very innocently through questionnaire that the Chamber did. What was incredible was that at the end [it] told us everything we wanted to know. Nobody wants a chain. Nobody wants another bank.

Local businesses joined the campaign to show their support for local industries as well as to educate their customers about the social and economic implications between local and chain businesses. The campaign went citywide and now hosts over 100 businesses from 16 city neighborhoods. It also served as the basis for the Andersonville Study.

This is a new approach to unveiling fetishism - certain objects will not reach consumption merely because of the economic structures that sell them and not only because of the production process. Andersonville residents are also conscious of the production process, evidenced not only by local clothing stores that sew their own clothing, but international products produced by companies committed to social justice. Many of the retail stores along Clark Street know where their products are coming from. On such product, carried by two retail stores, are bamboo purses that benefit women in developing countries by paying them a fair wage. The consumers of Andersonville are not aimless in their choices, and many of them make it a point to share their spending dollars to many of the businesses, and not just one. By keeping the vitality of the neighborhood in mind and by understanding how the money used to purchase a good will either funnel back to them in the form of a stronger community⁵, or be taken from them

⁵ See Andersonvillestudy.org for information regarding charitable contributions by locally owned businesses vs. chain businesses.
in the form of corporate financing, is one way Andersonville attempts to proactively defend against the loss of independent businesses.

4.4 Conclusion

The commercial business district of Andersonville holds a significant amount of history with regard to community roots. Clark Street is almost a sub-community of Andersonville, built around those who consume its stores in order to find inclusion within its community. It has always been important to the daily function of Andersonville, as political leaders and residents of Andersonville have a history of financially and emotionally investing in Clark Street. The historical dedication that brought Women and Children First to Clark Street continues today, as residents do what they can to keep the bookstore open in the face of chain store competition. Political leaders also work to keep local businesses along Clark Street by funding ventures such as The Andersonville Study as well as the Local First Chicago campaign. Linking this back to cultural economy, Andersonville’s culture stems from its economy. The loss of its local economy would significantly alter its culture, resulting in an overall change of neighborhood identity.

Given this evidence, it is clear that much of Andersonville’s neighborhood identity stems from the commercial district and the consumption experience it provides. Gentrification threatens the commercial district in ways that threaten neighborhood identity, evidenced by neighborhood reactions to these threats. Likewise, the threat of gentrification is also creating a community of concerned citizens who want to keep Andersonville a destination for local and independent shopping opportunities. For this community, consumption and gentrification are all intertwined together in Andersonville, as it continues to face new transitions.

The amount of community commitment to the local business district is a significant source of support for the businesses, however as gentrification continues, it may not be enough. If chains move into the area, there is a high chance that the ideology Andersonville that has existed since its conception will morph into something new. However, just as Starbucks or Hamburger Mary’s are exceptions to Clark Street, one begins to wonder what other exceptions may exist in the future. The ideology of Andersonville does rest on local businesses, but more specifically, it relies on the relationships or networks that typically stem from the independent businesses. If
franchises or chains can adopt this mentality, or if Andersonville residents can do their part to enforce this mentality, chains may not affect Andersonville in the ways that many owners and residents fear.

What chains do threaten, however, is a more generic product offering, something undesirable for interview participants. Additionally, the case presented by Anthropologie and drawing evidence from The Andersonville Study, chain stores are likely to take up more than one storefront, which will then threaten the diversity of stores that can be found along Clark Street. For this, the locally owned businesses of Clark Street do bring a certain character to Andersonville that is otherwise compromised with chain stores. Even if the mentality can remain, the experience will undoubtedly change, as residents now share connections with many storeowners and their stock. If chains are to move in, this will likely decrease the number of owners or workers for residents to connect with, as well as decrease the array of unique items found within the stores. Further, chain stores may have managers, though their owners are rarely to be seen. Those managing will not be as dedicated to their store in the same way business owners are. Therefore, the locally owned businesses of Clark Street are vital to the neighborhood and its identity.
5.0 Conclusion

In the beginning, I proposed to study Andersonville as a lesbian space. I sought to better understand gay politics in a liberalizing society, to understand how gay individuals live today, where and why. I presumed that the dynamics of Andersonville’s neighborhood identity would shed light on lesbians, and vice-versa. However, upon arriving to Andersonville I ultimately found something seemingly different. Instead of finding lesbians, I found consumption. I found that the constructions of Andersonville’s identity come primarily from a group of individuals dedicated to their neighborhood’s local businesses. What is curious throughout this study is that even though I had too much difficulty finding a way to study Andersonville as any kind of lesbian space, this population continually surfaced throughout the research.

Upon finding consumption, I inadvertently found a hint of lesbian as the feminist bookstore, Women and Children First, a gay, women-owned establishment, surfaced as a neighborhood priority. I, as a researcher, author and individual, do not equate feminism with lesbians. The fact that the bookstore is a feminist bookstore does not make it a totalizing marker of sexuality. The bookstore is much more than that, selling books of many different varieties to many different audiences. However, given the bookstore did bring with it a lesbian population to Andersonville, I do link the bookstore to sexuality for the population draw but too for its ownership. That neighborhood residents and non-residents (as the bookstore has a large consumer base from all over the city) re-dedicated themselves to shopping from the bookstore and essentially saving it, is significant. Though the actions of the consumers was to save their local bookstore, the otherwise aloof gay politics of Andersonville surface. I use the word aloof because though gay residents of Andersonville are entirely welcomed and appreciated by the heterosexual research participants, their sexuality is somewhat of a non-issue. It is uniquely both there and gone as a significant source of Andersonville’s diversity, while simultaneously illustrating how being different in Andersonville is accepted to the point of almost expectation.

The main conclusion of this study finds that the primary signifier of Andersonville’s identity comes from the existence of the locally owned businesses found along Clark Street. The loss of these independent businesses, like Women and Children
First, would lead to a change in neighborhood and community identity politics in Andersonville. The ways in which individuals attach to Andersonville establishes a sense of community and identity for the neighborhood, and if the local stores leave, this attachment will change. As the neighborhood gentrifies this identity and community manifests from practices of local consumption. The gentrification of Andersonville also exposes how residents may be rationalizing the socio-economic homogenization of their neighborhood.

To look at the Andersonville’s distinct transitions identified throughout this thesis, one can see that lesbians surface once again, this time with regard to neighborhood revitalization when lesbians moved to Andersonville with Women and Children First. There is a fair amount of literature about gay gentrification that understands that gay women establish a neighborhood as being safe for homosexuals, and gay men may then follow; a process that may have occurred in Andersonville. Lesbians moved to Andersonville around 1990 when the neighborhood was affordable. As gay men are getting priced out of Boystown, Chicago, the traditional gay male neighborhood, some gay men are moving into Andersonville. However, gay gentrification is not taking place in Andersonville, even though gays may be a part of its gentrification. Rather, the processes of revitalization in Andersonville led up to gentrification, of which gays are a part of, but are not responsible for.

Though many residents commented on the diversity of Andersonville, some recognize that the diversity was not all that rich in terms of ethnicity, while others note that diversity is simply part of living in a big city, purporting Andersonville is not uniquely diverse. By and large, the diversity comes from the homosexual population, as well as from the remaining international population. What dilutes this diversity is that the socio-economic conditions of Andersonville middle class to upper-middle class.

The community reaction to this socio-economic homogenization is rather passive, likely because it is not entirely taking away from diversity. The residential gentrification is sorrowful for some, beneficial to those that own, and a low (or non) priority politically. In contrast, there is considerable reaction to the threats facing the locally owned businesses. Consumer support saved Women and Children First, a feminist bookstore that brought other women-owned businesses and lesbian residents to Andersonville. The
commercial gentrification consumes (pun intended) all of Andersonville, ranging from the Chamber of Commerce to residents who have only moved to the area in the past two or three years. This supports why cultural economy is important in the analysis of Andersonville – without the local economy the present community and neighborhood identity of Andersonville is lost.

Having already detailed the case of Women and Children First, I bring out another example of consumer reaction in support of locally owned businesses. This one, however, has little to do commercial gentrification or politics of sexuality. The BC Tap, according to Hayes (2002), was a bar on Clark Street that was a Cheers reincarnated – it was a local hangout wherein business owners and residents alike went to drink and get to know one another. The bar was active in the community, hosting community association gatherings, participating in the summer festival, and even helping out with post-9/11 fundraising. Hayes describes the extent of the bar’s community contributions in this way, ‘If you were a college admissions officer and the BC Tap were a high school senior, you'd look at the list of extracurriculars and admit it on the spot.’

The fate of the bar came down to a violation of liquor license and the city shut it down in 2000, to the bewilderment of many. This did not occur without a fight, as many political and residential actors tried to save the bar from the confusion surrounding the liquor license violation,

In March 1998 the Andersonville Chamber of Commerce, the Edgewater Community Council, the Edgewater Development Corporation, and the East Andersonville Residents Council all sent letters to Mary Ann Smith supporting the transfer of the license. The alderman forwarded the letters to Winston Mardis, director of the liquor commission, along with her own letter of support. With help from the East Andersonville Residents Council, the BC Tap obtained the signatures of over 70 percent of the registered voters living near the bar. Everything seemed set to move forward. (Hayes 2002, Andersonville is a sub-neighborhood of Edgewater)

The outpour of support described above captures well how residents attach to the local businesses of Andersonville. The now former-alderwoman, Marion Volini is quoted in Hayes’ article by saying the following,

I’m afraid it will turn into a Payless Shoes. I’m afraid it will turn into some other run-of-the-mill chain location and it will lose a sense of neighborhood, a sense of locale, and a sense of community....In literature, there's a reference to what they call a third place. Every person needs a home, and every person needs work, but everyone needs a third place to go to, that they can go and relax at, and this is a third place for me and many of
my friends, and many of our neighbors, and that's why it is so important. (Hayes 2002)

For three years Andersonville fought to save the BC Tap. That the efforts did not succeed, is both important and not important. A Payless shoe store did not move into the space, an independent restaurant did.

What the BC Tap illustrates is that the community members of Andersonville demand local amenities that bring a small town into the big city. Overwhelming, residents find this from shopping the local businesses and creating networks with those business owners and possibly other customers. The local business owners provide a shopping experience that is unmatched by anything anyone could recall coming from a chain store. For Andersonville residents, the local businesses can be their own; they are not found all over the country or seen in sweeping television advertisements. The local businesses are what make Andersonville different from other neighborhoods in the greater city of Chicago.

Taking this into consideration, it becomes evident that the processes of gentrification taking hold in Andersonville are exposing community signifiers of identity. Research participants enjoy the local business district and highly appreciate the area’s residential diversity. There is a notable imbalance of concerns directed to the residential and commercial districts as gentrification begins to change the social dynamics of Andersonville. The culture of Andersonville, its daily practices and social signifiers, relies more on the local economy than it does on the residential diversity. The local economy of Andersonville has remained stable throughout the neighborhood’s transitions, and perhaps for this it rises as the strongest signifier of community identity, as new and long-term residents can share in that experience together. The loss of this local economy would dismantle this long-standing stability, and the community would change. However, the loss of residential socio-economic diversity has not seemed to affect the community in significant ways, leading to the conclusion that the economic defines the culture of the Andersonville community.

What needs to be considered, however, is that a local business district does not create community, gays do not always bring the stereotypical flamboyant personality, and social commitments do not appear out of thin air. The condition of Andersonville is one that is both historical and present. Andersonville as a neighborhood as had time to
develop, to hold onto long-term residents or businesses, of which have had the time to create their own strong bonds to the place, but to also create strong social bonds. If the business district were to appear out of intentionally planned construction plans, it would not come with the personal or social attachments to place, of which make Andersonville, Andersonville. It is from these attachments that Andersonville’s community and neighborhood identity become. The significance of this is that replicating its material qualities cannot recreate a community like Andersonville. The ways in which individuals attach to Andersonville create a complicated case for neighborhood identity, one that this thesis scratches the surface of. Understanding local constructions of place and identity are difficult to predict, and for this neighborhood research politics ought to remain flexible and open to new possibilities, even if not yet supported by existing literature.
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