CREATING COMMUNITY ANEW:
EXAMINING SOCIAL CAPITAL
IN THE UNITED STATES
POST-PANDEMIC

A Thesis

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Following World War II, Americans came together to strengthen interpersonal bonds and build trust after such a catastrophic event. They found communal ways to spend their free time, such as bowling in leagues, volunteering in schools and communities, and helping neighbors. Since then, social capital and community have been on the decline, according to Robert Putnam. How might one use Putnam's work to analyze the recent and ongoing crisis of Covid-19? The pandemic was not only a public health crisis, but it also had detrimental effects on the global economy, the education system, and relationships among family members, friends, and professionals. The pandemic and its effects have made their way into our culture since early 2020, and it leaves us wondering whether things will return to the way they were pre-pandemic or if this has become "the new normal."

This thesis attempts to answer the questions, "Did the Covid-19 pandemic weaken or strengthen individuals' sense of community towards others?" and "How might we strengthen a sense of social responsibility and community in the aftermath of the pandemic?" These are essential questions to ask because the current political moment is marked by deep partisan polarization, widening income inequality, and a stark political and social divide between rural and urban individuals. A lack of care and empathy towards others, alongside a failure to understand other viewpoints, have made civic engagement precarious in the present moment.

Specifically, this thesis focuses on social capital in the southeastern Ohio region. Appalachian Ohio is known for its deep-rooted communities and unique culture, and

strong loyalties to people and place. The Appalachian region encompasses thirteen states, "from southern New York to Northern Mississippi." The area often faces negative stereotypes because it "lags behind the rest of the nation on a number of socioeconomic indicators" ("About the Appalachian Region"). Many parts of Appalachia are considered "distressed areas," characterized by "lower educational attainments with higher unemployment and poverty rates compared to those living in non-Appalachian areas of the nation" ("Appalachia").

According to recent census data, 20.9% of those living in Athens County live in poverty. 21.1% of people living in neighboring Meigs County and 19% in Vinton County are reported as living in poverty. The national average shows 11.6% of people living in poverty ("QuickFacts Athens County, Ohio; Vinton County, Ohio; Meigs County, Ohio; United States"). The economy in this region relies on extraction. The resource-based nature of this economy means that unemployment remains a struggle in the area as well.

Ohio University's main campus and five branch campuses are all located within the Appalachian region of Ohio. Despite the negative stereotypes that are perpetuated about Appalachia, much can be said about its community-oriented culture. In southeastern Ohio, there is no shortage of organizations and programs aimed at strengthening communities economically, socially, and culturally.

Method

Robert Putnam's influential book, *Bowling Alone*, inspired this thesis. I began with a reading of Putnam's scholarship and continued my research on social capital through other books, contemporary articles, and sources found via library databases. This

thesis is both theoretical and practical. It establishes a model of social reciprocity drawn from the scholarly debate on social capital. It also examines how reciprocity and community are put into practice through actual programs and collaborations with citizens, nonprofits, and public actors drawn from organizations across the country. Importantly, these groups are building social capital through intersectional efforts and initiatives.

To do this, I began by assembling a list of contemporary groups that focused on community building and community engagement. I analyzed the groups' websites thematically, specifically investigating their mission, organizational values, and references to or discussion of social capital with community outreach. I chose case examples that would present a diverse representation of geography, culture, class, and identity. I examined each case example in terms of its impact on its community and used that analysis as the basis for my fourth chapter.

I also utilized the qualitative method of autoethnography in this thesis (Ellis). As a method, it allows authors "to situate their personal experiences within the context of their research," giving voice to personal experience in an analytical and systematic way (Wall 39). An autoethnographer's "intimate knowledge of the cultural and social setting in which he/she is situated" can help their audience understand research through the lens of experience (Guzik). Autoethnography is a relatively new method in political science (Burnier), but it is appropriate for this study because it enabled systematic, first-hand observations of local groups and events.

I chose several community events to attend and write about for my autoethnographic observations. I utilized online community calendars, flyers in local businesses, social media, and word of mouth to find the events. For most events, the

criteria for me to attend were as follows: The event must be free or low-cost. The event must be open to the public and in an accessible location. The event must have ties to the region. I selected these criteria because I felt it would be pertinent for there to be minimal barriers to attending the events. This allowed me to have the most authentic experiences of community.

When attending the events, I paid close attention to the interactions of the people around me and journaled about the experience upon my return home. For each journal entry, I captured as many details as possible to have ample information to pull from for my research. I aimed to observe the strength of the sense of community at each event through conversations that led to bonding, bridging, or both. Although these terms will be defined further in the second chapter, bonding is exclusive and occurs among homogenous groups, while bridging occurs when people across diverse social situations work together.

Thesis Overview

In the second chapter of this thesis, social capital is defined. The chapter also provides a brief biography of Putnam and further analysis of his written works. Later, I examine the critical aspects captured in *Bowling Alone,* including the documented decline in social capital and social reciprocity.

In the third chapter, I cover this documented decline more specifically. Chapter Three looks at the social capital and community decline through the lens of the Covid-19 emergency. This nationally divisive event reinforced political polarization and managed to tear relationships apart rather than draw people together. It increased peoples'

suspicions of others, made targets of minority groups, and seemingly lowered our capacity for generalized reciprocity. This chapter documents instances of fragmented social capital acted out by ordinary citizens and public officials.

In the fourth chapter, the thesis discusses the ways in which nonprofits and communities from around the country are working to revive a sense of social reciprocity and community, and how it might look in the *post-pandemic* United States. The chapter introduces the ongoing importance of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) and develops an inventory of case examples of programs that are rebuilding and reimagining social reciprocity and community.

The fifth chapter concludes the thesis with autoethnographic observations and experiences of community-based programming in Athens County. It also analyzes the importance of relationship-building within one's community. In this chapter, I compare and contrast different community events and the level of success with which each event produced social capital. Overall, this thesis takes us on a journey through social capital and community, so we no longer have to *bowl alone*.

Chapter 2
Robert Putnam & His Social Capital Contributions

Social Capital, Broadly

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was the first to define social capital when he used the concept in 1984 to "explain the cold realities of social inequality" and social immobility (Gauntlett 2). Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, American sociologist James Coleman expanded the idea of social capital from something viewed as stock held by powerful elites to something that can also hold value for marginalized groups (Gauntlett 3). However, it was political scientist Robert Putnam who wrote a journal article entitled *Bowling Alone* and became known as the leading scholar on social capital. Putnam argued that behavior shifts in the United States have led to disintegrating social bonds, and that the power to restore those bonds and promote a healthy civil society lay in preserving and maintaining social capital, which he defines as the "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (*Bowling Alone* 19). While Bourdieu and Coleman may be better known throughout academia, Putnam is viewed as an academic whose work regarding social capital and community has been most influential among both academic and popular audiences. When discussing social capital, this thesis will draw from Robert Putnam's work because he is among the most prominent scholars to have dedicated time and scholarship to this subject.

Biography

Born in 1941 in Rochester, New York, and raised in the small town of Port Huron, Ohio, Robert Putnam grew up to become an influential and esteemed political scientist known for his many writings on social capital. Putnam often referenced his experiences of growing up in the Port Huron community in his studies. In 1963, Putnam graduated from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. He then attended the University of Oxford and, later, Yale, where he earned his M.A. and Ph.D. In 1968, Putnam became a lecturer at the University of Michigan and was later promoted to professor (Munro). In 1979, Putnam became a faculty member at Yale University, where he also served as the Dean of the Kennedy School of Government (Putnam, *Robert D. Putnam*). Putnam has written fourteen books, two of which are among "the most cited publications in the social sciences worldwide in the last half century" ("Robert David Putnam").

Putnam's analysis of American social capital could easily be defined as his most significant contribution to the political science community. He is broadly understood as the foundational thinker for this concept. However, he has also greatly impacted the broader political arena. He has been the recipient of many honors and awards, including the Johan Skytte Prize in Political Science in 2006. In 2012, President Barack Obama awarded Putnam the National Humanities medal for his work as "America's preeminent political scientist, and one of the most widely read, cited, and respected social scientists in the world" (Garfinkle). He has remained active outside the academic sphere by serving as a consultant to the White House and foreign governments, as a member of the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation, and on the staff of the National Security Council (Munro).

Putnam is also recognized for his contributions leading to the Saguaro Seminar, an ongoing initiative at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard to put social capital research into practice. The project focuses on expanding knowledge regarding trust and community engagement levels and developing strategies and efforts to increase community engagement ("Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America—Harvard University"). The seminar has completed research "surrounding civics education among youth." It emphasizes providing civic education to young people, so they are "better equipped to practice civic engagement and philanthropy effectively and consistently" as adults (Stawick).

Putnam's Scholarship

In 2000, Robert Putnam wrote his seminal book, *Bowling Alone*, setting the stage for conversations around social capital, social reciprocity, and community for years to come. However, Putnam has published several notable pieces prior to and after this book that also provide commentary on social capital and civic associations at large.

Putnam's first work that introduced the importance of social capital was *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, which was published in 1993. The piece served as an early statement on social capital in a comparative politics context. This book answers the question of why some democratic governments can succeed while other democratic governments fail. Putnam's findings in *Making Democracy Work* showed that the different regions throughout Italy which had generations worth of civic engagement were the regions that had effective democratic governments in the 1990s. The book received several awards from scholarly professional associations, including the 1993

Louis Brownlow Book Award from the National Academy of Public Administration. The book found that “networks of civic engagement foster robust norms of reciprocity” and encourage community members to engage in mutually cooperative and beneficial activities (Putnam, Leonardi, et al. 173). *The Economist* praised this book as "a great work of social science, worthy to rank alongside de Tocqueville, Pareto and Weber" (“Robert David Putnam”). In the same year that this was published, *Bowling Alone* made an early appearance as a journal article in an American Prospect publication. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* was also published as a book in the year 2000. The book serves as an important inspiration for this thesis and will be further discussed later in this chapter.

In 2003, Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein collaborated on *Better Together: Restoring the American Community.* The book examines Valley Interfaith in Texas, a group that uses “relational organizing.” It features discussions of their tactics – including “one-on-one conversations and in house meetings, [where] organizers and leaders elicit people’s stories” (Putnam, Feldstein, et al. 21–22). Putnam argues that storytelling can break down barriers between groups and have a powerful and long-lasting effect. He emphasizes the importance of face-to-face conversations where “people can read each other’s emotions, can express sympathy and work through disagreement together” (Putnam, Feldstein, et al. 22). The book also discusses the Tupelo model of community spirit, which consists of “long-range planning to ensure the future of the community is impressive” and pursues cooperation between the area’s educational institutions and businesses (Putnam, Feldstein, et al. 114–15).

In 2011, Putnam published *American Grace: How Religion Unites and Divides Us* - "a critically acclaimed study of religion in the contemporary United States and its impact on social capital" (Munro). This book documents the reshaping of America's religious landscape: the decrease of religious observance in the 1960s, the rise of evangelical Christianity in the 1970s and 1980s, and the abandonment of organized religion by young people since the 1990s – all of which, Putnam and Campbell argue, have resulted in a growing polarization among "the ranks of religious conservatives and secular liberals" ("American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us").

In 2015, Putnam published *Our Kids*, a book that examines both upper-middle-class and working-class families, specifically the ways in which working-class families have been denied access to the same educational and life opportunities that the children of wealthier parents have had. In an interview he gave, Putnam stated that the book examines "the growing gap between rich kids and poor kids" and is set in "some place [so readers can] watch how that place changes over time" (Av). The book also serves as an expansion for Putnam on what was written fifteen years earlier in *Bowling Alone*. In this book, Putnam's methodology involves storytelling with information pulled from qualitative interviews.

Community in *Our Kids* can be measured through social capital by putting value and context to the social networks that one has access to. One person's experience with community can vastly differ from another's based on each person's social class.

To illustrate this, Putnam provides examples throughout the book that are like this: Someone who has grown up with a substandard education (who will now be referred to as Person A) has far different priorities than someone who has had access to excellent

teachers, tutors, and educational programs (who will now be referred to as Person B). Person A has less access to a higher-paying job, meaning they may have to work longer hours at one or several minimum-wage jobs to fund everyday expenses such as groceries, utilities, and medical costs. Person A does not have the luxury of free time nor the disposable income to engage in political activism, community sports leagues, or volunteer groups.

On the other hand, Person B reaps the benefits of their high-paying job because they had unfettered access to resources such as personal tutors and application consultants to land them a spot in an Ivy League School. Person B has earned a disposable income to shell out to various political organizations. Since they are not preoccupied with working to make ends meet, they can participate in various community groups– book clubs, parent-teacher associations, community bands, or summer sports leagues. Education, in *Our Kids*, is "a proxy for privilege" and is also one of the most important predictors for individual levels of social participation. Specifically, the education that one has access to significantly impacts shaping their experience with community (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 186). Differences in the quantity and quality of social connections that individuals have access to contribute to the growing opportunity gap many American young people face today. This opportunity gap correlates to inequities in the distribution of resources. Alongside disparities in education, there are a variety of socioeconomic barriers that can alter people's experience with community. Income inequality, class segregation, and racial and gender discrimination all diminish opportunities for individuals to "scale the socioeconomic ladder," such as enrolling in higher education courses that lead to a stable and high-paying professional career (Putnam, *Our Kids* 2).

Although Putnam's data showcases the effects of social capital on individuals, he also uses it to demonstrate the importance of a democratic community. For Putnam, having a dense social network is a critical part of building a democratic community. It is essential to build high levels of social capital so that political participation is not just driven by crises and emergencies. Rather, political participation should be rooted in and emerge from relationships built over time and across varying situations. From these relationships, people gain a sense of efficacy that they can get together with others and get something done. Substantial social capital makes it easier for citizens to cooperate and efficiently solve issues such as "collective active problems," "the prisoner's dilemma," "the free-rider problem," and "the tragedy of the commons" (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 288). Social capital holds community members accountable for their everyday actions and social transactions.

Furthermore, communities become more sustainable when they are founded on a sense of trust among each other. Social capital also widens "our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked" (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 288). In other words, social capital makes it easier for us to see what we owe each other as human beings. When we form social bonds with others, we become more compassionate and empathetic towards their struggles, which can lead to inspiring political change to better the situations of our fellow community members.

Putnam's most recent book, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*, was published in 2020. The book explores American culture over the last 125 years in the context of "four broad dimensions of social change" – economics, politics, society, and culture – "together, not one at a time"

(Putnam and Garrett 283). The book displays the ebbs and flows of American political culture from rugged individualism to communitarianism and back. This book places social capital in a historical context. Putnam offers a sense of hope in this book that Americans today can once again reach a sense of community and trust. He introduces the "I-we" curve, then explains how the societal focus on individualism during the Gilded Age shifted to a society focused on community in the years to follow. Putnam draws comparisons between the Gilded Age and present-day America to show that recovery is possible as it has been in the past.

Bowling Alone

Putnam's analysis of American social capital is understood as a significant contribution to the understanding of community in the discipline of political science. He contrasts social capital to physical capital, which refers to physical goods, and human capital, which "refers to properties of individuals," and defines social capital as "connections among individuals – social connections and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 19).

Putnam also describes the decline in trust and community over the last third of the twentieth century, likening this shift to "powerful tidal movements" powered by "currents and crosscurrents and eddies." He explains that for the first two-thirds of the century, "a powerful tide bore Americans into even deeper engagement in the life of their communities" (World War II), but a few decades later, "silently, without a warning—that tide reversed, and we were overtaken by a horrendous rip tide. Without fair warning, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of

the century" (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 27). This shift began in the 1960s and 1970s but accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 184). Putnam cites pressures of time and money, suburbanization and sprawl, electronic entertainment, and generational changes as catalysts for this change (*Bowling Alone* 283). He explains that in "virtually every conceivable measure, social capital has eroded steadily and sometimes dramatically over the past two generations" (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 287).

Social capital can be measured via bonding and bridging relationships. Bonding is exclusive and occurs among homogenous groups such as ethnic fraternities, women's groups, or groups with high participation fees. Bridging involves a much more inclusive approach as it occurs when people across diverse social situations work together, seen in civil rights movements or charitable youth groups such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 22). This thesis will provide examples of both types of relationships in action through autoethnographic observations and experiences with community-based programming in Athens County and surrounding areas.

Through bonding, in-groups and out-groups translate to the idea of *deserving* or *undeserving* individuals. Due to simple human nature, we are often resistant to accepting qualities that differ from our own; we categorize differences by branding people as *others*. For this reason, although bonding and bridging are both powerful, bridging social capital is more effective for fostering dimensions of understanding and empathy within a democratic community, which, this thesis will argue, has been on the decline during the Covid-19 era.

It is critical to understand that although Putnam brings much awareness to the decline in social capital and community in recent years, he also says that "American history

carefully examined is a story of ups and downs in civic engagement, *not just downs* – a story of collapse *and* of renewal" (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 25). Interestingly enough, this theme is developed further in his most recent book. Through the ethnographic observations of community in southeast Ohio, this thesis will provide evidence of how communities are actively engaged in renewal efforts.

Criticisms of *Bowling Alone*

Putnam's work is not without its critics. A recurring criticism of Putnam's *Bowling Alone* is of the ambiguity or vagueness that seems to be present in his writing. In "Bowling Alone: a review essay," economist Steven N. Durlauf argues that while Putnam "describes a remarkable number of facts concerning community life in America," he also lacks substantive definitions and empirical evidence (259). This critique, in particular, also draws attention to a "generic problem with … social capital literature," which is a deviation "from the use of constructive definitions" and the stark distinction of bridging and bonding social capital (Durlauf 261). Durlauf believes the two should not be so starkly drawn that, in fact, they blur. He feels they are less distinct.

Another criticism of Putnam's work can be found in the article "The limits to bridging social capital: Power, social context and the theory of Robert Putnam," where sociologist Derik Gelderblom argues that Putnam's idea of bridging social capital as a solution to America's increasing intolerance and polarity is unrealistic. Gelderblom also points out that Putnam's work has been subjected to criticism "for ignoring power relations as well as the effects of broader social structures" (1311). He also contests Putnam's claims that "the decline of voluntary" and communal organizations "in the US

bode ill for the future health of American democracy," questioning the actual impact of participation in voluntary organizations (Gelderblom 1313).

Another critique of *Bowling Alone* is that Putnam ignores the economic dimensions of social and political life that also impact relationships. Vicente Navarro, a health and public policy scholar, explains this in his critique. He narrows in on Putnam's analysis of the Progressive Era, which Putnam "considers a builder of communitarianism and social capital" instead of a response to intense pressure from the labor movement and women's movement for a redistribution of resources (Navarro 429). Critics state that what Putnam fails to acknowledge is the fact that many people are unable to dedicate themselves to community and political participation to create these changes. A fairly recent study has shown that the combination of parenting labor and wage-earning labor takes up ninety-eight hours per week, which is more than two full-time jobs (Khoo). Parents, especially where both are employed, are less available to volunteer, make or donate things, or participate in civic life. As Putnam discussed in *Our Kids,* this type of participation has always been difficult to achieve for working-class parents.

Finally, several commentators criticize *Bowling Alone* as an oversimplification of a complex issue. Tristan Claridge, from the Institute for Social Capital, notes that Putnam's work "has confounded theoretical and methodological rigor to such an extent that much of the later work on social capital has been described as vulgar scholarship" (Claridge). Claridge and others say that *Bowling Alone* does not offer enough theoretical or methodological framework for future studies on social capital.

Chapter 3
Social Reciprocity and Community Under Stress: The Covid-19 Crisis

During World War II, home front efforts relied on the active participation of communities to conserve resources and support those who went overseas. This "civic-minded World War II generation" responded to the calls for leadership and communal efforts "not only in the nation's highest office, but in cities and towns across the land" (Putnam, *Bowling Alone* 17). Many Americans, especially women, worked in factories and filled positions that were left empty by those enlisted in the armed forces. In addition, citizens participated in food rationing and rubber and aluminum recycling programs, following the motto "Use it up – Wear it out – Make it do – or Do without" ("The WWII Home Front"). Citizens also purchased U.S. War Bonds, which were implemented by Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. with the intention of uniting "the attractiveness of the baby bonds that had been implemented in the interwar period with the patriotic element of the Liberty Bonds" from World War I (Kimble 19–20). These war bonds, also known as "defense bonds," were sold by the U.S. government to help finance the war.

During this time, Americans also grew sixty percent of their produce in victory gardens to help ease the burden on transportation and farm laborers. Commercially canned goods were sent to the troops and were replaced by produce grown in victory gardens at home. Volunteerism proved integral to improving morale and creating a thicker sense of community. The home front war effort was the result of an all-out community effort.

The Covid-19 Dilemma

Completely opposite to the behaviors and norms of citizens coming together during those crises were the actions of Americans during the Covid-19 pandemic. People acted irrationally out of self-interest, disregarding the safety of their communities and placing the heavy weight of blame onto marginalized groups. Many citizens hoarded important supplies like toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes early on. They also refused to wear masks or follow other public health advisories. Citizens expressed deep resentment toward any infringement of personal liberties, including testing requirements and travel bans. Some people were willing to go to extreme lengths, such as falsifying vaccine records rather than actually getting the vaccine.

On January 9, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced cases of mysterious coronavirus-related pneumonia in Wuhan, China. By January 21, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) confirmed the first case in the United States. On February 3, the Trump Administration declared a public health emergency and a national emergency on March 13 (AJMC Staff). By the end of March 2020, individual states began to issue shutdowns and stay-at-home orders as more and more people succumbed to the deadly effects of the virus. The death toll surpassed 80,000 by May 2020 (“The Data: Totals for the US”).

Within the next month, conservative groups gathered nationwide to protest the stay-at-home orders and mask mandates, condemning the science and research that backed these public safety initiatives. An example includes an armed militia that protested outside the Michigan statehouse. This group, the Michigan Liberty Militia, entered the Senate gallery to call for the lift of coronavirus-related restrictions. The GOP

leader of Michigan's state senate condemned the militia for using "intimidation and the threat of physical harm to stir up fear and feed rancor" (Burnett, "Michigan Militia Puts Armed Protest in the Spotlight"). However, the Republican-controlled Senate in Michigan refused to extend Governor Gretchen Whitmer's coronavirus emergency declaration. Whitmer later became the target of political violence by "a group of men who were angry about restrictions imposed because of the pandemic" that planned to kidnap her for what they called "treason" (Burnett, "Threats, Vitriol Aimed at Women in Positions of Power").

Elected officials were not the only ones attacked during the pandemic. Public health officials were also the targets of unprecedented hostility. Dr. Amy Acton, the former public health director for Ohio, resigned from her position in June 2020 after she had been taunted by protesters carrying guns outside her home. Acton was also confronted with antisemitic messages and slurs from protesters and lawmakers (Burnett, "Threats, Vitriol Aimed at Women in Positions of Power"). In addition, Acton was met with lawsuits from organizers of music festivals and restaurants for her orders that kept people at home, as well as a legislative effort to strip her of her authority as a public health advisor (Julie Carr Smith).

Unfortunately, what happened to Acton was not an isolated incident. By August 2020, at least 27 health officers in 13 states had resigned from their positions. They cited doxing, "angry and armed protesters at their personal residences, vandalism, and harassing telephone calls and social media posts" as reasons for leaving their positions (Mello et al.). The violent responses that accompanied the Covid-19 pandemic reflected the general public's misunderstanding of the gravity of this situation. This results from

biases in human risk perception and an overall decline in public civility, which is demonstrated through the examples of disrespect toward elected officials, public health officials, and ordinary citizens. In addition, some judicial authorities have contributed to this mayhem. For example, Wisconsin's Supreme Court judges condemned the state health secretary's stay-at-home orders as "tyranny" by "an unelected official" exercising "controlling, subjective judgment" (Mello et al.). As reporters have pointed out, statements such as these are not "mere rhetorical flourishes" but instead represent a failure to practice civility norms during a crisis (Mello et al.).

Just as it happened during World War II, there were racial dimensions to the Covid-19 crisis. During the pandemic, the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community reported facing the following types of hate: verbal harassment, physical assault, civil rights violations, and online harassment. About "three-in-ten Asian adults (31%)" admitted that they "have been subject to slurs or jokes because of their race or ethnicity" since the Covid-19 outbreak first began. This can be compared to "21% of Black adults, 15% of Hispanic adults and 8% of white adults" (Neil G. Ruiz et al.). When surveyed, "the majority of Asian Americans (58%) and 45% of Black Americans" stated that it has grown more common for other people to express racism towards them than before the pandemic (Neil G. Ruiz et al.).

So, why exactly has the pandemic caused an increase in anti-Asian hate? The answer is that it partly stems from Covid-19's emergence in Wuhan, China. Because of this, then-president Donald Trump used terms like "Chinese virus," "China virus," and "Chinese flu." Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used the term "Wuhan virus" (Gover et al. 654). By using this terminology instead of referring to the virus by its proper name

(Coronavirus, Covid-19, Orthocoronavirinae), Trump and others framed the virus as something created by the Chinese, and by extension, Asian Americans. The use of this derogatory language fostered hostility towards Asian Americans and created disinformation about the virus itself, including the claims that the virus was deliberately or intentionally created inside a lab in Wuhan.

Hate crimes and racism against Asian Americans are not new. Anti-Asian sentiments have been present throughout the nation's history. During the California Gold Rush of the 1840s and 1850s, "Chinese entrepreneurs seeking to strike gold" were forced to compete with white miners for economic success and survival (Gover et al. 650). Neither group was successful, as the promised riches of gold mining were vastly overblown. As a result, all of the problems during the Gold Rush were labeled as the "yellow peril," placing blame on the Chinese immigrants (Gover et al. 648–49). The Chinese immigrants worked for less money than their white counterparts, they faced "legislative barriers to citizenship," and they suffered from housing segregation (Gover et al. 651). At rallies, white Americans claimed to be suffering from a "Chinese plague," and subsequently burned Chinatowns and initiated riots, purgings, and lynchings (Chang). In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, effectively prohibiting Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States.

As the United States jumped to the aid of the Allied Powers to fight against German concentration camps during World War II, the nation simultaneously committed "one of the most shameful violations of constitutional rights in U.S. History," Japanese internment camps (Gover et al. 667). The United States hosted concentration camps with barbed wire and armed military personnel, forcing Japanese Americans to relocate and

become incarcerated. Asian Americans have long been a scapegoat for many types of "wrongs" occurring in America. The pandemic only added to this long tradition of scapegoating.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, what started out as "heightened racial tensions and associated racist microaggressions" eventually turned to full-fledged violence and delusional finger-pointing at Asian Americans (Gover et al. 667). On the news, we have witnessed "children slashed in department stores, elderly set on fire or pushed to their deaths, and women… chased, beaten, spit upon, as if [they] are not people, but pollutants" (Chang 2). Unfortunately, a multitude of stories exist that demonstrate the fragmentation of community in the years following the onset of Covid-19, and all of them serve as an "unsettling symbol of rising tensions in a nation grappling with crisis" (Burnett, "Michigan Militia Puts Armed Protest in the Spotlight").

Individualism in the Time of Covid-19

During this crisis, some libertarians found themselves asking the question, "Why should democratic citizens have to be concerned about an abstraction like the "public good" if they choose not to be? If some people freely choose to do good works for the less fortunate or concern themselves with macrosocial issues, fine; but why is there a need for everyone to be so concerned?"(Hudson 70). More specifically, during the pandemic, these libertarians questioned the existence of a public health crisis, as well as the need to participate in community-wide efforts such as masking, getting vaccinated, or staying at home. For some libertarians, the importance of economic and personal liberty outweighs that of the collective good and a sense of reciprocity towards one's neighbors,

including immunocompromised people. This is a problematic narrative, especially from Putnam's perspective.

Libertarian individualism, which is an enduring strain of thought in American political culture, stands in tension with much of Putnam's communitarian ethos. Although a key aspect of this strand of American political culture is freedom of choice, these views fail to recognize, as Putnam maintains, the many ways in which our lives are interconnected and how individuals' choices affect their entire communities. Some libertarians are guided by the principles of radical or rugged individualism, the belief that individuals should exist "independent of and free from obligations to the rest of society" (Hudson 70). This perspective depends on the idea that individuals can choose to do or not do whatever they want, when and how they want. This is a problematic narrative to put out under normal circumstances, but it is especially so in times of crisis. It invites individuals to ignore the public dimensions of the crisis as they focus only on themselves and their families. Although libertarian individualism is commonly associated with innovation and resourcefulness, it harbors the potential to hinder collective action (Bazzi et al. 1).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the United States has seen an increase in individualism and libertarian extremism, as demonstrated by the refusal to participate in public health protocols, vaccines, and other restrictions. Because of this, the death toll from Covid-19 was higher in the United States than anywhere else despite the stay-at-home, masking, and vaccination protocols that were put in place (Nelson). Libertarian Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, for example, urged his constituents to disregard CDC guidelines in a video posted to his Twitter, where he said, "It's time for us to resist. They

can't arrest all of us. They can't keep all of your kids home from school. We don't have to accept the mandates, lockdowns and harmful policies of the petty tyrants and bureaucrats" (Paul). He posted this video amidst heightened cases of the Delta variant of Covid-19. Paul refused to wear a mask throughout the pandemic, even when he was sick with Covid-19, and he urged others to act similarly. The lack of civic duty promoted by libertarian figures such as Paul during the pandemic is "an important channel through which rugged individualism may hamper" citizens' responses to Covid-19. Studies show that "voluntary social distancing is associated with civic culture, i.e., prosocial preferences such as reciprocity, trust, cooperation, and propensity to contribute to the public good" (Bazzi et al. 2). In contrast to Putnam, these are not priority values for some libertarians.

Then-president Trump's behavior had a widespread effect on the way people treated Covid-19. Everyone was divided instead of banding together. In previous crises, such as WWII, the presidents brought people together across the political spectrum. Trump encouraged division and turned Covid-19 into a polarized health crisis. It is also important to observe the differential patterns in how states handled Covid-19, beginning with the coastal (blue) states, and then the frontier (red) states were pushed into doing things that matched up with their own sense of crisis. The media reported blue states implementing federal and state Covid-19 rules, while those in red states resisted and put economic interests above all else. However, liberals were not immune to the pull of economic interests. They supported extended unemployment and paycheck protection programs.

This divide was furthered by the politicization of immunologists who were experts on the Covid-19 virus. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the United States National Institutes of Health, should have been an objective source of information, but Trump politicized him. Even scientific evidence was politicized, creating uncertainty and ambiguity around health knowledge. Trump made things worse by (jokingly) telling people to inject disinfectants such as bleach. On April 23, 2020, he "took to the White House briefing room and encouraged his top health officials to study the injection of bleach into the human body as a means of fighting Covid" (McGraw and Stein). Vaccines were produced at revolutionary speeds for the collective good by arranging a public-private partnership between companies such as Pfizer and Moderna and making the vaccines accessible. However, Trump never got behind his own good work. On his way out of office, the then-president did get a vaccine, but he failed to motivate his own base to be supportive of the vaccine.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo was initially viewed as an extraordinary leader during the early days of Covid-19 due to his regular press conferences, willingness to talk regularly, and presentation of being knowledgeable about the crisis in ways that Trump was not. This was later challenged as Cuomo was criticized for the state's requirements that forced nursing homes to take back residents who were hospitalized for Covid-19 related complications. He was further criticized by the state's attorney general, who said that Cuomo's administration "undercounted nursing home deaths by several thousand" (Gold and Shanahan). Cuomo's secretary, Melissa DeRosa, claimed that the

administration “withheld data … because it feared that the Trump administration would use the information” for their own political agenda (McKinley).

Proper handling of the pandemic requires tradeoffs, and there should have been more cooperation efforts to open the economy as quickly as possible while maintaining public health standards as reasonably possible. It would have been prudent to maximize “alignment among the goals of securing lives, livelihood, and liberties” (Allen 14). The Trump administration failed to set a clear objective during the early days of the pandemic, exposing the cracks, fissures, and vulnerabilities in our nation’s ability to act during a time of crisis such as this. Our public health professionals had access to few strategies besides collective stay-at-home-orders, which proved to be “a necessary response to the immediate crisis,” yet also proved to have a detrimental effect on the economy, as “both viruses and economies depend on active, frequent social interactions” (Allen 15). What happened in the early days of the pandemic proved that our democracy has “defaulted to utilitarian trade-off modes of analysis” rather than nourishing solidarity and “tending to the health of the social contract” (Allen 16, 28). According to Danielle Allen, we should focus on solutions that “defend our society, lives, livelihoods, and liberties simultaneously” instead of leaving citizens trapped in the binaries of liberty versus collectivism (Allen 79).

Schooling also suffered during Covid-19. Early in the pandemic, K-12 schools struggled to maintain proper sanitation. Eventually, schools were shut down. Colleges and universities shifted to online learning overnight, leaving professors and students at a loss on how to continue the school year online without time to prep. School closures and emergency remote teaching widened the educational gap between schools in different

socioeconomic areas. A study conducted on parents and school personnel in Georgia found that most children "experienced learning losses as a result of the many challenges associated with attending school remotely" (Klosky et al. 659,660). Another study referred to the pandemic as "a wrecking ball for U.S. public education, bringing months of school closures, frantic moves to remote instruction, and trauma and isolation" (Lake and Pillow). Upon returning to school in-person, students "displayed decreased memory or attention, such as forgetting how to get to their classrooms after several months of being in school, or neglecting to turn in assignments on time." For younger students in kindergarten or first grade, it was their first time ever attending school in-person, so they struggled to become acclimated to the classroom environment (Klosky et al. 660). National averages for reading and math scores fell significantly (Lake and Pillow).

Some parents had ample resources to respond to the pandemic by purchasing their child a new desk for home school, stocking the pantries with plenty of food, and hiring tutors to aid with the transition to online learning. Other families could barely afford internet and other necessities, let alone drop everything to ensure their children had a specialized study space. These kinds of class differences and their effects on children's lives were a key theme in Robert Putnam's *Our Kids.* The Covid-19 pandemic magnified class differences that Putnam had already observed prior to the pandemic crisis.

As evidenced throughout this chapter, many libertarians regularly disregarded the common good throughout the pandemic. Robin G. Nelson, a biological anthropologist, argued that the Covid-19 "microbe revealed the lie of rugged individualism" and that "We are not self-sufficient and independent; we never have been. Our fates are bound together. Taking care of others is taking care of ourselves" (Nelson).

Collective Efforts to Tackle Covid-19

A collective approach to the Covid-19 crisis would have the potential to solve things like they did with World War II. Studies have shown that communities that "were already heavily invested in social safety nets with measures such as paid sick leave were able to lower Covid[-19] rates," while communities that were "invested in the ideology of self-sufficiency and individualism prolonged suffering and loss of life" (Nelson). Other studies have shown that nations whose values were rooted in collectivism fared much better in terms of virus mitigation than nations focused on individualism (Courtney et al.).

It is important to note that there are positive examples and success stories of communities managing Covid-19 in the United States. The Navajo Nation "ran its own vaccine education campaigns and implemented in-house vaccine-distribution policies," resulting in higher vaccination rates on reservations than in surrounding areas (Nelson). Community efforts such as meal and grocery deliveries among neighbors, libraries giving out free Covid-19 testing kits, and scheduling events remotely instead of in-person were additional examples of how some citizens demonstrated a commitment to the common good. The frontline worker commitment during Covid-19 was significant and inspiring. Frontline workers, including healthcare workers, employees of grocery stores, some restaurants, waste management services, public transportation, and police and fire services, put their own health and safety at risk to ensure others' basic needs were met during the pandemic. These frontline workers have borne the burdens of others' selfishness during the pandemic, leaving many of them stressed, burnt out, angry, and resentful. YouTube and social media sites such as TikTok are filled with first-person

accounts from frontline workers with testimonies of what they have dealt with since 2020.

Covid-19 and citizens' responses to the pandemic exposed the fissures and divisions in our social contract. The selfishness that was displayed through acts of hoarding, harassment of public officials, and disregarding public health policies proved that social capital is in short supply. The crisis magnified existing divisions, especially for minorities and low-income individuals. Dimensions of the crisis continue as hospital beds remain overloaded, people still refuse to get vaccinated, and case numbers of new Covid-19 variants continue to rise each day.

The following chapter will discuss the ways in which individual governments, nonprofits, and communities are working to revive a sense of social reciprocity and community, and how it might look in a post-pandemic United States.

Chapter 4
Social Capital Programming Inventory

This chapter spotlights several organizations whose goals include reviving a sense of social reciprocity and building community as we move into a new post-pandemic era in the United States. This chapter's inventory is not exhaustive by any means, as these programs exist in all the states and multiple localities. Instead, this inventory is meant to be illustrative of the many community-building efforts going on around the country. Here, the chapter highlights case examples of programs aiming to rebuild and reimagine social capital. The case examples were selected for regional representation, urban and rural communities, and, most importantly, organizations that reach out to diverse and marginalized populations.

Before discussing the contemporary cases, it is worth noting that the federal government in the 1960s, as part of its War on Poverty, experimented with community building through Community Action Agencies. Although the federal program was short-lived, operating for only two years, CAAs continue to do "good work" at the local level still today.

Community Action Agencies

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Economic Opportunity Act as part of his declared War on Poverty. This act set up the platform for Community Action Agencies (CAAs), which were designed "to empower individuals, families, and communities in poverty and to assist them along the path to economic self-sufficiency" (Pasachoff 248). Key to this was the federal requirement that CAA boards include

members of the community so that they would have a chance at “maximum feasible participation.” U.S. Code requires that CAAs are run by tripartite boards, with 1/3 of board members representing public officials, 1/3 representing “low-income individuals and families in the neighborhood served,” and the final 1/3 representing “officials or members of business, industry, labor, religious, law enforcement, education, or other major groups and interests in the community served” (“Community Services Block Grant Act”).

In 1965, Head Start programs began to serve preschool-aged children in low-income families by providing them with healthcare and early education services. Today the national network of Community Action programs is the largest provider of Head Start programs. The benefits of Head Start programs not only impact preschool-aged children, but also the parents of these children. Head Start provides parents with essential training and employment opportunities (Pasachoff 251). The program was initially controversial at its start but is now a well-established program with bipartisan congressional support.

Today, there are more than 1,100 CAAs operating throughout the United States in rural and urban communities alike (Pasachoff 250). Community Action Agencies have been working to promote the bolstering of social capital within poor and marginal communities for many years. The inclusion of local residents is important because it grounds CAA programs in community members’ experiences and knowledge rather than taking a top-down, “expert” bureaucratic approach. These programs are developed with input from members and administrators who take their lived experiences and preferences into account.

It is also important to note the success of CAAs in Appalachia, where this thesis was written. In Southeastern Ohio for example, HAPCAP (Hocking-Athens-Perry County Community Action) is integral to the communities it serves across these counties. It provides services related to child development, utility assistance, employment and case management, and transportation, to name a few ("Our Programs"). HAPCAP's car seat program, for example, provides income-eligible recipients with a free children's car seat and training on proper installation and use. HAPCAP provides an Early Head Start program for parents and their children from birth to age three. Through home visits, children are provided with early education, parents are provided with parent-child activities, and health care services are provided from pregnancy to age three ("Early Head Start"). HAPCAP's Head Start program serves children aged three to five. The program provides children with free preschool, free health and dental care, and healthy meals. The program "promotes education, encourages creativity and embraces diversity" ("Head Start"). It should also be noted that representatives from HAPCAP were present at many of the events detailed in the autoethnographic chapter of this thesis.

Case Studies

The following table has been developed to help examine more easily the case examples of successful social capital programming. Additional information related to each case in the chart will then be discussed. Following each example, the ways in which the programs, tools, and practices fit with Putnam's conception of how to build and maintain social capital will be identified. The case examples in this chapter draw on and extend upon grassroots and community-led practices established by the earlier CAAs.

Program Name	Program Description	Tools/Practices
CAP (Community Action Program) Tulsa	CAP Tulsa is a Community Action Program that uses a "two-generation approach" to create opportunities for families to connect with one another and create a network of peer support ("Strengthening Human Services through Social Capital").	- Early Head Start and Head Start school programs - ESL (English as a Second Language) courses where "parents often bond over their shared goal of learning English to improve their ability to parent" (*Case Study: CAP Tulsa* 2) - Linking participants with employers and organizations that can provide resources such as wages or health insurance - Facilitating discussions that allow families to overcome cultural differences that may prevent them from developing a sense of social capital
Roca, Inc.	Roca Inc. works to engage young people at risk in Maryland and Massachusetts to "help them tap into new, positive social networks, including with employers in the community" so they can avoid incarceration and urban violence ("Strengthening Human Services through Social Capital").	- "Relentless outreach" tactics, where a staff member consistently calls/texts/visits a young person and their existing network to offer support (*Case Study: Roca Inc.* 1–2) - Family nights and community dinners for both mothers and children - First Nations Tribe Circle "where each person speaks about issues, successes, goals, trauma, or conflict he is experiencing" (*Case Study: Roca Inc.* 2) - Peer mentoring - Storytelling and sharing experiences from formerly incarcerated individuals with backgrounds similar to the youth that Roca serves - Generation of empathy in the Circles (*Case Study: Roca Inc.* 2)
LatinoLEAD	LatinoLEAD is a network of over 2500 people in Minnesota working to empower the state's Latinx community by "investing in individual development" such as networking opportunities and "building coalitions for positive change" through community leadership teams ("Our Story").	- ALP workshops on strengths-based mindsets, wellness, wealth planning, and Latinx history in Minnesota - Volunteer community lead teams that work to address "the education gap, negative perceptions of the community, public policy issues most impacting the community, and leadership development" ("About") - Group sharing of bold stories of "success and impact as one way to elevate [the Latinx] community and its influence" ("Our Story")

Program Name	Program Description	Tools/Practices
My Brother's Keeper Alliance	The My Brother's Keeper Alliance utilizes the work of "the collective work of community leaders, members, and public and private agencies" to help young Black men in the United States reach their full potential through "sustainable, place-based change" ("Our Work").	- Technical assistance and training for young men as they enter college or the workforce - Integrating public health approaches to reduce violence in high-risk communities - Multifaceted reentry programs for those who were formerly incarcerated, providing them with housing, emergency assistance, medical care (including mental health care), workforce development programs ("Keeping Kids on Track and Giving Them Second Chances") - Creating networking opportunities for employers who will provide quality post-secondary learning opportunities
UNC American Indian Center	The UNC American Indian Center works to improve the lives on North Carolina's indigenous population through collaborative university-sponsored programming and initiatives.	- Holistic health initiatives that prioritize the health of community members and community infrastructure - Inviting perspectives of people that come from a "variety of backgrounds, from recent college graduates and grassroots organizers to tribal administrators and council representatives" ("NC Native Leadership Institute") - Collaborative meetings engaging both tribal and non-tribal partners
Project CARE	Project CARE works to empower individuals with disabilities in the Cincinnati area that have been affected by or are at risk of domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, or sexual assault.	- Bonding over shared experiences with peer advocates - Collaborative art workshops and education sessions - Self-advocacy programming - Community-based intervention services through the area's YWCA

CAP Tulsa

CAP Tulsa's mission is to help young people in working-class family units grow up and reach success. The organization does this through a two-generation approach with its Head Start program, meaning that preschool-aged children are able to participate in educationally-based programs while their parents attend programs designed to "increase parenting skills, employability and earning potential" ("Who We Are"). The organization values empowerment, growth, and intersectional understanding. The organization strives to create an inclusive space for employees, children, and families by welcoming multiple perspectives and stories. Those involved with CAP Tulsa are encouraged to "acknowledge and seek to understand structural inequities and their impact over time" while also acknowledging "the power and benefits of diversity and inclusivity" ("Core Values").

CAP Tulsa emphasizes parental involvement in educational activities so that students and parents can create a dense support network throughout the overall schooling experience. They promote this through various program initiatives. Family Connections, for example, is a once-a-month meeting for parents, educators, and community members to connect and discuss their different perspectives on predetermined topics. First Five Years consists of interactive sessions throughout the school year where parents work together to learn skills that create a positive foundation for their children. Additionally, the organization facilitates parent-teacher conferences and home visits ("Family Engagement").

CAP Tulsa advances bonding social capital through the peer-to-peer cohort model. This allows participants to connect with others who are going through similar

situations (*Case Study: CAP Tulsa* 2). The organization strengthens bridging social capital in the area through the ESL (English as a Second Language) courses. Putnam asserts that bridging social capital requires us to "transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves," which occurs when participants in this class come from a variety of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds (*Bowling Alone* 411).

Roca, Inc.

Roca, Inc. was founded in 1988 by Molly Baldwin. The program originally focused its efforts on teen pregnancy prevention but eventually evolved to target "high-risk young men out of schools, gang members and high-risk young mothers" ("Our Story"). Roca is best known for its relentless outreach approach. The organization reaches out to young people while they are in the middle of a crisis as opposed to after. Through friends, family, employers, and other members of the young person's network, Roca continues to reach out until the person is ready to receive help. The organization values "deep and meaningful relationships [that] can support [young people] and push them over time to make critical changes in their lives" ("Our Intervention Model")**.**

Roca became a key player in the restorative justice movement through its implementation of Peacemaking Circles with "program participants, staff, families, police, criminal justice agencies, community-based organizations and other community members" ("Our Story"). Restorative justice is a process that involves becoming accountable and taking responsibility for actively repairing any harm that has been done. In the Peacemaking Circle, participants share personal stories of struggle and triumph so

that the rest of the group can bond over shared experiences and build a stronger sense of empathy. The organization is responsible for implementing Peacemaking Circles in a contemporary setting. Roca also partners with well-established organizations such as Abt Associates, Massachusetts General Hospital, and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

Roca strengthens bonding social capital through the peer mentoring program and other networking events that are designed to provide youth and their families with an avenue to connect with others going through relatable challenges. Bridging social capital occurs through the "relentless outreach" program, as young people are paired with members from a diverse staff, including people who were formerly incarcerated (*Case Study: Roca Inc.* 2).

LatinoLEAD

LatinoLEAD is a network of over 2500 people based in Minnesota working to empower the state's Latinx community. It was founded in 2013 after the founders Sandra Vargas, Luz Maria Frias, and Mike Fernandez decided that "the community would benefit from a cross-sector network of Latinx leaders." The group consists of people from "nonprofit service providers, grassroots activists, and business sectors," with an emphasis on helping each other learn from various life perspectives ("About"). LatinoLEAD uses its resources to build volunteer teams of experts and everyday activists working together to address issues such as educational disparities for K-12, higher education, special education, and English language learners. The organization also has an online career center where members can search for jobs and get help building their resumes. In 2020,

LatinoLEAD was recognized by Minnesota Governor Tim Walz for its leadership in "convening, communicating and engaging Latinxs across the state" during the Covid-19 pandemic ("About"). LatinoLEAD's values center on leadership, equity, achievement, and diplomacy. LatinoLEAD advances leadership opportunities for Latinx Minnesotans and promotes equity so that Latinx community members feel comfortable with broad civic participation. It embraces an "asset-based view of Latinx culture and achievement," and aims for growth independently and collectively within the Latinx community ("About").

LatinoLEAD encourages Latinx populations to use their "culture as an asset for their advancement," opening up pathways for bonding relationships among Latinx Minnesotans ("About"). The organization also creates opportunities for bridging through the various action teams people may join. Based on one's interests, they are able to advocate for mentorship, school funding, and general interests. The different advocacy groups all collaborate with each other for the common good.

My Brother's Keeper Alliance

The My Brother's Keeper Alliance was formed by President Barack Obama in 2014 following the death of Trayvon Martin. Obama explained that this organization was formed to serve as a "call to action for the nation to address the persistent opportunity gaps boys and young men of color face" and to ensure that these young men have the resources to reach their full potential beyond the widespread structural and institutional inequities they have been faced with ("About"). The organization uses a research-based

approach to connect young men with community leaders and public and private partners who will help them reach their goals.

Currently, 250 communities have accepted the My Brother's Keeper Community Challenge, answering the call to reduce youth violence and foster successful mentoring programs ("Our Work"). In 2014, Chicago accepted the MBK Community Challenge. Since then, MBK Chicago has launched several "mentorship, violence prevention, summer jobs and workforce training" programs for young men of color. Cleveland became an MBK Community in 2014. MBK Cleveland "holds summer camps revolving around manufacturing" to expose participants to potential careers ("Find an MBK Community").

Youth members are connected to a Success Mentor, who can then help them navigate the six key life milestones that the alliance has found to be predictive of later success. The six milestones are as follows: First is entering school with a readiness to learn. Second is reading at the appropriate grade level by third grade, with an emphasis on reading to learn and not just learning to read. Third is graduating high school and becoming college or career ready. Fourth is completing postsecondary education or job training. Fifth is becoming employed. Sixth is remaining safe from youth violence, and/or receiving the treatment and education necessary for a second chance ("Our Work").

During the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Success Mentors helped their mentees obtain "access to technology and school supplies for remote instruction, supported food distribution, and helped [families] navigate the system to enroll in a summer program to combat learning loss" ("My Brother's Keeper: Seven Years of Walking Alongside Youth and Communities").

The cultural basis of this program allows for bonding over shared experiences as young black men growing up in the United States. Opportunities for bridging across class and age differences occur through the Success Mentor program. The geographically diverse nature of this program also allows people throughout 250 different communities to share a common goal of addressing the racial opportunity gap.

UNC American Indian Center

The University of North Carolina (UNC) American Indian Center is an example of a social-capital-based partnership between an institution of higher education and indigenous populations in the area. UNC put together a brief of best practices when engaging with Native Nations, encouraging partnerships built on respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and balance ("Engaged Partnerships with Native Nations and Communities"). These best practices advocate for the reverence of Native Nations leaders and tribal citizens, valuing them as experts and considering them partners throughout the collaborative process. The brief also argues for the importance of balancing academic knowledge with indigenous knowledge and traditions.

Initiatives include the Healthy Native North Carolinians network, which focuses on community revitalization, cultural preservation, tribal infrastructure improvements, and activities that promote indigenous ecological understanding ("Healthy Native North Carolinians Network"). Another initiative is the NC Native Leadership Institute (NLI), which is "the only culturally tailored leadership training program for current and emerging" native leaders who want to foster unity and community across tribes in North Carolina ("NC Native Leadership Institute"). Additionally, UNC's American Indian

Center administers the NC Native Asset Coalition (NAC), which works with native communities to preserve and promote economic and financial assets for indigenous peoples.

The UNC American Indian Center promotes bonding through opportunities for collaboration around common advocacy interests, such as leadership, health promotion, or community revitalization. The center also promotes bridging across the state by bringing together different indigenous groups as well as university partners, all with varying backgrounds and perspectives. This bridging creates a richer understanding of indigenous culture and traditions.

Project CARE

Finally, Project CARE is an organization based in Cincinnati that focuses on providing services to individuals with disabilities that have been affected by or are at risk of violence. Research shows that people with disabilities are at a higher risk of experiencing violence, so Project CARE aims to create a safe space for relationship building and healing for those who have experienced domestic or sexual violence. The organization's mission is to empower people with disabilities to benefit from programming opportunities that are "welcoming, comprehensive, and without barriers" ("Project CARE"). The organization's values are based on respect, equality, and visibility for survivors with disabilities (*Case Study: Project CARE* 1). Project CARE focuses on fostering relationships between survivors and peer advocates. This allows for the creation of authentic friendships and a thicker sense of social capital because they have a shared experience. Program participants are regularly encouraged by staff and peer advocates to

"take charge" and lead classes or meetings so that they, too, can develop as leaders. After attending meetings or classes and becoming comfortable with the group, participants may be asked to design their own programming to share with their support network. Project CARE differs from typical support groups in that its events are peer-led rather than clinician-led.

Participants bond over their shared experiences, which is an important factor in helping them work through challenges together while building authentic friendships and creating a strong support system (*Case Study: Project CARE* 2). Programming is made available through the Cincinnati YWCA, removing barriers to access such as financial components, age restrictions, or even transportation requirements. The program has utilized "secure, private online platforms" to implement socially-distant classes as well (*Case Study: Project CARE* 2).

Empathy, Trust, and Social Capital

As evidenced in the chart above, community-based programming aimed at the empowerment of affected populations are playing important roles at the ground level when it comes to developing social capital. A key element of success is the need to practice empathy. This is crucial following the Covid-19 pandemic, when the United States found itself with an empathy deficiency outlined as in the previous chapter. Social scientist Michael Carolan suggests that we need to "give in to empathy," explaining that we need to rethink the positivist understanding of empathy and instead evaluate our positionality in a world of multiple perspectives. He clarifies that the original definition of empathy involves having the "capacity to gain a grasp of the content of other people's

minds, and to predict and explain what they will think, feel, and do" (Carolan 187). That being said, Carolan does not feel like empathy should be focused on predicting the thoughts of others; it should be more focused on "nurturing affective perspective-taking that is diffused, multiple, and contested" (188).

Carolan uses the terms *headland* and *heartland* to explain "a fissure in how Western thought has traditionally broken down experience" (6). *Headland* describes experiences involving the head, cognition, or reason. On the other hand, everything else is categorized as *heartland*. This includes emotion, embodiment, and affect. Carolan feels that focusing on the heartland is crucial to repairing and saving today's democracies. More specifically, he feels that faith placed in the headland is faith misplaced. He explains that sharing facts or statistics with people is simply *not enough* to persuade them to change their minds or actions. He notes that because the headland model places importance on facts, it is unsuccessful in today's political environment (Carolan 7). Since the election of Donald Trump, partisan polarization has grown exponentially. People on both political sides are subject to receiving biased facts from the traditional media, as well as social media. It is difficult for some individuals to differentiate fact from fiction in such a crowded news and information environment. Issues that should be less politicized (like Covid-19, climate change, or minority rights) become topics that are difficult to have conversations around since nobody agrees on them. Carolan also notes a study that found that more knowledge was actually shown to increase the divide between people who acknowledge climate change and people who do not (8). Because facts are no longer viewed as objective, Carolan deems them an insufficient tool for political persuasion.

The heartland model, on the other hand, focuses on building empathy to connect with others instead of trying to convince people that they are wrong, and you are right. An example of the heartland model at play is how those who are religious, conservative, or both undergo "a change of heart after the 'coming out' of a loved one" (Carolan 9). Oftentimes, connections with others can be more powerful than political divisions. The key is to find a commonality or significant connection as a base from which to build out empathy. Practicing empathy will allow us to understand where others are coming from, offering a better sense of bridging social capital as we are able to connect to others with different backgrounds than our own. We must begin to understand each other and generate authentic empathy, even if this just occurs with loved ones, classmates, or coworkers. Every conversation counts. We can take our workplaces, classrooms, or family gatherings and use them to build a stronger sense of community by appreciating the differences that exist among us.

Along with an empathy deficiency, the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated a clear erosion of trust among individuals and communities. This distrust extended to government institutions, businesses, community groups, and individual relationships. Kristin Lord suggests six ways to repair declining social trust. The first is to ensure that institutions are effective and deliver benefits to real people. Although it may seem mundane, the day-to-day competent executions of programs and services are necessary to repair trust in governmental and civic institutions. Second, Lord argues that we must develop future leaders that act in the interest of the common good and not for their own self-interest. There is a strong need for leaders who will put the needs of others first instead of "enrich[ing] themselves at public expense" (Lord). Third, she argues that

accountability and transparency must be strengthened. This can be done by allowing for a complete freedom of the press and ensuring government openness through audits and other policies. Fourth, Lord states that to rebuild trust, citizens need to be engaged in solving community and societal challenges together. Trust is strengthened when people feel that they are part of a larger community that matters and that takes their voices into account (Lord). A fifth concern is the need to strengthen social inclusion. When members of marginalized groups are no longer made to feel like they are being deprived of certain opportunities because of their identity or status, there will be more chances for community building. Sectarian divisions have "profoundly undermined good governance and economic prosperity" and have "all too frequently formed the pretext to group violence and displacement," Lord states. Finally, she expresses the need to establish a real commitment. Civic leaders must make a sincere, conceded effort to acknowledge the decline in social trust. They must also work together with other leaders (such as philanthropists, businesses, or NGOs) to address this decline.

In summary, we must work to foster empathy and a deeper sense of social trust going forward. Organizations such as CAP Tulsa, Roca, Inc., LatinoLEAD, My Brother's Keeper Alliance, the UNC American Indian Center, and Project CARE all serve as examples of programs whose aims are to rebuild and enhance social capital, especially for members of diverse communities. They have been successful because they value the input and expertise of local community members.

Chapter 5
Autoethnographic Observations on Social Capital in Southeast Ohio

Although I was raised in Cleveland, Ohio, I have spent the last few years in southeast Ohio. I began my college career in 2019 as a Political Science student at Ohio University's Honors Tutorial College. I did not have a concrete plan as to why I chose this major or what I wanted to do with it, but my initial goal was to study politics on a pre-law track. My interest in social capital was initially sparked during a political science course in the fall semester of my first year. *POLS 2000: Introduction to American Politics, Policy, and Administration* opened my eyes to the world of social capital through the scholarship of Robert D. Putnam. The following semester, I asked my professor for an independent study course that would allow me to study social capital and social reciprocity in further depth. Each week, the professor and I met to discuss readings that focused on restoring faith in the government's role as a caretaker of its people by instituting a stronger sense of community. Soon thereafter, Ohio University shut down because of Covid-19, so we continued our lessons via telephone. The following semester, I took another similar course online and continued to do personal research on the topic until the time came to choose a topic for my senior thesis.

Clearly, social capital had become a great interest of mine, both academically and personally, so choosing social capital as my thesis topic was an easy decision. As a student at Ohio University, I wanted to experience more directly community in southeastern Ohio. I began to attend different community events, such as those outlined in this chapter. The first event I attended was a Halloween party hosted by the South East

Ohio Hope Center, the only recovery community organization (RCO) in southeastern Ohio. A recovery community organization is an independent, non-profit organization that is run by people in recovery or who have lived experience with loved ones in recovery. Through my work and volunteer experiences with the South East Ohio Hope Center, I have encountered people with different political views and have better understood the rural-urban divide. Having grown up in the Cleveland area, I have been given a different perspective now that I reside in Athens County. I have learned that rural populations struggle with substance use because there are limited resources available in rural areas, and many people are afraid to reach out for help due to existing stigmas. I became involved with the RCO through my work as a Voinovich Undergraduate Research Scholar. This program at Ohio University allows students of all academic backgrounds to connect their passions with real-life research experiences.

I continued to attend events hosted by the RCO and other community groups throughout my undergraduate career. Once this thesis project took shape towards the end of my junior year, I started to follow up more systematically on community programs and events for research purposes. I felt it would be important to root myself in the Appalachian region as Athens became my new home. My partner teaches in the area, and I intend to stay in Athens for at least the next two years while I complete graduate school. In continuing my education at Ohio University, I plan to obtain my Master of Social Work. I attribute my interest in social work to my experiences with the South East Ohio Hope Center.

Autoethnography Focus Points

Event Name	Event Host	Event Location	Event Date
Halloween Bash	South East Ohio Hope Center (SEOHC)	*Nelsonville Library* 95 W Washington St **Nelsonville, OH** 45764	10/28/2021
RCO Pool Party	South East Ohio Hope Center (SEOHC)	*Nelsonville Water Park* 40 W Canal St **Nelsonville, OH** 45764	8/25/2022
YAP Happy Hour	Young Athens Professionals (YAP)	*Eclipse Company Store* 11309 Jackson Dr **The Plains, OH** 45780	9/8/2022
Ohio Pawpaw Festival	Attended on behalf of South East Ohio Hope Center (SEOHC)	*Lake Snowden* 5900 US-50 **Albany, OH** 45710	9/16/2022
Eastern H.S. Football Game (Homecoming)	Eastern Local School District	*Eastern Local High School* 38900 OH-7 **Reedsville, OH** 45772	9/23/2022
Halloween Bash	South East Ohio Hope Center (SEOHC)	*Nelsonville Library* 95 W Washington St **Nelsonville, OH** 45764	10/27/2022
Rural Action Open House	Rural Action	*Community Makerspace* 751 W Union St **Athens, OH** 45701	12/13/2022

Halloween in Nelsonville (My Introduction to Community Outreach)

Thursday, October 28, 2021, around 4:30 PM, I hopped in my car, put on a podcast (if I'm being honest, I do not remember which one, but it was most likely something from NPR), and followed the commands of my navigation system. As I merged onto US-33 W toward Columbus, I started to get nervous because I really had no idea where I was going. I knew I was going to Nelsonville, sure, but the area and the people were unfamiliar. I didn't know how to prepare myself mentally. My anxious mind asked myself questions such as, *What would the people be like there? Will I stick out? Will they know I'm there to help and not judge them? Is it going to be awkward? What exactly will I be doing at this event?* Something I wanted to focus on during this experience was the difference between community-oriented (mutual) aid versus charity embedded with power dynamics.

Even though Nelsonville was only twenty minutes away, or less than fifteen miles, it felt like a different world. I was used to growing up in a suburb or a city. This community was much smaller. None of my friends from school were there. The only person I "knew" was my boss, but we had only ever met via Zoom because of the pandemic. So, I still felt out of place.

Once I arrived, though, I started to feel better. I recognized another familiar face, a woman I volunteered with through the Athens County Democratic Party. She seemed excited to see me. My boss greeted me with a hug and thanked me for my courage for being there. I thought to myself whether or not showing up for one's community was *courageous.* To me, it was just something I felt was important to do. Perhaps he meant that not many students from Ohio University make it out to Nelsonville or that not many

people would choose to spend their free time handing out food to strangers during a pandemic.

The event's mood was set by the music, provided by a warmhearted DJ. I learned more about this DJ at each event hosted by the RCO. He was in long-term recovery and was happy to be a part of this event to provide a safe space for others to build a recovery community with their family and chosen family. He played Halloween music as well as classics like Journey's *Don't Stop Believin'*. He threw a dance party and a limbo competition for the kids. I watched as a woman who was probably 70 years old embraced her inner child and danced with the costumed children.

At this event, I helped serve and package meals for Nelsonville's community members and spent time interacting with the children there and complimenting their costumes. My favorite costume involved a boy no older than six or seven dressed as Freddie Mercury from the 1985 Live Aid concert. Other volunteers at this event distributed Naloxone and brochures for mental health services in the area. Participating in this event was truly inspiring because it was there that I realized I was meant to be out in the field, interacting with people and advocating alongside them for whatever their communities needed.

Since then, I have continued to work with the Southeast Ohio Hope Center, the only Recovery Community Organization (RCO) in Southeast Ohio. This group has hosted other events similar to the Halloween dinner, including a pool party which will be discussed later. The recurring theme of these events revolves around raising awareness around addiction and overdose prevention while providing a fun atmosphere for community members.

An Evening at Nelsonville Pool

This was the second community outreach event in Nelsonville, OH, that I have participated in. The first event took place in October of last year (2021), and it was a Halloween party-themed community dinner held in a lot outside the library. I was met with many familiar faces from the last event returning to this one.

I had forgotten about this event until I received a notification from the Google Calendar app: "Reminder - Nelsonville Pool Party in *10 minutes.*" I frantically raced around my apartment, trying to figure out how I would make it to Canal Street in Nelsonville from High Street in Athens within the next ten minutes. It was simply not possible. I did not want to show up late, so I debated even showing up at all. I came up with every excuse I could: *I really wasn't in the mood to leave the house. I was supposed to make a special dinner to celebrate the first week of school. I was tired. I had other things I could be doing.* But I had made a commitment to the RCO (Recovery Community Organization) earlier this month, and they were counting on me. So, I went… And I ended up feeling glad that I did!

When I got there, the same DJ was setting up his equipment. Other members of the RCO were setting up the tent with one table dedicated to resources (Naloxone training sign-ups, flyers with available career courses listed, transportation resources, and more) while another table held the two hundred and forty slices of Little Caesar's pizza, two cases (twenty-four boxes) of Tagalongs and Do Si Dos, and two cases of water. All of these would be available to people at the pool, and all we asked in return is for attendants aged eighteen or older to fill out a three-question survey about addiction and whether

they knew someone suffering from it. This survey data allows us to host these events through grant funding.

Once 6:00 PM hit, the families piled in. Admission was free regardless of whether someone had a Nelsonville Water Park/Aquatic Center membership, as the RCO covered entry fees. With music playing, kids jumping in the pool, and their parents filling up plates, I was ecstatic that we had such a great turnout. I walked around and talked to some of the families, then sat back at the resource table and spoke to more. The DJ played limbo music, and I watched kids line up for the competition, also giving their names and what schools they went to. There were children from Nelsonville-York all the way to Eastern Elementary. This helped me understand how far-reaching our community involvement efforts were. For reference, Eastern Local School District, located in Reedsville, OH, is about forty miles or forty-five minutes away from Nelsonville. I realized that when communities survive and thrive on events such as these, distance does not play as much a factor as one would expect.

As the event was wrapping up, we had plenty of food left. I handed out whole pizzas to the children. Some asked if they could take home food for their family, while others shyly grabbed whatever slices were left on the table. I aimed to make everyone feel comfortable utilizing the resources available to them at this event.

Free Appetizers at Eclipse Company Store

The next event I attended was a happy hour put on by the Young Athens Professionals (YAP). The event occurred at Eclipse Company Store in The Plains, about ten to fifteen minutes from uptown Athens. At some point throughout my college career,

I wanted to improve my networking skills and signed up for YAP's email newsletter. When I received the initial invitation to this event, I felt excited. My attendance at this event would not only provide an experience that I could feature in the autoethnography portion of my thesis, but it would also give me a chance to eat at my favorite restaurant in this area.

I dressed in business casual clothing and brought along my roommate and two of her friends so I would have a group of people to converse with if, for some reason, there were not many people to chat with. When we arrived, there were a few college students, but most people seemed like they were in their mid to late twenties. People were primarily closed-off or set in their own groups, although I did get to talk to a few people. Most people were huddled together in clumps of only a few people, with their body language displaying the idea that they were not open to conversation.

The first person I talked to had earned a degree in Hospitality Management from Ohio University. He said he used to work at Nelson Dining Hall washing dishes but is currently the manager of another dining hall on campus. After a few minutes of talking, he left to get a drink and began speaking to another group. The next person I met was from New Jersey, one of the only people I had met that evening that was originally from somewhere other than Ohio. He moved here to attend college and never left. He studied Music Production and now makes guitars. He brought one to the function and showed a few people.

The event's intent was important because it brought together young working people in Athens for a chance to kick back and relax but also socialize and network. However, I did not notice much of a sense of community at this event. The conversations

I tried to have ended up being surface-level and did not result in me feeling more connected to the community. It was enjoyable talking to others about their careers and goals, though I did not find the connections I made to be as meaningful as the other events I attended for this thesis.

Pawpaws, Pawpaws, and More Pawpaws

The first time I attended the Ohio Pawpaw Festival was in 2019, only a few weeks after I had moved to Athens to start college. I did not have access to a car, so I rode the bus from Athens to Albany and spent the entire day soaking up what the event had to offer. Pawpaws are an edible tree fruit native to North America. They are considered an Appalachian food staple. The Ohio Pawpaw Festival is a community event that celebrates the fruit by providing education to the community as well as pawpaw-based food options, competitions, and live local music. The festival partnered with Rural Action to ensure that the event was one with zero waste. Rural Action is a prominent nonprofit environmental actor in the region, and part of its mission is to model how zero waste can be achieved practically.

The second time attending the festival, I attended on behalf of the South East Ohio Hope Center (SEOHC) RCO. We pitched a yellow tent and made a sober safe space available to anyone who wanted to steer clear from alcoholic beverages, which were abundantly available from different vendors, or for those who just wanted a cool place to sit. It was over eighty-five degrees that weekend, so we also provided free water bottles. Like our community outreach initiatives in Nelsonville, we offered fentanyl testing strips and Narcan to anyone who wanted it.

After a few hours of answering people's questions about Narcan and drug overdoses in the area, someone asked to sit down in one of our shade-covered chairs. He did not share his name; however, he stuck around to chat with us for the rest of the day. I learned that he was from Boston, Massachusetts, and was traveling on a bus trip when he happened to see an advertisement for the festival. He shared what life is like in Boston compared to Athens. From this conversation, I learned quite a bit about the community programs and services that exist there and how they differ from those in a rural community such as Athens. Although we had never met before, this man was comfortable spending the day with the other RCO members and myself, and I am grateful for the sense of cross-community connection that he provided us.

Compared to other community events, this festival was the least financially accessible. Not only was the price of admission twenty dollars per person, but all food and beverages had to be purchased at less than reasonable prices from vendors. I was fortunate enough to have my admission covered by the RCO, but many others attending the event did not have that luxury. That being said, the Pawpaw Festival remains an informative, fun, and significant annual event in the southeastern Ohio community, and I will continue to attend each year for as long as I am able.

Eastern High School's Football Home Opener

I will admit that I was quite excited about going to this football game for several reasons. First, I had not been to a football game since high school. I was involved in my school's marching band, so I had undoubtedly been to at least fifty games over the years. Even though the bleachers often separated people into various groups (the student

section, the parents, the band), I always enjoyed watching the community come together to rally for our team. Additionally, this was my partner's first football game as the marching band director, so I was especially looking forward to supporting the band.

When I arrived at Eastern High School, the parking lot was filled. People were parked all along the side of the main road, indeed a sign that the *entire* community had come out to support the Eastern Eagles. I parked my car, headed to the stadium, and began searching for a seat after purchasing my ticket. What I observed was two hours of full-fledged community support and excitement directed toward the football team. Most people wore green, the school's color, and many snacked on something from the concession stand run by the Music Boosters. Halfway through the game, the marching band went onto the field to play the fight song. Team morale was high as the crowd cheered, "Here we go, Eagles, here we go!"

I did not know anyone at the game, so I sat by myself on the bleachers until an older couple asked if they could sit next to me. Through conversation, I learned that their grandson was a senior on the football team. They told me all about his plans for college and beyond. I mentioned to them that I attend Ohio University, and they began to ask me whether I knew this person or that person – people that they were friends with. At this event, I truly felt like I experienced the sense of community Putnam discussed in *Bowling Alone*. I experienced bridging social capital through conversations across age and class lines. Regardless of our backgrounds, we bonded over our excitement during the game. Football is a meaningful pastime in southeast Ohio. The football team began the season with a victory, and the energy in the stadium reflected the pride that the Eastern community held for their team.

Second Annual Halloween Bash

By the time the RCO's second Halloween bash had rolled around, the anxiety I felt before the first Halloween party had been replaced with uncontained excitement. Not only was Halloween my favorite part of the year, but I was also looking forward to seeing my coworkers and friends from SEOHC and the members of the Nelsonville community that I had gotten to know. I was looking forward to seeing the various costumes people had created.

The event was bigger this year, allowing us to connect with more community members. Also, more food was available, and there were even options for people who wanted to take it to go. There were more tables set up with community programs and resources, including SAOP (Survivor Advocacy Outreach Program) and HAPCAP (Hocking Athens Perry Community Action Program). The music was, of course, provided again by the same DJ that always attends our events. Later in the evening, he hosted a limbo competition. I helped by holding the limbo stick with another member of the RCO, and we congratulated the winner with a gift card to Little Caesar's.

Sitting at the table handing out Narcan and fentanyl test strips, I watched in awe at how the organization's reach had expanded in the past year. There were less than fifty people at our first event, but there were close to one hundred or perhaps more at this one. I was surprised when I started talking to someone and found out that he and a few friends had traveled all the way from Cleveland (about three and half hours away) because they wanted to learn about South East Ohio Hope Center. The widespread impact of our community organization was astounding.

Rural Action Open House

This event took place right before Ohio University's Winter Break, so the uptown Athens area felt like a ghost town to me. I was relieved that once I ventured further from campus for this event, plenty of community members were in attendance. The parking lot was completely full, with some people double-parking or making up spots along the main side of the road. The event took place at Upcycle Ohio, a social enterprise of Rural Action. Social enterprises are businesses that focus on sustainability and strengthening the communities that they serve. Upcycle Ohio has two sections in the building, the Community Makerspace and the Thrift Store.

When I arrived, I entered through the thrift shop. I took a few minutes to walk around and view everything, but it was crowded, so I only spent a little bit of time in that particular area. I took that as a good sign, though, that a lot of community members had made it out to the event. The thrift store had anything and everything you could imagine, from 90s fashion magazines to fax machines to prom dresses. After browsing the thrift shop, I made my way to the Community Makerspace section of the building. It was divided into a few areas. I first went to the sewing room, which had a library of fabric, thread, embroidery machines, and sewing machines. The next room consisted of a woodshop with various power tools and machinery. Finally, there was a room with a 3D printer and a laser cutter. A community member was demo-ing for anyone who was interested, so I sat for a while and watched as the 3D printer made drywall anchors.

I asked the man to share more about the Community Makerspace with me, and the more I learned, the more intrigued I was. He told me that it was "like a gym membership for the creative side of your brain." Access to the Makerspace meant access to

woodworking and metalworking tools, sewing machines, and looms through an affordable monthly or annual membership. Punch cards are also available for people who may not have the availability to get the most out of a monthly or yearly membership. I was so impressed by this program because crafting is a financially exclusive hobby, and typically people in an area that struggles financially do not have access to affordable crafting tools or outlets. Free and low-cost workshops offered by the maker space also offer a chance to connect with other community members interested in crafting. When talking to the man working with the 3D printer, he explained that people of all ages use the services at the Community Makerspace. I hope to obtain a membership for the summer months, so I can take advantage of the resources that Upcycle Ohio has to offer when I am not as busy with schoolwork.

Conclusion

After attending several community events with various hosts and purposes, I have concluded that the most impactful events were those that valued the knowledge, traditions, and input of the community members welcomed to the event. These types of events allowed for instances of both bonding and bridging, both components which are necessary dimensions of healthy social capital. Extravagant marketing was not so much a necessity compared to a laid-back, inclusive atmosphere. Events that focused on local culture were more successful in promoting social capital than those that did not.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

This chapter concludes this thesis with a summary of my findings in correlation with the earlier posed research questions. It will also discuss the limitations of this study and propose opportunities for further research.

Through my research, I attempted to answer the questions "Did the Covid-19 pandemic weaken or strengthen individuals' sense of community towards others?" and "How might we strengthen a sense of social responsibility and community in the aftermath of the pandemic?" These research questions were responsive to a societal need for a better understanding of social capital and community. The Covid-19 pandemic exemplified a moment of division rather than people coming together in contrast to the community-oriented responses to World War II that Putnam discussed in *Bowling Alone*.

My research indicates that, broadly, the pandemic weakened individuals' sense of community towards one another. I came to this conclusion because of the many recorded acts of citizens acting out of self-interest and openly disregarding community safety. In Chapter Three, I outlined the ways in which elected officials and public health officials faced threats to their safety in response to their Covid-19 guidelines. I discussed the scapegoating and hatred towards Asian Americans that has increased during the pandemic. I also examined the impacts of libertarian individualism on citizens' responses to Covid-19. Further research indicated that the acts of frontline workers and communities such as the Navajo Nation provided positive examples of people managing Covid-19 together in the United States.

Chapter Four develops case examples of communities working together to strengthen social capital in order to generate a sense of social responsibility in the current

moment. The organizations were CAP Tulsa, Roca, Inc., LatinoLEAD, My Brother's Keeper Alliance, the UNC American Indian Center, and Project CARE. These groups are case examples of programs whose aims are to rebuild and enhance social capital for members of diverse communities. Chapter Five offers a first-hand look at community-based events in rural southeastern Ohio. Using autoethnography, I examined several events throughout Athens County and Vinton County that were open to the public. I found that events that took a top-down approach to planning were not as successful at including community members and building a sense of trust. In contrast, events that focused on the knowledge, traditions, and input of community members were better equipped to strengthen the sense of community and social reciprocity.

This study provides a contemporary analysis of social capital and community in the wake of Covid-19. Putnam's *Bowling Alone* was published in 2000, over twenty years ago, and many academics have contributed to the scholarship on social capital since then. The recentness of Covid-19 meant that there was a gap in the literature related to its impact on social capital. I wanted to provide research on this subject with the hope that the next Covid-like crisis will be a moment of unity as opposed to a moment of division. This research contributes to the body of scholarship on social capital that exists in the social science field.

As with any academic thesis, this research is subject to limitations. Due to the time constraints of writing this thesis and the ever-evolving nature of Covid-19, I was unable to fully address the lasting impacts of the pandemic. Future research might address the long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the state of social capital in the United States to fill in these potential gaps.

In sum, this thesis examines the ways that social capital may have been diminished in the United States during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research indicates an increase in individualism and lack of care during the onset of the virus. Through a presentation of case examples of actual programs and autoethnographic journal entries, this thesis considers how individual groups, policymakers, nonprofits, and communities are reviving a sense of community that strengthens social capital moving forward. I conclude with a sense of qualified optimism for the future of social capital. It will be interesting to see whether the patterns established during the Covid-19 crisis will appear in future crises or if people will take a more communal approach. Though evidence of citizens' individualism is prominent, the case examples in Chapter Four and the community events that I witnessed firsthand in Chapter Five provided me with a sense of hope for the future. As I continue my education with a Master of Social Work, I intend to use the research gathered from this thesis to help promote social capital and trust in the communities I work with.

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