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Yuppies and Bootstraps: The Impact of Gentrification on the Preservation of Community Identity and Urban Youth Culture in Somerville MA.

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Yuppies and Bootstraps: The Impact of Gentrification on the Preservation of Community
Identity and Urban Youth Culture in Somerville, MA.

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ABSTRACT

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Gentrification has been at the forefront of dialogue within major social science research fields, as it is a crucial urban phenomenon that prompts fascinating interchange regarding changing definitions of community. Traditional interpretations of this process have highlighted a dynamic in poor urban areas when residential shifts, urban planning, and other forces significantly alter the spatial, social, and cultural configuration of a particular city. Furthermore, much of the gentrification literature focuses on the displacement of poor pre-gentrification residents living in declining “broken” cities. The city of Somerville, MA, provides an interesting and refreshingly different context in which to observe the impact of gentrification. Somerville is unique not only in its ethnic and racial composition, but in its economic profile and the ways in which different populations in the city come to define their “Somerville identity”. This study expands on previous research by exploring the impact of gentrification on the socialization and acquiring of social capital for inner-city youth. Gentrification research has largely ignored the adolescent and youth population. The few studies that have considered them have done so only in the context of deviance. Using analyses of in-depth interviews, surveys, and focus group sessions with adolescent residents of Somerville, MA, this study shed light on the ways in which youth think about their changing urban realities, but also how youth themselves can be positive forces in the preservation, promotion, and revolutionizing of a community identity that is constantly being redefined.

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Introduction

Gentrification has been at the forefront of dialogue within major social science research fields, as it is a crucial urban phenomenon that prompts fascinating interchange regarding changing definitions of community. Traditional interpretations of this process have highlighted a dynamic in poor urban areas when residential shifts, urban planning, and other forces significantly alter the spatial, social, and cultural configuration of a particular city. Although this is process, we see that gentrification literature most notably follows a common story that we are most familiar with—that is, the story of older people who inhabit these pre-gentrification regions and struggle to stay in the houses they grew up in as the areas they once knew become filled with high-end storefronts, frozen yogurt stores, chic pet clothing stores, sushi restaurants, and yoga studios. In analyzing these scenarios, we cannot help but feel sympathy towards this group of people who are forced to move out of their homes due to a rising prices of rent and mortgage. We also feel anger in realizing that a type of community identity is lost with the forced movement of this population. These residents once represented a rich history and could be seen as agents of preservation as they are living representations of what an area used to be. They represent a solidarity that stems from preserving through tribulations and accepting the positives and negatives of their communities.

Who is to blame for this changing urban landscape? Again, in analyzing traditional models of gentrification, we come to believe that the “bad guys” are young urban professionals that arrive in what developers label as economically depressed and needing urgent redevelopment. With the presentation of these two “sides”, we perpetuate a narrative that is unilateral in nature. Not only does this conventional narrative label gentrifying communities as being declining “broken” cities, but it also disregards populations that are not typically even considered in major municipal discourses. In an analysis of the city of Somerville, MA, we see

that gentrification discourses becoming increasingly prevalent due to concerns of Somerville natives. Many of these concerned residents are in fact youth, but due to the fact that gentrification literature has not provided a comprehensive or accurate portrayal of youth experiences, this population is largely misunderstood within this context. The few studies that have considered them have done so only in the context of deviance.

Somerville is unique not only in its ethnic and racial composition, but in its economic profile and the ways in which different populations in the city come to define their “Somerville identity”. The experiences of Somerville youth and the way they come to define their own identity within the context of gentrification are crucial to the understanding of an ever-changing urban world. Using analyses of in-depth interviews, surveys, and focus group sessions with adolescent residents of Somerville, MA, the aim of this study is to expand on previous research by exploring the impact gentrification can have on youth as well as to change the ways traditional literature underscores this population. Most importantly, this study functions to shed light on the ways in which youth can be positive forces in the preservation, promotion, and revolutionizing of a community identity that has is constantly being redefined.

Understanding youth culture can prompt the understanding of our ever-interconnecting world especially with youths’ usage of technology. Even in analyzing youth roles in the major revolutions or movements in the past, youth have always been at the forefront of change due to their ability to hone their unique creativity, energy, and motivation to be able to think of unconventional strategies or innovations. They have an important story to tell. Youth are the essence of community of identity and thus can be facilitators of its preservation and evolution. This study is not only a way to highlight this potential, but to provide an outlet for the youth of Somerville, MA to be heard in ways that challenge established norms.

Chapter One: Literature Review

For many generations, Somerville, a medium-sized city in Massachusetts has been called a city of immigrants—an escape, a safe haven, a place that represented and continues to represent upwards mobility and progress for those who it welcomed with open arms. Having a history that dates back almost four hundred years to the 1660's, it has always been a place characterized by constant change and influxes of new populations, new mindsets, new traditions, and new hopes for the future. Once a part of Boston's Charlestown, Somerville settlers fought to create their own town and improve their rural landscape and progress with mindsets to keep on building (Morris and Martin 2008). Much of that independence and spirit that was used to describe that struggle is still present in city identity (Agarwal 2004). It has come to embody the old “pulling yourself up by your bootstrap” mentality that engulfs older resident's post Industrial Era lifestyles.

In order to understand Somerville's evolution in a modern context, it is necessary to understand its historical context. Somerville has history dating back to the Revolutionary War and as such, if one walks around the city today, one can see many memorials and statues that commemorate such an entrenched history. One example of the history sites is where Paul Revere passed through the city during his famous ride warning of the arrival of the Redcoats in 1775 (Haskell—City of Somerville). And of course the place where the first Union flag was raised on Prospect Hill still stands overlooking the city on one of the city's seven hills (Ansoff 2006). Following the years after the Revolutionary War, Somerville still maintained its largely rural character. Through the decades following this era, Somerville's population began to increase at significant proportions. In a summary of the city's economic history, The Office of Strategic Planning (2009) specified: “An advertisement of the day called that ‘new times demand new

manners and new men.’ The commonwealth responded in earnest with Somerville’s population tripling by 1850. The message attracted a large number of specialized craftsmen, mechanics, and entrepreneurs to the city” (Office of Strategic Planning 2009). This period also signaled the commencement of increased racial tensions between establish well-off Yankee families and those who were arriving to the city from Ireland and thus trying to also establish their once uprooted identities in this new place (Office of Strategic Planning 2009). They sought factory jobs as the Industrial Era also boomed not only through Somerville, but also through much of the United States. The spirit of progress resonated through Somerville’s past and during its Industrial period.

Progress, no matter what form it may take, beckons the process of change—this is what occurred as the once-rural landscape transformed into something completely different. The rural pastures of Somerville that were once lined with Yankee summer homes gave way to various assembly lines and factories. They were built to keep up with this emerging industrial economy (Ostrander 2013: 21). This escalation of new jobs and opportunities spurred a continuous population increase as well as steady influx of Irish immigrants, which contributed to an even further increase as the years passed (Office of Strategic Planning 2009). The rapid population growth, increased opportunities for factory jobs, and immigrant arrivals served for an extremely fascinating city dynamic during the 1800’s and up until the turn of the 20th century when yet another significant shift in population structure took place (Sammarco 1997).

From 1870 to 1900, Somerville’s population multiplied four times from 15,000, to 60,000 in just three decades and this “was the city’s greatest period of population growth” (Office of Strategic Planning 2009). Sons of Irish immigrants, now established and with their eyes on upward mobility, writes Ostrander (2013), “began to climb both social and geographically,

moving up the hill from neighborhoods still referred to as the Patch and Brickbottom (the latter named for its industrial brickyards). An Irish middle class consolidated and in the early twentieth century, the city's politics shifted from Yankee republican...to immigrant Democratic" (p. 21). This era in Somerville's history is the reason why it the city was and still is labeled as a safe haven for immigrants or a "gateway" city. This was due to the population's steady increase and for its accessibility as a place where immigrants could start a new life. Once settled, they would be able to work towards the establishment of all their hopes and dreams, eventually creating an even better future for generations to come. As Somerville's landscape continued to be shaped by constant flows of various European immigrant groups, the Irish factory workers were replaced by Italian immigrants and later in the 1930's with the arrival Portuguese and Greek immigrants (Sammarco 1997). As mentioned above, despite varying cultures and ways of thinking, what they had in common was the desire to work in this flourishing economy, purchase homes for their children and grandchildren, and last, create a better life here in this country of opportunities.

One could argue that the experiences of immigrants then and now are very much similar. In an attempt to grapple with the complex systems that characterize the movement of people, the Migration Policy Institute (2006) highlights the process of immigration as being "...the oldest and newest story of the American experiences. The same dreams of freedom and opportunity that galvanized people to cross the ocean hundreds of years ago draw people to America today" (p.1). No matter the time period or era, many immigrants groups strive to better their condition to improve the quality of life for their future families. Often times, that is achieved through acquiring more than one difficult job, saving up money to purchase one's own home, and create memories of surviving hardships, tales of preserving spirits, and hardworking existences that can be passed on though the generations. The MPI (2006) also highlights the sense of pride that

people today inherit from knowing that those before them have overcome obstacles and barriers in order to establish their lives in this country:

Americans take great pride in their nation-of-immigrants heritage. Most know and readily recount their families' history of immigrants. Indeed, there is no more American story than the journey to a new land by sea, land, or rail; the first job in a farm, factory, or shop; the child of immigrants reaching new heights of educational and economic opportunity. (P.2)

This similarity in the immigrant experience is why the city of Somerville has attracted and continues to entice immigrants from all over the world. In fact, as highlighted by Pirie and Gute (2013), “[it] is an immigrant entry point—and approximately 30% of the population is not native born. It is a heterogeneous population with 52 languages spoken...” (p. 2127). This contributes to its incredible diversity and distinctiveness compared with other cities around the metro Boston area.

In the wake of the 1930's and the Great Depression, Somerville's once flourishing and upwardly progression was halted and from then on everything changed. Demographics were altered yet again, but this time marked by dramatic decrease as the number of jobs available diminished at unparalleled rates. In addition, in Ostrander (2013) explains the cause for Somerville's economic decline in concluding that, “automation contributed to the loss of the city's industrial base, and Somerville began a decades long period of overall decline” (p. 22). This decline continued through the 1950's as people sought the quiet life of suburbia instead. Many of the people who were living in Somerville at the time and who were of immigrant ancestry, modeled this way of thinking and also sought to move out of the city to the outskirts of Boston. Towns such as Burlington, Arlington, and Billerica were perceived as better options due to their unobtrusiveness and tranquility. Somerville's Office of Strategic Planning (2009) reports: “With the decline of manufacturing and the exodus of people from urban areas during the 60's

and 70's, Somerville's economic character moved from one centered on major industry to that of a diverse mix of service sectors" (Office of Strategic Planning 2009). Property prices plummeted in Somerville, as no one wanted to live in a city that was very much characterized by a staggering decline and halted progression (Landau 1976). During this time is where the terms "slumerville" or "scumerville" became popular. They were usually coined by residents of neighboring communities whose cities and towns did not see the face of regression with such intensity as Somerville did (Landau 1976). The city had hit an all time low, which did not change until about 1980's. This was the point where the city reached the population size that most closely resembles that of this current era.

A State of Becoming:

"Somerville is 4.2 square miles of hills, neighborhoods, and people. It is a place where the concept of community is vital, yet individuality is treasured. Somerville is constantly changing and is always in a state of becoming" (Morris and Martin 2008: 1)

Having grown up in the city of Somerville, MA, I have witnessed many changes to the physical and cultural fabric of the city. The Somerville I grew up in is very different then the one I now come home to on winter, spring, and summer breaks. Although now I would consider myself a temporary resident of the city, this residential position has allowed me to truly retreat in a physical sense, but also mentally retreat and analyze the extent and scope of the "changes" I have noticed throughout the years. Somerville is undergoing yet another change. To be able to adequately understand this transition, one must be able to acknowledge how exactly Somerville's past and present come together to highlight the city's exceptionality. Most importantly, it is necessary to see how, as writes Gecker (2013), "fostering the uniqueness of Somerville can be a seen as a method of constructing authenticity" (p. 45). In providing a descriptive sketch of Somerville as a city, we can see that it is not only diverse culturally with various ethnicities and

races being portrayed, but it is also economically diverse (City of Somerville 2013). While walking the streets or riding the public busses in the city, one can hear over a dozen different voices being meshed together into a melodious unified sound. In addition, Somerville is very much unique in the sense that it is not quite economically polarized at least in the internalized sense. This occurs most notably with long-time residents of Somerville, as they tend to still identify with the working class immigrant spirit of their ancestors. Landau (1976) discusses that, “Somerville’s image as [a] “blue collar town grew out of both its industrial base and the manufacturing employment of its residential workforce” (p. 17-18). For that reason, many of the people at the top of the city’s political structure also try to embody and perpetuate this hardworking character. Somerville’s own city website, highlights the city as an “eclectic mix of blue-collar families, young professionals, college students, and recent immigrants...” (City of Somerville 2013) Those in power, however, may believe differently due to their efforts to make the city appealing for the “creative class” as well. Despite this effort, it has still become sort of an internal city tradition to be labeled as blue-collar. This still holds true as The City of Somerville (2013) specifies that,

One-fifth (22 percent) of Somerville residents are employed in typical blue-collar jobs, such as operators, fabricators, or laborers. Another one-fifth of Somerville residents are employed in service roles, such as household, protective, craft and repair workers and another one-third (35 percent) are employed in technical support, sales, administrative support, and clerical support positions (City of Somerville).

Because on this information, one could still say that Somerville residents are very much indeed working class but then at the same time, some may characterize the city as becoming middle-class. According to a Somerville News article titled, “What to Do about Gentrification”, this phenomenon “[is] seen as largely responsible for the increased wealth that has entered

Somerville, with houses outside of Davis Square selling for a million dollars, which amount to almost 20 times compared to 1980 prices” (Shelton 2005).

Some of the things that describe this paradox are the steady increase of property tax and the displacement of various long time residents of the city to less expensive areas of the metro Boston area. Like many areas surrounding the metro Boston area, one can observe the emergence of a new class of people known as the “creative class”, a term originally coined by Richard Florida (2002) and now highlighted by Gecker as “a group of individuals pursuing careers in art, design, and tech start-ups, who are in search of cities that appeal to their artistic tastes” (p. 9). This definition can be expanded to include recent college graduates, and other young professionals who once lived in the suburbs and now hope to reside closer to the urban core in search of work opportunities (Somerville Patch 2013). They seek neighborhoods close to various modes of transportation networks that they will be able to use to commute to work. As this influx of people moves in, the landscape of a city begins to change and these are the very changes that Somerville underwent and is currently undergoing. The process is known as gentrification or as Gecker (2013) defines, “a pattern of neighborhood change in which working-class and/or poor neighborhoods begin to experience an entrance of middle-class and upper-middle class residents, which leads to a variety of cultural and economic changes to the social, political, and aesthetic landscape” (p.1). More specifically, gentrification involves the displacement of immigrants and poor people of a particular neighborhood. One aspect of the gentrification literature definitely underscores the revitalization of “broken cities” as they are more susceptible to being subjected to plans for the desires of developers. They seek to take this once broken city with abandoned buildings, empty lots, and open spaces and turn it into a broken area into a hip and upcoming place. Although this marker or label of being “broken” could have been placed on Somerville

especially in the years following the depression and up until the 1980's, one must ask himself or herself what exactly constitutes a “broken” city and whether today's Somerville could still fall within that category. Many would argue that Somerville has definitely transformed itself from the ground up. Many of its residents have a shared commitment and dedication to harnessing the spirit of an “old Somerville” as well embracing a potential for a bright future with the various impending modifications and revitalization efforts that are part of the interchange for the city's near future. However, one could argue that what truly makes Somerville unique is also the ways it is grappling with the changes it is currently facing. This time, however, the outcomes are uncertain and are part of an ongoing dialogue that engulfs the city—sometimes starkly dividing and sometimes continuously unifying the different populations living in Somerville.

Gentrification and Urban Revitalization:

Gentrification, as a process has been placed at the forefront of dialogue within major social science research fields, as it is a fascinating urban phenomenon that prompts the modification of community definitions among different populations living in a particular area. Zukin (1987) underscores traditional interpretations of this urban phenomenon as a dynamic process:

The conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use, reflects a movement, that began in the 1960s, of private-market investment capital into downtown districts of major urban areas. Related to a shift in corporate investment and a corresponding expansion of the urban service economy, gentrification was seen more immediately in architectural restoration of deteriorating housing and the clustering of new cultural amenities in the urban core (P.129)

As such, traditional definitions of gentrification vary significantly from person to person, city-to-city all across the United States, and even most of the world. This process is not a novel social occurrence and for that reason, many scholars have sought to continuously develop definitions

that attempt to not only capture its extent, but also its impact on the populations of pre-gentrified communities. Consequently, this process also tries to describe its impact on institutions present within society. The literature is quite divided on perceptions of gentrification as either being inherently positive or inherently negative. However, before introducing major debates in the gentrification literature, one must gain an understanding about what exactly this term means not only for the context of this study, but also for understanding specific interchange that occurs within the realm of urban revitalization.

As briefly mentioned above, gentrification, as a concept is not a groundbreaking discovery; the term has been around since 1964, when British sociologist, Ruth Glass “used the term to describe some new and distinct processes of urban change that were beginning to affect inner London” (Lees et al. 2008: 4) It describes a process that began when housing in old industrial cities, like Somerville, declined and deteriorated, caused by the loss of the industrial economy. New owners and real estate developers began to upgrade housing and made large financial gains by selling to more affluent new residents. Perhaps the most well studied urban process since the 1970’s, gentrification is defined in multiple and competing ways (Hackworth 2002: 815). As such, it is reasonable to analyze the literature in two major ways; those scholars who perceive gentrification as a positive urban phenomenon in the way that an introduction and emergence of a new middle-class in an economically-declining area will serve not only to increase tax-base or general revenue for a city, but will be spur these new young professionals to feel compelled to think of these changes as a “social responsibility” (Brown-Saracino 2009:5) and thus implement change based on intersectionality for all citizens. This, of course, is a broad and overarching analysis of the positive arguments for gentrification, but on contrary, the literature also illustrates stories of gentrification tales that speak of displacement, loss not only of

a physical space, but also of a sense of community, and fictive kinship relations between residents of a particular city thus creating “social displacement” (Brown-Saracino 2009: 5). Because of the extremely polarized views on the topic, we can then begin to become more acquainted with why it is truly difficult to extract one static definition that scholars can agree on. Why is gentrification so difficult to elucidate?

In reviewing the literature, one finds a very stark divide between urban sociologists and scholars from different disciplines. One side of the debate grapples with questions of gentrification being an inherently positive process in urban cities. A reason for this being the simple reason that this is the chance that residents have to restore the original beauty to their previously declining communities. In addition, some scholars have refused to continue calling gentrification by this conventional name for the fact that it has a negative connotation typically brought forth by opponents of gentrification, such as when “Ruth Glass (1964) first coined the term ‘gentrification’, she utilized the term in order to identify the process of middle class moving into low income neighborhoods, and the impacts of such” (Hanaoka 2007: 14). Because they focus on furthering displacement literature, proponents of gentrification feel as if the term is too limiting and one-dimensional, thus coining the term “urban renaissance”, coined by Zukin (1987), which illustrates a picture of new artists and the creation of a creative class “infusing moribund communities with new health and an appreciation for cultural activities” (Spain 1993). As Ostrander (2013) notes, “they celebrate middle-class residents who have fled from the homogeneity of the suburbs in search of urban places with much character and concentrated pockets of “culture” (p. 107-108). One example of scholars that present a positive lens when looking at this social process are Alstshuler (1969), Lowry (1960), and Smith (1971) where they expand upon the concept of a trickle-down model of gentrification (Lees 2008: 2449). Although

they take a critical stance, they do explain this economic model as being deterministic. This is where the concept becomes nebulous and somewhat problematic in regards to developing a cohesive definition of gentrification.

First, it would be beneficial to more closely examine this trickle-down model that these scholars propose: they provide an economic sketch of how the emergence of a wealthier socioeconomic class would ultimately be beneficial to the revitalization of economically depressed areas. What would this new class bring to economically declining areas, one may ask. The answer to that lies in a general rejection of the homogeneity of suburban life. In other words, with the strong desire to be immersed in urban culture that will allow them to simultaneously be in close proximity to their jobs, they seek cities and the opportunities available within them (Brown-Saracino 2009: 5). One of the markers of gentrification is increased accessibility to public transportation for the simple fact that more people can come and go. In relation to the last point, young urban professionals that choose to live in economically depressed areas are not only benefitting from cheap rent in these areas, but they are perceived to be almost “savior-like”. Brown-Saracino (2009) explains that:

Early gentrification research identified an ideological orientation among gentrifiers that supported their engagement in the process: ‘frontier and salvation’ mentality (Spain 1993), which glamorized personal sacrifice and sweat equity as methods for ‘settling’ the untamed city. (P. 5)

Also, they are perceived about genuinely caring about “diversity” and even thought to be more open-minded or sympathetic to the plight of people of color who live in the areas in which they move into. Is this actually the case? Could one say that this explosion of young middle-class is in direct result a rejection of all things homogenous and largely “white”? Are they in search of “real culture”? Some scholars such as Gina Perez (2002) has written about the commodification of culture and heritage tourism, but that will be touched upon in the following pages.

Returning back to the trickle-down economic model of gentrification, we understand the basis of this argument as being rooted in the belief that the poorest members of a society will gradually begin to benefit as a result of increasing wealth of the richest members of a society. In other words, when it comes to gentrification, the transitioning of upper-middle class young people to a traditionally economically depressed area will eventually help the people that live there. Some reasons being because the wealthier people will invest money in local stores thus improving local economies or because young urban professionals will become more involved in the city politics, thus eventually want to do something about city dynamics. In addition, as the influx of young urban professionals increases, they will seek to buy traditionally neglected properties, fix them up, and then rent to others. Eventually, there is a cycle that materializes and causes property tax to increase steadily as more and more people move into the city. This is the point where scholars who are in favor of gentrification would say that for a lack of a better phrase, things will “end up being okay” for pre-gentrification residents.

Interestingly enough, residents would begin to see positive changes as their city not only becomes more aesthetically pleasing, but its identity shifts from being characterized as a “broken” city to one that is upscale, hip, or even chic. However, is this always the case? Does gentrification always have this positive impact on definitions of community and most importantly, how does this impact the individual experiences of the residents who live in those particular areas? Although scholars like Alstshuler, Lowry, and Smith do acknowledge the presence of displacement in these communities, they perceive it as necessary and even inevitable. According to James H. Johnson Jr (1984), their arguments and interpretations are “derived from a Marxist analysis [and it] borders on economic determinism” (p. 387). If this process is indeed deterministic, and older pre-gentrification residents will ultimately end up

being displaced and nothing can be done about it due to the fact that that is just how these urban processes occur, then how can one perceive it as something positive? Loretta Lees (2008) underscores this gentrification paradox in one significant way, which she calls “social mixing” among other criticisms regarding preexisting knowledge of gentrification. For example, she notices said paradox in her observations based on the fact that although this new middle class does seem to have a desire to gain acceptance of diversity and all things hip and urban, they ultimately do tend to “self-segregate.”

Additionally, Lees (2008) underscores literature that also proposes this new middle class’s tendencies to be more accepting to new perspectives as being the main source of gentrification and will ultimately lead way to the creation of a more inclusive community. In sum, Lees says, “In keeping with a longstanding strand of research that has identified the liberal desires of the new middle classes for difference and diversity in the city as key to the process of gentrification and to the creation of a more diverse and tolerant city...” (Lees, 2000; and Lees et al., 2008) However, this author points out that there is limited research focus on the impact of this. Although new middle classes are interpreted as being the “movers”, “promoters”, or interestingly enough, the source of diversity, does this willingness to be open to new ways of thinking actually promote “social mixing” in the long run? The author expresses the need to find out the degree in which this exists as a side effect of gentrification as she says, “yet there is a poor evidence base for the widespread policy assumption that gentrification will help increase the social mix, foster social mixing and thereby increase the social capital and social cohesion of inner city communities” (Lees 2008: 2450). Other aspects of her argument includes the idea that the extent to which this “mixing” occurs is even evident in diverse urban communities and underscores the fact that in reality, when presented with the façade of gentrification, social

mixing or diversity only aids to create further division in a community. Lees (2008) argues that not only does it lead to “socio-spatial segregation, rather than alleviating social segregation, as working-class and minority residents are steadily priced out of gentrified areas” but creates more social polarization (p. 2457). In terms of creating a trickle down approach, the author does not believe this can happen without truly reevaluating this concept of segregation first and prevent potentially harmful effects on the lower income communities. In her particular study, she concludes in summarizing another author’s work that speaks about the “defending the neighborhood” argument, which “claims that since middle-class people are stronger advocates for public resources, socially mixed neighborhoods will fare better than those without middle-class households” (Lees 2008: 2451). This presents the residents that classify as being on a higher socioeconomic level as also being similar to a “savior” which then perpetuates this idea that pre-gentrification residents cannot advocate for their own rights. Relating to this, Lees (2008) also highlights the ‘merry-go-round’ argument, “[claiming] that tenurially and socioeconomically mixed neighborhoods are able to support a stronger local economy than areas of concentrated poverty” (p. 2451). In underscoring the above argued proponent theories of gentrification, she is thus able to take a critical stance as she analyses that according to their theses, gentrification is meant to be a “trickle down” approach and eventually help the citizens of these economically depressed areas.

However, even though during this time there is increased debate about displacement and segregation and even more so there is the belief that over time “things would be okay”. Lees warns about people explaining gentrification as a justification for segregation or just another name for this researcher also finds that although this new middle class does seem to have a desire for diversity. They are generally more open minded to different beliefs, but still ultimately “tend

to self-segregate” as mentioned above. In terms of creating a trickle down approach, the author does not believe this can happen without truly reevaluating this concept of segregation first and prevent potentially harmful effects on the lower income communities.

Other scholars such as Redfern (2003) grapple with the idea of why exactly gentrification is so difficult to pinpoint and define. As we have seen with Lees’ analysis of social mixing, we can see that most of the time these definitions depends on who is doing the defining. As Brown-Saracino (2009) also reiterates, “it assumes a neat correspondence between an actor’s economic or structural position and cultural tastes, particularly his or her ideological orientation to gentrification.” (p. 7) Aspects of one’s identity thus influence how one is able to think about gentrification and as such create further divisions in the gentrification literature. The fascinating article by Redfern (2003) emphasizes the specific concepts that contribute to the reasons why people have such a diverse perception of the variables that make up “gentrification”. He gives a brief explanation of the frustration on the part of previous gentrification scholars as they have described the process as being one of “supply and demand” – meaning, that it is usually one side divided into categories of have and have-nots or displaced and gentrifiers or a new emerging urban middle class. These previous scholars do in fact call attention to the fact that there needs to be another more all encompassing definitions and perspective when talking about this. It must be a definition that “transcends these divisions” as Lees says as well and as Redfern quotes in his own research (Redfern 2003: 2352). Thus, the author’s main point is that there needs to be a restructuring in the way both sides think about the gentrification debate and change “the implicit assumption that gentrifiers gentrify because they have to, in some form or another” (Redfern 2003: 2352). This particular aspect speaks to early and traditional gentrification literature written by authors such as Alstshuler (1969), Lowry (1960), and Smith (1971) for their view on the

process is deterministic in that they believed that gentrification is and was something that would not be reversed. In addition, it is interpreted as a force in which no one can really do much about. However, Redfern on the other hand, warns other scholars to not think of young urban middle-class populations as being the sole reason for changing the surrounding urban landscape. In addition, he warns against the mentality that they are to blame and thinking of their relationship with gentrification as being inevitable. This once again leads us to the question of whether gentrification can indeed be stopped and if so, what are the lasting effects on pre-gentrification residents? Is it even possible to adopt a “before and after” sketch like many traditional displacement scholars seek to describe it? Are tales of gentrification always so two-dimensional in describing a clear “winner” or clear “loser”? Is it always the case that an urban renaissance is built from the ashes that were once “broken communities” (Ostrander 2013: 107-108)?

Gentrification quickly impacts “broken communities” but the definition of this concept hardly mirrors Somerville’s identity. For example, the city was recognized as an “All-America City” for the wide extent of community organization and community involvement on the part of citizens—it is home to various grassroots community organizations that range from focusing on immigrant advocacy to the promotion of the need of affordable housing. “Broken cities” are void of all community engagement and are typically economically depressed. In addition, many categorize Somerville as a lower-income suburb and as Ostrander (2013) highlights, it is thus “much more likely than other types of places to mobilize in favor of growth control” (p. 108). Given that, can we still apply the traditional models of gentrification on a city like Somerville, MA? In the following section, we explore the uniqueness of the city and how its existing diversity, both ethnic and economical, either function to resist forces of gentrification or work to create an even more all-inclusive community to further embrace varying degrees of diversity.

Somerville and the Changing Definition of Spatial Community:

Other scholars grapple with the idea of gentrification in a cultural explanation and how that impacts both residents and drivers of the phenomenon. Whitney Gecker (2013) underscores the cultural explanation as being “[reflective of] the intergroup tension that arises from shifts in the aesthetic landscape. Individuals construct socio-spatial narratives about who belongs where, as a means to claim space and gather the political support necessary to fight their causes” (p. 7). In light of this subsection of the literature, it brings up the topic of spatial interpretations of community in that gentrification not only establishes new boundaries or modifies the existing boundaries, but it also changes the ways residents are able to think about their communities in regards to space. This will be a crucial topic in my future discussion of adolescent use of community spaces and their ability to assert self-identity as a cause of these changing spaces. In addition, we can notice this “intergroup tension” of which Gecker speaks of being manifested in Somerville with the introduction of the Red Line by the MBTA (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority) in 1984. As Gecker (2013) observes, “Somerville acquired its first T station at Davis Square and at the time, the city was still notably called “Slumaville” and had the reputation of Whitey Bulger’s Winter Hill gang still clinging to it” (p. 2). This was the first large scale redevelopment project in the city and can be used as an initial case study for the concept of changing spatial definitions and intergroup tension for the overall space would be significantly transformed from being characterized as being economically depressed to a lively metropolitan hub. Based on observation and to what Gecker (2013) outlines in her dissertation:

Today, Davis Square is a commercial hub of local retail and restaurants, which has the drawing power to attract visitors from outside of the city. Davis Square is also a commuter’s paradise with quick access to downtown [Boston] and smack in the middle of the Minuteman Biking and Walking Trail. The transportation development and subsequent economic reinvestment in Davis Square is a landmark event in the history of Somerville:

altering its reputation from that of a slum to an attraction, and altering its fiscal well-being. (P.2)

Many residents perceive the redevelopment of Davis Square as a prelude to the significant changes that the city would undergo in the years following the introduction of the T stop and changes that are currently occurring. Intergroup tension arises as this particular area becomes more and more of a sought after destination—more and more young professionals move to this area due to its proximity to the red line station and how much easier it is to get to Boston from this location.

Other redevelopment dialogues surrounds major projects that mirror the Davis Square momentum is Assembly Square, which interestingly enough, was home to various automotive part factories (its name modeled after assembly lines) in Somerville's early history. It is located in the eastern part of the city and easily the area that has the highest concentration of people of color and immigrants. Gecker (2013) remarks, "Assembly Square is going through a massive development project that includes commercial and residential buildings, spanning an impressive area of 125 acres of formally open space adjacent to the Mystic River" (p. 3). In addition to that, there is the further expansion of the Green Line, which will add 3 or 4 new stops in Somerville. The most anticipated, however, will be constructed in Union Square which Gecker (2013) describes as a "cultural hub and epicenter of community engagement, second only to Davis Square" (p. 3). Although these changes occur to the spatial, aesthetic, and physical composition of a community, these changes also produce alteration in the ways individuals are able to think about their communities and what that means. Many people in Somerville express concern over a sense of "loss of community" or the stereotypical loss of being able to go to a neighbor's house to ask for a cup of sugar. Many older residents of Somerville, especially, claim the loss of a general feeling of fictive kinship among community members and instead, now underscore a

disconnect present in the community brought forth by constant influxes of new middle-class people moving in. An informant in Ostrander's book, speaks to this concern when he says, "the gentrification process, we never saw it until it was right in our faces. Suddenly, everything changed. We didn't know people on the street anymore. We were strangers in our own communities" (Ostrander 2013: 113). Building off this informant's worries, we see that loss of community is not just in a physical sense, but it is very much a reality which Gecker highlights as being "individuals' construction of socio-spatial narratives about who belongs where, as a means to claim space and gather the political support necessary to fight their causes" (Gecker 2013: 8). However, what happens when certain populations do not have means or the social capital in order to gain this political support necessary to have their opinions heard or acknowledged? In the next section, I speak about the relationship between youth and adolescent literature in light of gentrification.

The Adolescent Experience in a Gentrifying Community:

This study seeks to highlight the experiences of youth in a gentrifying community that is Somerville, MA and most importantly, I am interested in finding out more how exactly this urban phenomenon impacts not only the social construction of youth identities, but also the impact on development of social capital and community involvement. As such, the youth and adolescent literature, similar to general gentrification literature underscores the importance of socio-spatial identities and the building of communities around a physical space. As Depeau (2001) says, "young people prefer to meet in sociable areas such as urban spaces as they contribute towards shaping their self-identity" (p. 3). As youth and adolescents try to become acquainted with their true selves and thus grapple with various facets of potential identities, they play with various presentations of self that depend largely on significantly distinct interactions

with multiple people, thus multiple allegiance to various networks are created. Scholar Joanne Massey (2007) explores the concept of “hanging out” and the social construction of space in her works “Young People and the ‘Right’ to the City”. She explains the fact the paradox of “hanging out” in large crowds in that although they can bring security and sentiments of safety to a group of adolescents when they are socializing in a public space, to the adult mind, this almost always means they are up to something and can be labeled as “threatening” or “dangerous” for many times being young spurs fear of deviance. This, in fact, mirrors much of the literature on adolescents and youth as traditionally, the contributions of this population have been neglected or has been limited to solely explaining deviance. Why do adolescents and youth have the tendencies to be labeled as deviant entities in our society? Some would say that because adolescents have the tendencies to explore with their identities, they are more likely to engage in activities typically associated with various subcultures. According to Massey (2007), however, we can notice that this labeling of the younger members of our populations goes back not only to group dynamics, but speaks to spatial compositions of public space. She comes to the conclusion that youth’s sanitized aesthetic of newly regenerated urban space” and also “because they are not the ‘right’ users” as they do not really have any established financial capital that they would give back to the space” (p. 241). Another scholar that underscores a similar “sanitation process” that comes with gentrification is Mitchell (1997) as highlighted by Atkinson (2003) as he says that the overall displacement of people serves the function of “catering to gentrifiers’ “desires for safety and relative homogeneity” (Atkinson 2003; Mitchell 1997). I, too, wonder what exactly is the impact on youth when they are not really viewed as full-fledged citizens of a community when they have been physically a part of it for the entirety of their young lives. What does this mean for the development of their identities and the social construction of the community they

identify with? Some may attribute this neglect to adolescents' age in saying that that is the sole reason why they are isolated from various public areas. One scholar, Depeau (2001) explains the issue of age when he says, "for example they are too old to use the children's playground and too young to gain access to pubs and bars" (p. 83-84). In addition, "hanging out" is the alternative to engage in social behavior that allows them to experiment with various spatial or community identities. Scholars Freeman and Riordan (2002) argue:

That a space in which youths can interact with their larger social worlds is essential, especially given that young people are significantly removed from the economic, political, and social arenas of adulthood. While it is accepted that youths should be allowed to express themselves and create their self-identity, there are still concerns about them being vulnerable (P. 301)

This then leaves the question of how adolescents are able to maneuver through a society that not only views their actions as potentially dangerous or deviant but also, neglects their interpretations of community. In expanding Massey's (2007) argument with regards to gentrification, because youth do not have any financial capital and thus any major tug on the political realm, they are often dismissed from major gentrification debates or major urban redevelopment because of the fact that they are not often regarded to as "full" citizens" of the community often time. In addition, youth do not bring substantial amount of money into the community, so for that reason their legitimacy decreases" (Massey 2007: 21). So, the real question remains: where and how can young people legitimately go to create their identity and how does gentrification promote or hinder the development of both adolescent and community identity?

Somerville Youth and Community Authenticity:

As we know from the explanation above youth have a certain way in which they must socialize with one another in our urban society and due to their age, they are placed in a liminal

state in which they are not quite children, but also cannot be labeled as being adults. Due to this, they are left to “hang out” in public areas, which in a gentrifying city like Somerville can spur much intergroup tension among varying populations in this area. We also know that youth are the future of our communities, yet why has their perspective and perceptions of crucial city affairs been left out of the equation? What about the experiences of urban youth of color or undocumented youth who already experience a fragmented life transition due to issues such as liminal legality? Who gets to decide which voices are left out and which ones are listened to? Some scholars attribute this to financial and social capital explanations, as there is an apparent legitimacy and extent of power that arises from having these two things. Thus, young people, not having neither financial or in-depth social networks, they cannot work to establish a cohesive and legitimate force in a community especially when it comes to one that is dominated by a very homogenous population of people in power. First, it is important to grapple with the question of what gives places and events authenticity? Gecker (2013) highlights explanations by Molotch et al (2000) as they say that, “people shape their communities as their communities shape them” (p. 795). In turn, Gecker (2013) then goes on to illustrate this process:

...The process is based on a complex myriad of politics, history, tradition, geography, race, etc. Narrative production is an active and dynamic process, in which individuals create stories about who they are and where they live. Some narratives are more profitable and attractive than others. In gentrifying neighborhoods different groups of people create divergent socio-spatial narratives. (P. 10)

Thus, as definitions of community change depending on which who is doing the narrating and defining, it happens that local government will end up choosing a narrative that is more in line with the current times and not a narrative that is representative of a threatening subculture or another deviant force in society. In other words, local policy makers will be in favor with the

narratives that appeals to the economically forward definition of community that many of the upwardly mobile citizens of cities like Somerville seek to uphold.

Leverentz's (2011) discusses crime narratives where she finds that "meta-narratives and place-specific narratives interact to define and explain local communities" (p. 351). In other words, these narratives are the kinds in which normal people in communities believe to be established and thus are "unquestioned". Although Leverentz's work functions to underscore a narrative of intergroup tension which thus highlights members of certain populations of being deviant, we can say that this also occurs with adolescent in youth populations as many times they are also categorized as the "other". Because young people in urban communities have represented this liminal state of not being children or adults, they also present an image of instability. Thus, people often associate the age group as being threatening to the community, but most importantly, they may be perceived as being harmful to the promotion of community ideals. The tendency to scapegoat certain young populations in urban contexts is a topic that is quite prominent in the literature as it is important to recognize the implications this can have on students' ability to think about their surrounding communities. More specifically, Perez (2002) examines the role of law enforcement as a key mode in the gentrification process as "a way to sanitize public space". In addition, the media usually chooses to report stories of criminality and deviance when it comes to young people, so that in turn, adolescents become stigmatized, which ultimately "seriously limits their social and economic opportunities" (p. 55). This scholar's analyses are directly related to the ways in which youth and adolescents are able to identify with a community that ostracizes them. Also, this is related to the question of how youth conceptualize the definition of their own communities in relation to the power shifts that occur within a change community.

The concept of law enforcement is a prime example of how gentrification as a process functions to isolate certain populations and label them as deviant. Perez (2002) elaborates on her point about the social construction of place meaning that ultimately, the spatial composition of a certain area is less about the physical area and more about how the definition of that area is constantly shifting by social, cultural, and political beliefs of people who use a space. Saying that, we can acknowledge gentrification as almost like a case study of this theory for the definitions of gentrification in general can be reliant on who is doing the defining of it. For example, gentrification as a concept for pre-gentrified communities will most likely associate this word with something negative, while developers and young urban professionals may not interpret it in the same way. Thus, we one can observe as noted by Brown-Saracino (2009) that “the literature acknowledges ideological variation among players in the gentrification field—that is, where it notes that some may depart from the frontier and salvation ideology—it nonetheless assumes a neat correspondence between an actor’s economic or structural position and cultural tastes, particularly his or her ideological orientation to gentrification” (p. 7) In expanding this, we also see this with the concept of the commodification of culture and heritage tourism. Perez provides an explanation of their emergence in cities such as Chicago to provide a specific context for her discovered although this can be observed in many large cities as well. What exactly is the commodification of culture and how does it impact residents of gentrifying communities? This can be traced back to the tendency of young urban professionals to be fascinated by “real urban culture” and the authenticity that it exhibits. They are drawn to the diversity of urban areas as most of the time, it is extremely different from the lives they had in suburban America. Thus, they yearn to become associated to all that is different and new. This relates to the above theory of the social construction of space for the simple fact that although

pre-gentrification residents do appreciate their diverse communities, it seems as if young urban professionals have found a way to commodify this diversity in way that ends up taking away from its authenticity, according to Perez (2002). One example is with “YUM”, an event sponsored by the Welcome Project, an immigrant advocacy group in Somerville. The purpose of this event is to “promote cultural exchange and understanding by learning about and supporting the great tastes of immigrant-run restaurants in Somerville and by sustaining the work of The Welcome Project” (YUM: The Welcome Project). Although this is a fantastic mission, most of the people who did in fact show up to this event were members of the young urban professionals population of Somerville, while the members of the immigrant populations present were those who were serving the food. The ironic aspect of this event is that although it is great to promote and “learn about” the local culture of Somerville, who is actually doing the learning? Immigrant groups already know about their traditional dishes and have been buying food at these local restaurants for decades. In the end, it could be said that event was really only catering to middle-class as they were the ones benefitting the most out of this cultural exchange. Yes, it is true that some of the proceeds go towards the immigrant-run restaurants, but this event does not promote heightening diversity for all populations thus making it very one-dimensional. In relation to this, we can look to Lees’ (2008) article on social mixing as she says that gentrification as a justification for segregation or just another name for it. Also, she finds that although this new middle class does seem to have a desire for diversity and are generally more open minded to different beliefs, ultimately they “tend to self-segregate” (Lees 2008: 2458). This could in fact be potentially harmful to lower income communities.

In referring back to the article on the topic of policing of urban spaces and its connection to youth, we can observe this as having a negative impact on the ways adolescents perceive their

communities. In addition, Massey (2007) also speaks to this as she points out “that youth’s social use of that particular space is of concern to people because they “threaten the sanitized aesthetic of newly regenerated urban space.” In urban communities, we may see this manifested with unjust stop-and-frisk laws that promote racial profiling. This also functions to uphold certain labels that the general public (perpetuated by the media) puts upon youth and adolescents as being deviant and generally threatening. Because of this, we see the increased presence of police and other law enforcement in certain public places where youth do tend to “hang out”. An example of this took place in the city of Somerville with the introduction of the Somerville Gang Ordinance, which in essence is extremely similar to these stop-and-frisk laws that are prominent in other urban areas. For example, Ostrander (2013) writes about this as “contributing to the displacement of ‘young brown and black men...constructed as dangerous, threatening, in need of surveillance’ [and] as part of the ‘sanitizing racial and class landscape accompanying gentrification” (p. 58-59). In her book, she highlights a particular incident that spurred the passing of this city ordinance, which was when Latino gang members raped two deaf and blind young women in a park located in the eastern part of the city—the part of the city where most of the Latino populations resides. This particular occurrence promoted an increased amount of dialogue in Somerville with an emphasis on who is deviant and who is not. It is unfortunate, but due to the fact that the young men who committed the crime were young men of color, it seemed as if since then on, most if not all men of color were viewed as being directly affiliated with different Latino-orientated gangs. The creation of this ordinance also caused another event where a couple of Latino high school students walked past another group of youths who were fighting near a crowded Somerville street in Somerville when all of a sudden, as Ostrander (2013) reports, “the police ordered all six young men to spread eagle, place their palms against the side

of a police cruiser, and drop to their knees” and where then accused on being affiliated with a gang (p. 97). It turns out that the youth were not gang affiliated and thus were wrongly accused. This makes one wonder about the effectiveness of this ordinance. Although one can see the reasoning behind its creation and the intentions of keeping the streets of Somerville safe, we have also have to take a look at the repercussions for sections of the population where this ordinance did more harm than good. An answer is, as Ostrander (2013) explains, it “can be seen as contributing to the displacement of ‘young brown and black men’, but in a larger sense can also be a way to categorize all young people as being deviant. The specifics of this ordinance “directs local police to order dispersal whenever they see a ‘member of a criminal street gang...loitering with one or more other person” (p. 95). Thus, we can see how adolescents who do look public places to “‘perform’ multiple presentations of self” cannot do so in fear of being perceived as a threat to society.

How does the fact that youth and adolescents are perceived as being part of an out-group in a gentrifying urban context modify the ways they acquire social capital? What does this mean for this population’s interpretations of the social construction of space and community? The literature outlines arguments about the positive and negative impacts of gentrification in urban settings, but these interpretations speak to the experiences of older residents thus ignoring the adolescent and youth populations. This study expands on previous research by exploring the impact of gentrification on the socialization of inner-city youth, but also as a way to underscore the youth potential of being agents of positive social change in a community. The few studies that have considered them have done so only in the context of deviance. This study will shed light on the ways in which youth think about their changing urban realities. Conclusions drawn

will clarify how gentrification processes impact definitions of community for young people, and also document ways in which youth can be valuable assets in promoting community identity.

Chapter Two: Research Methods

As stated in the previous chapter and according to the contemporary literature on gentrification and displacement, we see a general disregard toward the experiences and contributions of teens and youth in urban areas. More specifically, as readers, we see that traditionally, existing urban studies literature has instead sought to portray this age group in a demonized light. Traditionally, the literature highlights youth experiences that solely include breaking the law, vandalism, and other acts of which our society categorizes as deviant. Thus, our society does not take into account how youth can be positive agents of change in a changing or gentrifying community. As social phenomena like gentrification alter the spatial composition of the social world youth live in, they are forced to change the ways in which they think about their urban realities, definitions of community, and their legacies as a generation. The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate the ways in which shifting urban realities serve as a way for youth to redefine not only their “Somerville identity” but also highlight the ways their age group can be valuable assets in the promotion of community identity.

In order to uncover and learn more about the connection between gentrification and changing youth community perspectives in the city of Somerville, I conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with two community organizations, Teen Empowerment, and the Liaison Interpreters Program of Somerville, which is directed under the larger umbrella organization, The Welcome Project. Together these organizations function to give youth voices in the community and give them the opportunity to give others voice as well especially in the case of LIPS where bilingual youth serve as liaison interpreters and as advocates for immigrants living in the city of Somerville. Teen Empowerment, on the other hand, with locations both in Boston, MA and in Rochester, NY seek to empower the young members of a particular

community to be able to institute positive change. The organization seeks to do this through the mediums of spoken word, rap, speeches, singing, and other forms in which teens can express their identities. Most importantly, they can project the experiences that have shaped them, and thus become agents of social change in underscoring issues that impact other urban youth in those communities. Because I have been a member and participant of both organizations, I have both a pre-existing connection to people who work there and a familiarity of the goals of said organizations. This prior knowledge thus facilitated my recruitment for available youth to interview and be able to gain a deeper understanding of the opinions of youth regarding community identity, gentrification, and social change. Additionally, I administered two focus groups at each organization to be able to conduct larger scale discussions about specific topics as the ones previously mentioned. A significant portion, if not all elements of our identities are shaped by the interactions and experiences we have with members of our communities and immediate social networks and because of that, we perceive ourselves based on the perceptions people have of us. Because of this, I believe focus groups were definitely helpful in obtaining a more representative overview of the youth experience from being able to hear said youth bounce ideas off each other and discuss societal and community issues affecting them in their current realities. By using both interviews and focus groups, I was able to obtain a substantial amount of collective information that helps to draw conclusions and shape my analyses regarding definitions of community for young people in gentrifying communities. Simultaneously, I was also able to acquire comprehensive and extensive personal accounts of these said experiences.

To reiterate my motivations for conducting this study, I would like to present a clear description of youth experiences not only as a way to demonstrate that youth culture should not just be studied in the context of deviance, but in the potential context of social justice and social

change. My experiences as a youth participating in both Teen Empowerment and LIPS (Liason Interpreters Program of Somerville) I was able to become acquainted with the way my peers and I served not only as positive members of society, but as motivators for other people in our age group. With Teen Empowerment in particular, a significant part of this organization's mission is to give teens the tools necessary to provide a basis for community change. In a comprehensive evaluation of Teen Empowerment's Somerville, MA location conducted by the University of Massachusetts Boston, researchers Schutt and Gecker (2012) concluded that,

Teen Empowerment has succeeded in developing and maintaining an approach to engaging at-risk youth and reducing youth violence that can serve as a model for other communities. It's a systematic approach to selection, engagement, and transformation provides the foundation for individual achievement and community change. (P. 3)

Using this information, I knew that it is thus my purpose, by writing this thesis, to be able to highlight their experiences, but also have readers think about teens and youth in terms of what they can contribute to the construction of a better community and society. My hope is that by reading this, people will be able to not only revisit the concept of gentrification in a nonconventional way to move beyond traditional displacement theories, but rather notice how different groups in society that we traditionally do not highlight are adapting to their own changing urban realities and thus finding ways to not only bring awareness to others in their own groups, but to society in general. That is why I think programs like Teen Empowerment and The Welcome Project are so crucial in gentrifying cities such as Somerville, MA— although small, organizationally wise, they provide an outlet for youth to express matters of concern in their lives, but for others as well and they become a way to give voice to parts of the community that typically do not get heard. I believe this voice is worth listening to and this is what I hope to

achieve with writing this thesis. I hope to highlight unheard youth voices in the community and their underscore how this section of the population can be valuable assets to a city.

Population and Sample:

I chose to interview youth (an age group which I define as being 13-20 years of age) because they are typically misunderstood and misrepresented in various urban or academic debates in communities all over the world. Whether it is because they are labeled to be deviant such as in our society or because they may not even be considered to be fully functioning and fully contributing members of society, teens and youth have interesting perspectives that deserve a chance to be heard. Historically, youth have been at the forefront of major revolutions as we see with the Civil Rights Movements so why is it that in recent times, youth left out of major national dialogues? These national dialogues are those that in one way or another will impact the ways they perceive the world, as they are the ones who will inherit the implications and changes brought about by said dialogues. This is a societal paradox that I find worthwhile to analyze in my writing. Youth are at fascinating points in their psychological development as a person because at that age they are extremely impressionable, not fully independent as they may still be living under the protective care of their parents, but it is this point in their development where youth begin to form their own ideas about the world and challenge the notions that they have grown up with perceiving “as they way things are”. They are receptive and sensitive to the changes around them, but also feel the need to be left alone to the confines of their ever expanding and molding minds. It is because of this notion that I chose to write about teens and youth in my analysis of gentrification. Although they may not be able to see the historical changes of gentrification in their communities having only been around to see immediate changes, they provide a less conditioned perspective to the concept of gentrification. They may

have heard the concept in casual conversation when around adults or they themselves may be involved with community organizations that deal directly with changes brought about by gentrification but the difference between youth and adult perception lies in the fact that youth see changes as is and as immediate changes to their urban schema. These changes which may have been in the works for multiple years, end up affecting youth in an immediate sense, which is why some may criticize the youth perspective with a point of their argument being that their knowledge of gentrification is not complete as they have not been aware or receptive to the historical context and timeline regarding certain community changes. However, I see this as an advantage when it comes to youth becoming agents of social change—they have an advantage in being able to look at the present situation with a critical and nuanced perception without fear of defying conventional methods of interpreting community or social norms.

My sample and population are largely based in Somerville, MA. My motivations for choosing my own hometown as a case study for gentrification and youth social change are rooted in my own experiences in growing up in a changing city. The Somerville I knew growing up and the Somerville I see when I go back during winter and summer break are two very different realities that I see as worth examining. Not only is Somerville becoming highly gentrified, but the concept of being a youth in Somerville is also changing with the urban landscape around it. These changes are what I hoped to gain an insight to using in depth interviews and focus groups. Reflecting the rich diversity of Somerville, my interview informants also come from many different Somerville backgrounds as they identify with many different socioeconomic groups and racial groups as well. I believe this will give me a more accurate perspective of the gentrification debate as well since traditional groups that have been studied in gentrifying literature seem to be highly one-sided either focusing on the stories of the displaced or trying to gain perspective on

the motivations of the middle to upper-class gentrifiers who move into once-declining cities and communities. Although the youth I selected for the interviews and focus groups may seem like they were randomly selected, I would say that their selection was not random as they already were part of specific organizations that I previously maintained contact with (Teen Empowerment and the Liaison Interpreters Program of Somerville). In addition, because of their involvement with said organizations, many of my informants did have a general knowledge of the social implications of gentrification. For this reason, their selection was not random as I specifically set out to interview both T.E and LIPS youth for my thesis because of their identities of being both youth and residents of Somerville with a knowledge on the changes occurring to their community's identity.

Interviews:

All questions for the in-depth interviews and guiding questions were reviewed and approved by the Union College Human Subjects Review Board. It was concluded that my study would involve minimal risk just as long as confidentiality procedures were upheld and respected. All interviewees were required to fill out and complete informed consent forms that outlined the purpose of my study. Additionally, the form underscored the fact that let informants' know participation was voluntary and that they could refrain from answering a particular question they did not feel comfortable answering. Most importantly, the document specified that their responses and identities would be confidential. In order to uphold this confidentiality standard, I provide coded names instead of providing the informants' real name in order to prevent the possibility of having their responses linked to their particular identities. Because many of my informants were under the age of 18, I also provided for them a passive parent consent form where the youth would have to show their parent or guardian the form and if their

parent/guardian was opposed to having their child participate in the interview, then they could sign it and return back to me. Out of the minors that I interviewed, none of the youth brought back a signed form stating parent opposition to being interviewed. Copies of informed consent forms, parent consent forms, and debriefing documents can be found in Appendixes A, B, C, and F.

The interviews conducted ranged in length although the average length was about 15 minutes. I originally aimed for each interview to be 30 minutes long in order to collect thorough and in-depth, thoughtful responses from the informants. However, at times this was difficult, as many teens did not really want to talk about their experiences in Somerville, not because said experiences brought them any kind of psychological trauma but because they were people of few words or maybe due to a lack of trust. In any occasion, I tried to establish rapport before the interview session in order to make our interview dynamic be as casual as possible. This would allow the prompting of honest and thoughtful answers. I do believe my previous work with both Teen Empowerment and LIPS assuaged my interactions with youth participants as they most likely felt as if I had been in their shoes not too long ago and that I was thus, similar to them. These organizations are very familiar with having researchers visit to conduct research on teen behavior or organizational culture of youth, so the youth that participate in these programs are often skeptical of the aims of particular interviewers that they do not identify with. I made sure to provide a lucid statement of purpose so that teens would feel more comfortable in asking me questions rather than having them feel embarrassed to ask something due to their perceived image of me as being a strict researcher. Before commencing the interviews, I let them know that I would be voice recording them using my laptop while they were speaking, so that I would be able to fully listen to their responses and have them for later use in case I needed clarification on

a particular comment or argument made. I let them know that I would also be writing down notes as the interview progressed.

After informed consent procedures I went on to begin the interview process by asking informants basic information about themselves and their connection to Somerville. I asked questions such their age, gender, and how long they have lived in Somerville. Although I provide a list of the questions I used in the interviews (outlined in Appendix D) sometimes, I asked additional question that are not outlined in that particular guide because I thought of the question at the moment or wanted an interviewee to expand upon a particular response or concept. The questions however, are not outlined in the specific interview question guide. Most of my questions are open-ended as I aimed to obtain long responses from informants where I could examine their perceptions and interpretations of community definitions in Somerville.

The first question I ask as part of my interview process is part of the basic questions I asked every youth participant under the category of “How long have you lived in Somerville” – within that category, I asked questions such as “What do you like most about the city?” “If there was something you could change about the Somerville what would it be and why”, and “Do you plan on living here for a long time? By including the last question of asking whether informants would see themselves living in Somerville in the future, I hoped to challenge perceptions of immediate perceptions of their communities and their hopes for what they hope to see their communities become. I believed this question would prove to be interesting, as youth in Somerville tend to be very much involved with wanting to preserve a sense of “Somerville Pride” – I will touch upon this concept in a later chapter based on the analyses of the in-depth interviews I conducted. With preservation of this sense of pride, comes a desire to institute

change not only for the current generations of youth that may not necessarily be as aware and then also for future generations of young people.

The next set of questions focused on the open-ended concept of youths' overall experiences living in Somerville. Within this subject, I asked questions relating to their overall enjoyment spending time in Somerville, any changes they have noticed in city (as well as how they may personally feel about those changes), as well as a question about whether or not they feel "proud" of being a resident of Somerville. This question was meant to again, have youth take a figurative step back from their everyday experiences of being teens in Somerville and analyze their sentiments regarding the changing landscape of Somerville in a reflective way. In other words, sometimes we as humans live life without really taking the time to reflect on the ways our experiences mold our perceptions. In order to get youth participants actively thinking about city changes such as gentrification, I hoped these questions would be a way for them to expose their thoughts about the role Somerville plays in such changes. Additionally, the question of whether or not they feel "proud" to be a resident of Somerville refers back the concept of "Somerville pride" that I speak about earlier as in order for youth to want to make a difference in a particular community, they would have to feel a some sort of pride – whether that be in the existing image of the city or pride in what it could become.

Teen and youth culture in general is heavily dependent on the ways members of this population interact with each other and thus develop their individual identities. As with organizations such as Teen Empowerment, the most impactful way that they spread their message is through spoken word, raps, and other mediums that aim at helping teens relate to a common purpose to wanting their urban realities to be free of violence and inequalities. Because of this powerful message, it is imperative that many different sectors of the youth populations are

able to bounce ideas off of each other and find strengths in their differences. According to a quote on the Teen Empowerment website, one youth states, “I was able to interact and befriend many people that I would never talk to and found that we share a common interest” (Teen Empowerment 2008). The importance of shared visions among young people in a community is a concept I strove to underscore with my other set of questions in the interviews as I ask, “Could you tell me about your interactions with your fellow peers/people your age?” I hoped to gain an understanding of current urban youths’ methods of socializing and interacting with people in their age group. Within this open-ended umbrella question, I included a question about where their friends go to spend time together or the colloquial term of “hanging out”. For this particular sub-question, I hoped to understand youths’ spatial interpretations and whether they have changed since years ago when youth used to consider Somerville as having ample space to “hang out” and express themselves in ways that were conducive to the positive development of their identities.

Another portion of the questions I asked in my interviewed focused again on youth’s spatial perception of the layout of Somerville and how this contributes either to gentrification or to how they define community identity. I ask what parts of Somerville they typically spend time in and more specifically what restaurants, public, or commercial areas that they particularly enjoy as well as whether Somerville is the location where they do most of their shopping, recreation, and socialization. I also ask if there are any parts of Somerville they do not go to (the follow up questions being where those locations are and why) as I found this could be important in highlighting the ways youth form their community identities based on their interactions with the spatial configurations of Somerville as a city. By knowing the general areas youth do not tend to go and their reasoning behind it, I could potentially dispel certain myths about

Somerville's attitudes towards its younger population. Over the course of the last decade, the city has witnessed the closure of many recreational parks and outdoor areas that were traditionally used almost exclusively by youth, but as the years progressed, parks have been closed, leaving youth with limited places to be able to interact with other youth who may in fact have similar mindsets geared towards social change and community action. Many consider Somerville to be an extremely "youth-friendly place" and as I ask in the last set of questions, I think this question helped youth participants grapple with the concepts of the city being a place that embraces youth culture as part of the ever changing community identity instead of disregarding it as the peripheries of urban society.

The second to last set of questions I asked of informants was regarding the expansion of the Green Line subway system into various parts of Somerville. For quite some time, Somerville has been conducting dialogues and various information sessions about potential implications of having the Green Line (and now, Orange Line as well) cut through different parts of the city—here they realized that this could very well be a driver of gentrification in its own right. Although extended transportation would help the residents of Somerville to get into Boston with more facility, the end results would be far worse in that convenient access to transportation means a dramatic increase in both rent and properties' values in general. What does this mean for the people who cannot longer afford to live in Somerville to do the changes being brought about by the Massachusetts Bay Transportations Authority (MBTA)? Yes, it is true that having an increase in the amount of people that commute in and out of Somerville will add to the rich social fabric of the city, but one cannot help but think about the community identity will shift significantly with the influx of new people. Most of the time, the people who will most greatly benefit from the new transportation system will be young professionals who are living outside of

Boston for cheaper rent options and will be commuting to their jobs on this new subway line that will go through Somerville. In gentrification literature, we see transportation being one of the main agents of displacement as stated earlier, new accessibilities for getting to and from the city will facilitate the movement of people and thus will alter the way youth see their futures when they too will look to not only use the subway, but will use this as a deciding factor as to where they will live in the future. One of the key features of this interview question is the fact that I ask a sub-question regarding what exactly it is that the city of Somerville or Somerville residents need to do in order to prepare for the expansion of the Green Line. I believe that youth have a clear perception of their often marginalized status in a community and society and this was my motivation for choosing this question as I thought youth informants would be apt to say that the city of Somerville needs to listen to youth voices when it comes to expansion (whether it be in regards to the Green Line or any other major redevelopment project in the city).

Lastly, with the final set of questions, I was able to touch upon one of the most telling concepts relating to youth perceptions regarding how older members of the population view them. I ask the question, “Would you consider Somerville to be youth-friendly?”. Although this question could be answered in a yes/no format, I also provide three sub-questions that were used in order to prompt more long-ended responses from informants. Those questions are the following: “Do you think there are a lot of places for youth to interact and socialize with each other?”, “If you think Somerville is youth friendly, what elements make it so?”, and “If not, what do you think the city could do to improve that?” These questions all relate to how others (namely city officials) think about teens when making large-scale city policies as this can influence how “youth-friendly” the city can be. If the mayor decides to reduce spending on the Mayors’ City Job Program, which aims to create more youth jobs, then this will directly impact how youth live

their lives. Additionally, an example such as this would also impact how youth perceive themselves, as it will mirror how older residents perceive them as outcasts of society. With this question, I also hoped become familiar with youth vision for how to make communities more conducive to social change using youth as the main agents for this to occur. Major revolutions and movements have been started by youth, so in order for a community to sustain such a change, it needs to be accepting towards non-convention steps that teens may use to get there.

The use of in-depth interviews has proven to be extremely beneficial in examining the narrative of urban youth in response to gentrification. I gained new insight and a new perspective into the lives of not only the youth I interviewed, but also into the state of youth culture in a changing city such as Somerville, MA. Often time, I found myself straying from the interview questions, not because of carelessness but because I was bombarded with fascinating insights from youth that would lead me to think of new questions or concepts to review. Not only was I able to learn new things from my informants, but also I was able to interview individuals from various backgrounds, various ages, and various perspectives on community identity, gentrification, and social change. For most, if not all youth participants, did agree on one thing and that is that youth are indeed the future of our current generation, so in keeping this fact alive in the ways society views its younger members of society, we will come to accept and value the voices of our young people especially when it comes to the gentrification discourse.

Focus Groups

In addition to administering interviews with Somerville youth, I also conducted two separate focus groups—one at Somerville's Teen Empowerment and another at the Liaison Interpreters Program of Somerville. As mentioned previously, I have an established connection with both programs being a former youth participants so I contacted the directors of both

organizations to tell them about this project and to ask for their permission to not only conduct interviews, but focus groups as well. In total I conducted two focus groups, one being at Teen Empowerment and the other one at LIPS. In addition to have individual opinions on the ways the city of Somerville is changing, I wanted to have a collective discussion with youth about their thoughts on gentrification and social justice as I realize that youth culture is highly performative in the sense that youth identities are very much influenced by perceptions fellow peers have of them. Therefore, I thought it would be interesting to see this social process at work by conducting focus groups in which youth informants could engage in a think tank dynamic. Here, they could honor their individual opinions, but at the same time reflect upon how their experiences contribute to the development of a group identity (that is, what constitutes being a youth in a changing and gentrifying community such as Somerville).

The youth participants in the focus groups are members of the two organizations and were thus recruited not only because they are existing members, but also by availability. During the time I was conducting these interviews and focus groups, I was also volunteering at these programs. As a result, I was able to present the purpose of my thesis and be able to ask youth if they would be willing to contribute their experiences. We designated a day that worked for all of the interested youth and we met to conduct the focus group. While the participants do represent urban youth living from extremely diverse backgrounds, they are exclusively members of Teen Empowerment and LIPS, therefore my focus groups were restricted when it came to including youth from other programs. It is also important to underscore the fact that again, although these youth participants come from diverse backgrounds, they are in no way representative of all urban youth experience as not all young people experience life in Somerville especially in light of gentrification in an urban setting. Their responses are ways to be able to gain a deeper

understanding of certain elements of youth culture, but not necessarily to set a standard for how all young people in urban settings think or should be thinking.

The Union College Human Review Board was also able to approve my focus group question guide, which can be found in Appendix E at the end of this document. At the beginning of each focus group, similar to the interviews, I made sure to provide a purpose and context for my research purpose not as a way to condition participants, but as a way to debrief them. That way, they would know how exactly I was going to utilize their responses and what potential conclusions I could derive from them. Additionally, I had all participants (8 total participants for the TE focus group and 15 participants for LIPS) read and sign informed consent forms that similar to the interview consent forms, outlined the purpose of the study, outlined principals of confidentiality, and most importantly, outlined potential risk associated with participating in the focus group. Although my research questions did not involve concepts that could cause any psychological harm, participants needed to know that they would be sharing their opinions and experiences with others in the group thus potentially, revealing something that they do not feel comfortable sharing. I also stressed the fact that they could remove themselves from the focus group at any point if they did not feel comfortable participating.

I use a focus group method instead of a survey or any other method of data collection for the simple fact that I am focusing on the development of youth community identities and as I specify earlier, youth identity is very much influenced, if not dependent on the perception other teens have on them so because of this, I thought it would be fascinating to analyze real interactions on the issues of gentrification. To allow youth participants to feel relaxed and open, from the beginning, I told youth to feel free to express themselves in however way they wanted and not to feel restricted in saying what was on their mind. This way, youth would be more

comfortable in providing honest and relevant answers. My specific role was participant-observer since I played both the role of moderator in facilitating the conversation with the focus group participants and at times even providing my own point of view, but then also at times I also had to retreat from the conversation in order to record notes on a particular subject underscored during the focus group. Additionally, although the questions are rewritten a little differently, they are still related to the interview questions in content. I made sure to include questions that were more all encompassing and comprehensive as I wanted the focus group to be similar to a think tank dynamic where youth participants could engage in a casual dialogue, contribute their own ideas, and build off of each other's arguments. The first question asked related to whether or not they would consider Somerville to be a "youth-friendly" place and of course this would prompt youth to ask what exactly I meant by "youth-friendly", I made sure to specify that the questions were meant to be open-ended in order to have youth bounce ideas off of each other. There is no real and concrete definition for what the term "youth-friendly" means, so participants were able to contribute ideas to not only the definition, but the degrees to which Somerville embodies the definition and their reasoning behind the particular stance. Within this umbrella concept of the presence or absence of "youth-friendliness", I provided the following sub questions in order to prompt further development of their opinions on this term: "Do you think there are a lot of places for youth to interact and socialize with each other?" and "If not, what do you think the city could do to improve that?"

There is another set of questions related more closely to the issues of gentrification in Somerville. I asked what the term gentrification actually means—although, I am familiar with the definition in a traditional and more modern sense, I sought to gain insight into the level of awareness on the side of youth into their perceptions of the issue. Then in an attempt to bring the

discussion of gentrification to less of theoretical perspective and more of a practical and local definition, I asked how the term “gentrification” relates to Somerville. As part of this question, I wanted youth to be able to connect the points they brought up with their standard definition of gentrification to see how the gentrification occurring in Somerville either dispels or proves typical definitions of gentrification (displacement theories). From the beginning, I have observed that gentrification in Somerville does not fall within the traditional definition of the term for the fact that many people in Somerville are indeed aware and conscious of the potential changes this could bring not only to their lives, but to their concept of community. Additionally, many people relate this term to “broken cities”. As I outline in the first chapter however, Somerville (although could have once been labeled as being “broken”) is hardly that. With being named an All America City in 2009, Somerville demonstrated the extent to which its “community members, government, businesses, and nonprofit organizations work together to address critical local issues” (City of Somerville 2009) – these criterion would hardly classify as belonging to what could be labeled as a “broken city”. Interestingly enough, another measure of civic vitality in a city for the All America award is the “recognition and inclusion of the diverse segments of the population in community decision-making...” A prime factor in this analysis of youths’ changing community perceptions in light of gentrification is definitely this concept of inclusion of society’s youngest members, so with this open-ended question, I sought to gain insight into youth definitions of gentrification.

Next, another question set that I included in my focus group discussions as well as my interview were ones related to “youth-friendliness” and the specific impacts of gentrification on youth populations. I specifically ask, “How are adolescents like you impacted by this?” as well as “how do you youth and adolescents in Somerville socialize or ‘hang out’ with each other”.

The last one was more of a general way of asking if they have noticed a change in the ways youth interact. The last set of questions is related to the concept of community as I ask participants what an “ideal” community looks like in their eyes and whether or not Somerville mirrors that image. In combining previous topics of gentrification and changing community ideals, I hoped to learn about how exactly youth viewed their own communities as well as the steps they saw as necessary to change. The change aspect of this question proved to be fascinating as it brings in potential for social change – if youth did not see their communities in a state that would benefit their development, then they would take next steps to try and achieve change that would most accurately align with their image of a “good” community. It is this receptiveness of the desire of mobilization is what I sought to underscore with this question and will prove to be extremely telling my follow analyses. What steps do youth take in order to promote a positive community image not only for themselves, but also for future generations? How do these changes impact those who are in power? How can youth become agents of social change? Are youth social movements are things of antiquity? Conclusions drawn will clarify how gentrification processes impact definitions of community for young people, and also document ways in which youth can be valuable assets in promoting community identity.

Analyzing the Data

The following chapters outline the analysis of the responses that were collected through the interview process as well as the focus groups. Together, these two modes of data collection served to shed light on traditionally unheard voices within the gentrification literature and narrative.

Chapter Three: Analysis of the Interviews

Overview of the Interviews

The interviews that I conducted as one part of data collection for this thesis proved to be extremely telling and allowed me to gain insight into the world of youth living in a gentrifying community. The informants and participants of my interviews were all youth from either of the Somerville-based organizations, Teen Empowerment or the Liaison Interpreters Program of Somerville (under the larger immigrant-advocacy organization, The Welcome Project). In addition, they are all current residents of Somerville or have a connection to the city as they spend time in the city for work purposes or the maintaining of familial ties. Each of the informants, age ranging from 15-18, is involved in their communities and are intent on making a difference in said communities. For this reason, one could say that they generally are receptive to the patterns of change that characterize their urban realities and are thus interested in finding out more about their place or their contribution in their larger society. The informants are extremely diverse individuals as many of them are bicultural—in other words, they adhere to the social norms of two cultures while having or combining the cultural practices of two ethnic identities. For this reason, I was able to obtain insight in not only how each youth interprets the world around them in response to the hybridist nature of their perspectives, but also how this lens can impact how they view the altering of current community identities. How does being an immigrant youth impact how one might view the issue of gentrification and community or social change? Through the use of interviews, I was able to gain a holistic and more comprehensive perspective into the lives and community identities of ten Somerville youth. In addition, I was able to obtain insight on their opinions on urban issues such as gentrification that have a direct

impact on the molding of community identity that highlights both the personal and the societal. The following descriptions are brief profiles of each of the informants that I interviewed and a summary or overview of their responses. It is important to note that in order uphold confidentiality, the names of all informants have been changed.

Ryan is a sixteen-year-old White male from East Somerville, MA. However, although he considers a life-long resident of the city, he did reside in the neighboring town of Charleston due to his Somerville home being burnt down when he was only six months old. He moved back to Somerville and now attends Full Circle High School, which is a “Turn Around” or alternative high school that according to the Somerville’s Public School’s website is “designed to meet the special academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of adolescents who, for many reasons, have experienced difficult in the traditional education settings” (City of Somerville Education 2014). In general, Ryan values the diversity feel that the city has to offer and he feels as if his life would have been extremely different if he had grown up in Charlestown. He is thankful for all that he has learned in “dealing” with other cultures as a result of being a resident of Somerville. If there was something Ryan would change about Somerville, however, it would be gentrification and “how expensive it’s getting to live here”. He believes as if this has personally impacted him and his family as “[they] live off of one paycheck a month from disability from [their] dad so the rent going up and up makes it harder on them and so [they] only have that one source of income.” On an individual level, however, Ryan has been receptive to the changes that Somerville is undergoing and what that means for the city’s cultural atmosphere as well his community perspective. He highlighted both short-term and long-term consequences to these changes. For example, he specified the short-term as being the physical alterations of his urban spaces coming to light through increased construction, but most importantly, he sensed the

paradoxical nature of these changes. He does consider that aesthetically, these changing realities are seemingly positive and it generally helps people to feel proud of their urban environment, but ultimately, as Ryan specifies, these changes can only be measured in the revenue that is gained from it in terms of newer residents buying condominiums or shopping at new high-end stores. The result, unfortunately, is a disappearing of Somerville culture and what Ryan defines as, “The pride and embracing everything that’s right and wrong”. This concept of “Somerville Pride” is one that is highlighted in many interviews and focus groups with Somerville youth and can be directly transferable to being a huge agent of the molding of community identity. I touch upon this in the following interview analysis. This informant also spoke about the changes in ways his interactions with peers have changed as a direct result of a changing Somerville culture. He has noticed that the city is less tolerant of youth hanging out in public areas and he recalls a time in his younger years where he used to spend time at the various parks located in East Somerville. Now, he described a different reality where youth are confined to indoor settings thus creating a separation and isolating effect on the ways youth think about their communities. They are cast to the peripheries of society and affecting the ways our younger members of the population are not only interacting with themselves, but with the community. In addition, Ryan believed that if this change in the ways youth are perceived, as he himself has had negative interactions with what he calls, “yuppies” or new residents of Somerville, then he wants to make sure “the right people are here to make sure Somerville is a better place, but keep the culture the same”. Is it possible to maintain this the same character in a city when so much changes around it? I asked Ryan the following question during our interview, “How do you think [gentrification] would change the culture of Somerville?” and he responded with saying that he did not foresee this sense of “Somerville Pride” as being as prevalent in the community and that because it is such an integral

agent of identity development and identity in general, Somerville youth feel as if gentrification will allow for the disappearing of culture and a true Somerville youth identity.

Geraldine is a sixteen-year-old Black female Somerville resident of Haitian descent and a previous resident of the state of Florida. She is a junior at Somerville High School and has lived in Somerville for three years now. One of the aspects of the city that she truly enjoys is the accessibility of food choices in the various neighborhoods. She says that she does not have to go far to find food and underscores the major street, Broadway as being her favorite. She lives on this street and it is a place where she is able to find a multitude of food stores. In addition, Geraldine believes that Somerville is youth-friendly as there are many youth programs in the area that function to create cohesiveness within the adolescent population in Somerville as well as and probably most importantly to Geraldine is the existence of various physical spaces for youth to interact such as parks and the Davis Square movie theater. However, even though this is true for the informant, she also believes that her more aware and socially conscious friends say this and that Somerville still has areas in which it could improve in terms of developing additional programs for youth. She says that many youth have talent and she suggests having a play in which Somerville teens could create something of their own and at the same time function to become an outlet for their creativity. In addition, she feels that because youth are the future generations, she would tell youth that they have to be aware and involved in the changes that are going on around them in order to be able to have a say in major city developments. She said, “older people are going to die and young people are going to take over just like we’re going to die and our kids are going to take over so it’s a big part of the society”.

Meghan is a White, eighteen-year-old female originally from the city of Somerville, but now a current resident of Everett, MA. She is also a recent Somerville High School graduate.

Although she classifies Everett as her current place of residency, she feels a special connection to Somerville as a city as it is the place where her parents grew up, where she went to school, and the city that molded her up until she moved to Everett. As she said in the interview, “I always come back to Somerville” so it is evident that it has an extremely prominent aspect of her identity. She admires the number of opportunities that are available for the youth and she feels as if this contributes to the impact youth can ultimately have on the landscape of the city. On the other hand, she also notices an issue with the city as she underscores something that she wishes she could change and that is the ever-growing presence of temporary residents in the city. Many college students that attend Tufts University and the neighboring Boston and Cambridge institutions, but has chosen to reside in Somerville due to its cheaper rent prices. Meghan says,

“There’s just ... the college kids are coming in and there are a lot of low-income families that live in Somerville and they’re coming in and it’s raising prices for the families that already live here. It’s becoming so common to live in Somerville when you go to college around Boston because the T is right there so it’s easy to get back and forth so they’re moving in and then y’know some life-long Somerville residents are having to move out”.

She also emphasizes how this aspect of gentrification is also having a huge impact on youth populations as well as many families who have lived in three-family houses that were once bought by grandparents or great-grandparents, have been forced to move out with increasing property tax. As it gets more and more difficult for families to remain constant presences and pillars of the community, youth must also move thus impacting age demographics of the city to being one that is comprised of a “twenty-somethings” and middle aged people. In addition, Meghan underscores the importance of having teens and adolescents voices in a community mostly because according to her, “youth really know what is going on in the community” and because of that they can be the ones to come up with the ideas in order to improve the community. They are able to see the community without a biased lens because they are able to

appreciate and take into account the “ins and outs” and positive and negative aspects of said community. This is often difficult to do from the eyes of an adult who is may be less-willing to take into account the perspectives that may be contradicting to personal dogmas. According to Meghan, “The youth here, they have truly lived here”. They attend high school, they see and know everyone due to their heightened social behavior, but most importantly, they know what is occurring in the community whether it is positive or negative. She says,

“With you know the gangs and stuff like that youth are the ones that get pulled into gangs at an early age but also youth make a difference in the community because you can choose to not to go into the gang and to better your life and you know its just depending on what the youth choose to do is how the next generation is gunna change because right now, we have the voice.”

Next, in discussing the expansion of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)’s plans to extend its Green Line into Somerville and incorporate multiple new stops throughout, we discussed the two-sided nature of this occurrence and how it will impact community dynamics. Meghan recognizes that increased accessibility to the train system will be a huge convenience for residents of Somerville who must commute to Boston for their jobs. However, with increase transportation comes a facilitation for not only people to leave the city, but also to enter it and as Meghan fears, the expansion of the Green Line will spur an even more constant influx of college students and thus change the city in drastic ways. In discussion of the Green Line extension in relation to this changing landscape, Meghan spoke about its impact on gentrification and how a huge driver or agent of this urban phenomenon is in fact transportation. More specifically, she believes that this influx of new younger professionals in addition to temporary students will cause the rent to increase even further and thus make it more difficult for Somerville residents who are already struggling to live in a changing city. Most importantly, Meghan captures the large-scale impact to which these changes will have not only for families,

but also for youth themselves as they try to maneuver in a city that traditionally seeks to label them as “dangerous” and “deviant”.

Nate is an eighteen-year old Black male from Somerville, MA. He lived in Somerville for the first fifteen years of his life until his grandfather passed away and was forced to move to North Carolina. Similar to Geraldine, Nate is extremely appreciative of Somerville’s extensive array of food options and claims that he can get food anywhere and very easily. He says that during his stay in North Carolina, life was very different as compared to Somerville as not only did he go almost a whole year without indulging in a steak and cheese sub, but, like Meghan, he also specified the importance of transportation accessibility. Nate, like many of the youth I interviewed and those that participated in my focus groups, they recall their days playing in the streets. Somerville is a “kids’ paradise” according to Nate. In addition to this, there has also been an instance where Nate notices a change in Somerville’s atmosphere in that it is becoming safer with the presence of newer groups in the city—he speaks about a steadily decreasing crime rate and most importantly, the dwindling presence of gang activity in the streets. According to this youth informant, however, the past was still characterized by kids growing up following in the footsteps of gangsters because they were the most respected in the not so distant past. Looking to the future, this informant made it clear that Somerville’s identity is marked with progress as is dictated by the constant construction and beatifying of the city’s squares—“Somerville is trying to make itself into an event better place to grow up.” One concern that was brought up during this interview was relating to youths’ changing patterns of interaction with regards to how youth interaction with each other. Very much like Ryan, Nate also notices the lack of interaction youth have with their outside spatial realities and how they are more in tune with their electronics. We see the ever-growing paradox of today’s youth—the question of being connected (literally to

electronic devices) yet being disconnected from the outside world and the environmental factors that could ultimately contribute to develop their community identities.

Tasha is a fifteen-year-old Black female who is originally from Somerville, MA. She is a first-year student at Somerville High School and specifies that she has lived in Somerville her whole life except for two years in which she lived in the Mattapan area of Boston, MA. Like Ryan and many of the youth interviewed, she loves the diversity of Somerville and more specifically the fact that she can have the luxury of speaking to people one would never expect to be talking to. She gets to meet Brazilians, Latin Americans, Haitians, etc. and she specifies that there is an ever-growing acceptance to people of new cultures and a closeness that arises from discourse with someone whose worldviews may be different than your own. In addition to the embracing of multicultural aspect of the community, Tasha underscores the fact that she feels safe in her community as well, which is definitely important with regards to how one defines community in general. Although this is true, this youth informant also recognizes the number of people who have to move out of the city due to inability of paying rents or mortgage. Tasha claims that living in Somerville is “a struggle” and even more so for youth voices as they are not heard within the larger municipal discourse. Somerville has some improving to do when it comes to strengthening lines of communication between city affairs and its youth populations, as Tasha underscores. Most importantly, the sense of agency is lost amongst this population when they are disregarded as major contributors to the city atmosphere and seen with the examples provided by the informant:

“We don’t get a choice – school lunches change and no one every knows about that and the schedule changing at the high school no one probably knew about that either and like during the summer we got our schedules. They were just blocks and no one knew what those were either.”

In proposal of a solution, there could be a more effective and efficient incorporation of blending of youth voices within in major school affairs decisions. Tasha specifically proposed the distribution of an open-ended survey where youth could write down ideas of things they would like to see changed in their communities. In highlighting the interconnectedness of youth culture, we see that this informant believes in the extensiveness of youth networks as a positive agent in the potential for change. Tasha says that when one person steps up, another friend and their particular friend network or group will stand up and join in the cause. As a result, because teens are very much influenced by perceptions their fellow peers of them, they will be likely to do this positive thing if it was dictating the behavior of the majority.

Stephanie is a sixteen-year-old Salvadoran-American resident of Cambridge. Although she does not live in Somerville, she does have a direct tie to the city as she participates in the LIPS program and events put on by the organization, attends local ethnic restaurants, and visits family who are residents of Somerville. For this reason, she felt comfortable participating in my interviews despite knowing that most questions would be referring to concepts relating to Somerville. She knows enough about the city to be able to answer the interview questions in a way that is comprehensive. Stephanie is a junior at the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School and was born in the city of Cambridge meanwhile both her parents are originally from the Central American country of El Salvador. She has lived in Cambridge all her life, but as specified earlier, she considers herself to be knowledgeable about the area as she generally spends a lot of time here. Stephanie specified that the thing she liked most about Somerville was the creation of tight and extensive networks that people in the city construct with people similar to them and with similar ways of looking at the world. In speaking about the fact that she does come to Somerville in order to maintain familial ties, she says that the large demographics of Latin American people

in Somerville mostly serve as networks in her family's desire to obtain resources. She says, "we come here to eat and to visit friends and family so my favorite part about Somerville is that there are so many different stores, and so many people that have Spanish backgrounds, so I feel more comfortable being around them. Interestingly enough, this informant was able to provide insight on not only her experiences or perceptions about Somerville, but most importantly, she was able to recall sentiments or opinions other people in her Cambridge networks have regarding Somerville. As I came to find out, that is something that Stephanie would like to change about Somerville or rather she would like to change the perception that other cities have of Somerville because usually, the perception is that "they're not as good as other cities". There is the notion that it is "low-income" or that the school system is not up to par in comparison to wealthier districts in the metro-Boston area. Similar to the 80's when Somerville was very much in a state of decline, the stereotypes of Somerville still holding on to this image of a struggling city is still prevalent in the cosmovision of other cities. With a different lens than many of her peers, however, Stephanie has been able to really take into account the fact that Somerville is indeed in a state of becoming—"I've noticed that there is so much revitalization and rebuilding around the city and schools, so I would just like to change the perception that people have of Somerville in general." In addition, Stephanie spoke about the youth-friendliness aspect of the city mostly due to observations based on young people she has seen on the streets and as a result, becoming a mecca of college students. Although, she does recognize that this could be a good thing, she also points something out that she learned in one of her math courses. She learned that universities can be major vehicles of urban alteration due to the influx of young people who eventually seek to work in the city or settle down with a family. Most importantly, however, Stephanie saw this as positive thing that would help to "expand" and help a city to continue "growing". In

discussing youth contributions to their communities, I was able to learn that it is important for youth to contribute their ideas as they can positively contribute to the flow of new ideas and innovative thought processes that can aid in the development of the transition from a older way of thinking to a more progressive and modern outlook on city affairs. In a negative sense, Stephanie foresees youths' addictive tendencies to be the cause of a community's demise especially when it comes to substance abuse. Overall, this youth informant recognizes the importance of being able to underscore positive messages and those students who are committed to social change can be able to make an impact in urban settings and everywhere where youth live.

Farah is a sixteen-year-old Black female resident of Somerville, MA and originally from the country of Haiti. She moved to Somerville three years ago and attends Somerville High School. Like Geraldine and other youth informants, Farah values the multiculturalism aspect of this dynamic city and regards it as one of the reasons as to why she admires the city. She appreciates the fact that there are different people from multiple countries and different ways of interpreting the world around them. Most importantly, she is impressed by how groups are able to look beyond the differences and emphasize the ways they share a common purpose and lifestyle. In discussing the importance of youth contributions to community development, we see that Farah believes in a passing down or transmission of positive images from one generation to another. According to this informant, it begins in the home. More specifically, Farah says "if you have a child, and you teach that child to grow as a good person, you raise him/her to be friendly and to love, to love your neighbor, and things like that then that child will learn all that you have said so anything you teach it, they will apply it even know it is not immediate. They are the future of the country ... of the community" Relating to this contribution that is perpetuated

through socialization, Farah also says that the city could improve on listening to youth voices as there could be more programs and organizations that are geared toward youth development. I asked whether she meant more programs like LIPS and she specified that youth need more of an outlet. The source of this outlet can come in the form of a community center in which they can be able to interact with each other and express themselves in a positive way and with people who care.

Rosalie is a sixteen-year-old Latin American Female from the city of Somerville and has been a life-long resident. She used to attend the East Somerville Community School, but during her time there, the school burnt down and her and fellow classmates had to be relocated to the John A. Cummings School. Currently, she is a second year student at Somerville High School. During her interview, she highlights the unfortunate reality of drugs and its impact on the community—she specified that this would be something she would change in the character of Somerville. She says there are many intelligent and talented youth who are caught up in the cyclical nature of the drug culture. They eventually end up selling drugs and “throw their lives and careers away”. Although this is a truth that Rosalie sees highlighted in her community reality, she does bring up the positive aspect of her community identity, which is that everyone in Somerville is united and genuinely care about one another. Thus, the city is a place that she would like to continue developing her youth identity, establish a life there, and even raise her future family there. In addition, she realizes that although there are many changes occurring in Somerville, people are generally interacting with each other in a courteous way especially when it comes to people who may be seemingly different at first glance. An interesting point in our conversation resulted from Rosalie discussion on the Green Line expansion for the simple fact that transportation accessibility is increasingly becoming a paradox within the changing urban

identity that constitutes Somerville's character. As Rosalie points out, although she will definitely utilize the new stops on the Green Line especially because one is going to be constructed right outside her house, she also feels as if more stops could spur an increased in deviant behavior in and around said stops. She uses the example of one of the Orange Line stops in Somerville, which is Sullivan Station and how there are always drunk people and homeless people who occupy this space at nightfall and early in the morning. This brings up topics of what is considered deviant in a particular society.

Marylin is a sixteen-year-old Black female who is originally a citizen of Haiti. She is a LIPS youth and was able to come to this country in 2009, when she was about to enter the sixth grade. She is about to go into her fifth year of being in the United States and she currently lives with her parents. Like Rosalie, Marylin is concerned about the ever-present impact of drugs on Somerville communities. In responding the interview question about what she would change, this is something she highlighted with regards to again, the cyclical nature of drug culture. She says, "I would change the people that do drugs. I think I would make sure to tell them not to use them or sell them because a lot of kids do that because they feel like its good for them but its not really because it makes them bad stuff." Also, Marylin brought up a very interesting point about the general aesthetics factor that goes into gentrification discourse and how the impacts the shaping of community identity. For example, during her interview, she specified that, as a particular change she has observed is the city's willingness and almost obsession with making sure it is safe for all. Although this is certainly a good thing for the general maintenance of society, we can see that many of these changes to the physical aspects of the city are very much set in place to attract people from outside of Somerville. Marylin's example was relating to tree lights and street lamps. She says, "When I first got to this country, there were barely in lights on the streets

and now the paths and streets have good lighting. They also put lights in the trees to make Broadway look prettier.” Although this is true, she feels as if Somerville residents are not resentful as it helps in altering outdated negative perceptions of the city. People will be drawn to Somerville. Also, another interesting point in an overview of Marilyn’s interview is the fact that the concept of being youth-friendly is relative and potentially even socially constructed. She said that although she would consider Somerville to be youth-friendly, “it depends on the person and their interpretation” – because she is an involved youth with LIPS and other extracurricular at Somerville High School, her perception is biased as she belongs to an existing network where there are opportunities for youth to voice their opinions and express themselves. This is most likely not the case with all youth populations in the city, however. In relation to this notion, Marilyn also believed that the city government needed to improve their standing on listening to youth voices in the community because they already do not take this into account when passing major municipal legislation. She feels as if society and the current city power structure is “too strictly controlled” for youth culture to thrive and for them to be “able to be creative and free”.

Audrey is a seventeen-year-old Black female and a resident of Somerville, MA. Like many of the fellow informants, she is also of Haitian descent and immigrated to the United States in the early years of her adolescence. Again, also like many of the informants before her, Audrey isolates the “feeling” of Somerville, its vitality, and vividness as something to be admired as compared to other cities. She says a big component of that is the diversity—a term that is very often used to signal the presence of many different ethnic and racial groups living in a single area of region. She says that when she first moved to this country, she did not expect to live amongst such a multitude of different people from many different places on the globe. Audrey also specified her frustrations with drug abuse within Somerville youth culture as something that she

wishes she could change and says, “I would just like Somerville to be a better place and not be known for the drugs and gangs”. In relation, we can see how accepting Somerville with its positive and negative qualities is a way of constructing a community identity that is especially tailored to fit Somerville’s character. She demonstrates how living in Somerville will change one’s perspectives of the city. “A lot of people have misconceptions about the area and people will give you false information about it but once you come to Somerville and get all the parts of Somerville...the good, the bad, the better, the best, and you put them together, it will change your perspective and that’s why I like it so much because sometimes there’s a place where you can’t go wrong”. Next, Audrey touches upon her concerns with the rising cost of living of Somerville in correlation with the issue of gentrification. As opposed to a few decades back into Somerville’s past, the city was not a desired place to live, however, according to Audrey and her father’s insight, it gradually became “nicer” as more and more people sought to be a part of this new progressive city on the rise. The city government has taken note of the response not only from neighboring communities, but also from the residents themselves as they keep expanding in whatever space is available and ready for redevelopment. The negative aspect of this as this informant points out is the fact that with all said changes, “it’s becoming really expensive to live in. I’m afraid that in 10 years, all the stuck up people are going to move to Somerville and change it even more to fit what they like. They are going to forget about the low-income people and families”. What does this mean for the current diversity of the community, however? Audrey made of a point of saying that although these changes will enhance the diversity of the city with new influxes of people coming in, she does not want the diversity to eventually cancel itself out to the point where society becomes homogenous once more. The concept of *Somerville Pride* is a topic that shows its face in multiple points in not only the interviews, but focus groups as well

and is definitely telling of the ways in which Somerville youth construct their youth culture and ultimately their identities. An aspect of this *pride* is a perseverance and vitality that is rooted in struggle. Audrey says,

“I’m proud of being a part of a place that stresses this pride and solidarity no matter what you’ve been through or struggled through. That struggle is what brings people together. I love being a part of that and that’s why I love it so much and wouldn’t want to change too much about the city’s identity”.

Lastly, a crucial topic within the major gentrification discourse is the issue of the temporary resident tendencies of these “new people” that are moving into Somerville. Many do not stay in Somerville for an extended period of time and thus it can be said that they do not feel a certain connection to the city as someone who considers himself a stable or permanent resident. Are they capable of developing this Somerville Pride? According to Audrey’s interview she feels as if they are meshing with the community identity, but not necessarily being sensitive to all aspects of it due to a more individualistic mentality. With relation to this, I gained insight into Audrey’s thoughts on youth interactions not only within youth networks, but also regarding youth interactions with adults. She believes it is a communication issue that is embedded in the community identity and that is something that will be explored in future discussions and analyses.

Analysis of Interviews

Through the use of a qualitative research method of obtaining information for this study, I was able to gain more information about the impact gentrification can have on the development of youth identity in a changing urban community. Using in-depth interviews with ten diverse Somerville teens, I was able to notice some similarities that spanned across all interviews, but also some differences that were both troubling and telling according to the context of changing perceptions of community in light of gentrification, preservation of “Somerville Pride”, and the

overall alteration of youth identity development in working-class cities. The following is a discussion of the all-encompassing themes unearthed while discussing the previous concepts in the interviews with Somerville youth as well as a discussion on the sociological theories that can help to explain the responses that were given.

Growth Rooted in Change

Many of the youth interviewed had a difficult time deciphering what changes were happening in the city of Somerville, MA. Because all of my informants were anywhere from the ages of 15-18, they were not alive during the time gentrification began changing the physical composition of the city. In order to be fully aware of “change” one has to be conscious of how something was before said change occurred, they must be present during the transitioning period, and lastly, they must be receptive to the final product in which one’s view of the past will come in handy when pointing out what stayed the same and what has drastically been altered as compared to the previous version. Most teens or youth do not have this luxury, however. They were not alive during the time that Somerville began to gentrify and change into what it is currently becoming. For that reason, Somerville youth are a fascinating age group to observe for the fact that they are living amidst a changing urban reality and thus can only be receptive to short-term changes that they have been alive to see. This is not to say that they are less receptive or at a kind of disadvantage due to their age. This age group shares a special connection in having the fortune of growing up in a rapidly changing world. Not only are they receptive to said changes, but also they are troubled by what the future may hold especially in a gentrifying community such as Somerville. Many of my informants specified a concern with the fluctuating rotation of new people living in Somerville. An interesting point to make is that youth that were interviewed did not feel bothered by their presence in the city as they do acknowledge the fact

that they have a lot to bring to the culture, just like the multitude of other groups (ethnic or otherwise) that coexist in the city. However, what is troubling is the nature of their stay; it is characterized by a state of temporary transition for the fact that many of the new inhabitants of Somerville are either college students that attend Tufts University (which is located in the Somerville/Medford area) or institutions in or around Boston. For this reason, once the students' four years are over, they no longer wish to stay in Somerville and move out. The same goes for what many teens in Somerville call "yuppies" or young urban professionals; they stay in Somerville due to new jobs and figuring out what their next step may be. Somerville may or may not be part of that equation. For Audrey, this type of presence is troubling as it is not constant when she says, "it [is] just like a collage of those people trying to go where they're going and the people who have been here will just try to collide with those people while the landscape of the community changes around them" Similarly, Ryan provided insight into the fact that much of the face of gentrification is perpetuated from the culture of those who seek the social atmosphere of changing communities such as Somerville. According to these youth, this culture is not something that is desirable because although it may be associated with the spirit of progress and forward thinking, it is almost a step back as this spirit is very much also associated with displacement of established residents. Ryan says, "I just like how Somerville is now. It definitely has its faults but I like how it and I don't want to ... its just the people. I don't the people to be able to change. I don't want yuppies." This informant has also had multiple negative encounters with this new group as they have looked at him in a particular way due to his style of dress "just from the people on the streets that I've had small interactions with whether it's like a dirty look or comments in public. It happens more than I would have liked it to." Relating to the definition of "yuppie", we see that this truly speaks to youth's uncertainty when it comes to pinpointing

what it is about these changes that are so “threatening” to their way of life and to their community identity. When I asked what about why this group is truly so different from their age group since they too can be considered youth or at least belonging to the age group of “Generation X”, my informants responded with the fact that yuppies are fundamentally contrasting with their image of their Somerville community identity. For example, Ryan says, “...yuppies are completely different from Somerville youth. There are people who come here from new places like my friend who came from Mexico – I wouldn’t classify all new people who come into Somerville as yuppies. There are those who are more uptight and I feel like Somerville is more like a “do your thing” and embrace yourself kind of place and not a “Do this, don’t do that” type of place.” As we see from social identity theories relating to in-group vs. out-group identities according to a University of Twente summary of Turner and Tajfel’s (1986) main arguments:

It asserts that group membership creates in-group/self-categorization and enhancement in ways that favor the in-group at the expense of the out-group. In addition, this theory states that after being categorized as being of a particular group membership, individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group from a comparison out-group on some valued dimension. (University of Twente 2014)

This quest for positive distinctiveness means that people’s sense of who they are is defining terms of “we” rather than ‘I’. Because of this, we can see how many of the youth that were interviewed were quick to develop defining characteristics of the “other” group which urban youth have come to label as “yuppies” while grouping their own identity characteristics and people that identify with that as being what Somerville is truly made up of. In this case, we see that defining distinctiveness among groups as being social class. In an interview with Audrey, she attributed the personality trait of “stuck-up” as being a defining characteristic of the yuppie group, which would then mean that Somerville natives are not. Similarly, Ryan’s definition

mirrored this aspect of class distinctions when describing the impacts of the Green Line expansion in Somerville, “they’re trying to get a lot of condos and fancy houses and people are really feelin’ that so I don’t know. If they do what the people want then it’s going to be good, but if they try to turn it into like a yuppie neighborhood then...” As we can see, if the opinions of “true” Somerville residents are taken into account, then the negative effects of gentrification brought about by increase public transportation will be lessened, however, the alternative to that is the fear of a community becoming a “yuppie neighborhood” which is clearly not desirable. In asking this informant what the definition of the word yuppie means, he like Audrey, specified class as an underlying factor. He says, “You think you’re better than everyone else...then people with less money type thing.”

Yet another aspect that contributes to the narrative of youth growth and development in a gentrifying community is that of the concern of the dissolving of strong social ties and “culture” belonging to a true Somerville youth identity and city identity in general. I will speak about the preservation of a type of community pride that is unique to the city of Somerville in the following section, but one thing that truly was made apparent in various in-depth interviews was the concern that the city is simply not “the way it used to be”. This concept of “the way it used to be” was been used by a multitude of elder residents of Somerville who definitely have been alive to witness the shifting community perception and identity of this area, but it is intriguing to hear youth using this reminiscing and nostalgic language to refer to a time where community identity was at a peak of cohesion and positivity. Perhaps youth are just receptive to what they hear older residents use to describe the changes caused by gentrification or it could be that this continuously changing image of Somerville does not quite parallel youths’ perception of an ideal youth-friendly community. Returning to this concept of the dissolving of social ties, social networks,

and the overall culture of the city, we must turn to “Anthony Cohen’s (1982; 1985) work surrounding the concepts of belonging and attachment in community identity. Community plays a crucial symbolic role in in generating of people’s sense of belonging” (George Williams College 2001). In many of the interviews we see that community identity in Somerville is very much divided by new, temporary upper-class residents of the city (yuppies) and those who have lived in the city for many years (could be descendants of the first waves of Italian, Irish, and other European immigration). Referenced within Cohen’s work is the Crow and Allan (1994)’s work in which they specify the fact that “the reality of community, lies in its members perception of the vitality of its culture. Cohen argues that, “people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity” (Cohen 1985: 118). Within this argument, we see the emergence of a concept of social networks as specified by Putnam (2002) as this concept is crucial to the construction of community in an urban setting. Many youth expressed their concern with the loosening of social ties relating to how “old Somerville” resembled their image of an ideal community much more than what this “new Somerville” is looking like. As this community theory says, the image of a community parallels the degree of social capital within it (Putnam 2002). The definition of social capital, according to Putnam is as follows: it refers to connections among individuals—“social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense, social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue”. The difference is that “social capital calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations”. Within the in-depth interviews that I conducted, we can see this theory played out with especially with Ryan’s response during one of the focus groups when he said, “I grew up with like the kids on my block, but now its only like a few of us left and just

walking around its like yeah, we know each other and we know people who used to live here, but the people who are here now, we don't know them and they don't know us. We don't interact like it starts to lose that "homie" feeling." This was a common sentiment among interviewed youth, as they did not feel as if they truly "knew" their neighbors anymore. According to Audrey in a focus group, she said that now more than ever class and general socioeconomic status had become a distinguishing factor among the residents, but no longer this concept of virtue. Another example from a focus group is a point Terrel made as he said,

"But yeah, I feel like Somerville is known for people sticking together, but then you have all these people like doctors and lawyers who have college kids...there's not the same stick together or community feeling ...its more of a "I'm going to do my thing and you are going to do your thing" and its less of a "YO, how's Mr. and Mrs. Johnson down the street. How's Misses from three blocks away?" Right now it's not how it used to be where people didn't just know their immediate neighbors, but they knew everyone on their block."

One does not come to know or build rapport with the people on their streets anymore and the Somerville identity that once was characterized by being "a family" is becoming antiquated. As these youth grow up with these changes constantly impacting and shifting the way they perceive their own youth identity because this is a direct reflection of their fluctuating degrees of social capital within the city.

In knowing that gentrification and rapidly-changing interactions between residents alter community perceptions and thus youth perceptions of their own identities, we must ask ourselves: How does this impact youth development in a gentrifying city, however? Why does this all matter? To answer this we must look towards an ever-widening economic gap and class disparities in our modern society, with rent and property tax at an increase, we see that many families struggle to stay in Somerville. The concept of "changing realities" are not just a metaphor for what is occurring in the city for with a upwardly mobile image that it is trying to

adopt to counteract previous “Slummerville” labels it acquired in the 80’s, we see how this is very much real life. Progress does not necessarily mean inclusivity due to the fact that although city politics may do all that it can to include the voices and perspectives of traditionally disenfranchised groups, in reality, they will still get left out perhaps not even willingly, but because of our country’s shifting economic climate in our modern capitalistic society. Thus, quality of life for the youth and families of adolescents who reside in Somerville is becoming more and more difficult. Families must move out and find housing in neighboring cities in the metro-Boston area. According Somerville City Population Trend Factsheet, between the years of 1960 to 2000, there was a decline in youth population (the sharpest drops in Somerville’s youth population were recorded between 1970 and 1990). Interestingly enough, this report also shows that Somerville youth (youth 18 and under) represent the most racially and ethnically diverse segment of the city in general (City of Somerville). With decline of the youth population also signals a decline in diversity in this city. Is gentrification the sole cause behind a gradual disappearing of culture and a true Somerville youth identity? Unfortunately, we see that concepts of displacement and loss of social capital are indeed part of the gentrification narrative. However, we must also look towards positive ways in which youth can perpetuate community identity, culture, and most importantly, be crucial agents of a preservation narrative and social change.

Preservation of “Somerville Pride”

In speaking about a preservation narrative, we must come to understand the concept of “Somerville Pride” and how this relates to Somerville identity and youth identity in particular. Many youth informants spoke about this topic of sentiment of pride that is unique to the city. For this reason, it needs to be preserved as something that defines the city and thus distinguishes it

from other cities similar to it whether it is in the metro-Boston area or even the whole nation. As defined by Ryan, we see how “Somerville Pride” is defined by youth, as “embracing everything that’s right and wrong” about the city. Similarly, during an interview when I asked what aspects of Somerville make you the most proud, Audrey responded with:

“Like I already said, community and just being here. I’m proud of being a part of a place that stresses this pride and solidarity no matter what you’ve been through or struggled through. That struggle is what brings people together. I love being a part of that and that’s why I love it so much and wouldn’t want to change too much about the city’s identity.”

It was interesting to see how Somerville Pride is something that has trickled down to youth cultures as for very long it was something that was known as being part “of the good old days” when people still had pride rooted in the close networks formed by members of what is considered “Old Somerville”. That is, a close-knit network of people that worked similar jobs, shared similar struggles, and were all equally looked down upon for living an area such as Somerville. However, they embraced all that came with that identity and redefined their community identity to include that of pride—a type of pride rooted in hardship, struggles, but most of all eventually triumphs and perseverance. Newer and younger generations of Somerville youth have also sought to adopt and honor this community idea for the fact that they very much do identify with struggle as their families’ economic situations and lifestyles gradually change with the gentrifying urban landscape that surrounds them.

Interestingly enough, however, although members of what could be considered “Old Somerville” did not take into account acceptance or inclusivity with their definition of Somerville Pride, we see that youth definitions and more progressive residents generally adopt the aspect of embracing all aspects of the city, especially the concept of diversity or multiculturalism. This concept has served to, again, be a distinguishing factor between other

cities or towns in the area. In an interview, Ryan said, “The diversity, the pride, the Somerville pride that a lot of cities don’t have. Just the people...” Theoretically, it is important to examine this in the context of the social construction of community and how it relates to the molding of Somerville identities. According to Cohen, “people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and a repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity” (Cohen 1985: 118). Thus as stated earlier, it is examined that this concept of “Somerville Pride” is not only something that brings people together, but it is an exclusionary force simultaneously to be able to establish an out-group and ultimately, define those who do not exactly identify with having said pride. Cohen argues that community is comprised of inclusionary and exclusionary forces. In other words, the concept of community upholds social solidarity and cohesion due to the fact that it can be a source of similarity that helps people establish connections with each other. Simultaneously, however, community identity can also be something comprised of difference for the fact that it includes, “the opposition of one community to others or to other social entities” (Cohen 1985: 12). Additionally, this brings up the question of where exactly a line can be drawn as to what constitutes one community from another and more specifically, in regard to Somerville youth identity, how does the concept of “Somerville Pride” truly help to explain its importance within community identity as whole? Cohen would say that a line could not technically be drawn due to the fact that community is socially constructed and thus its defining is in the hands of the citizens who live there or identify with the perpetuation of its identity. People gain “an appreciation of how people *experience* community” (Cohen 1985: 12). The shared experience of undergoing tribulations resulting from identifying with the working class, witnessing changing community ideals, and perseverance of obstacles is what bounds many people to a singular identity existing under a pride that characterizes the city.

Another important aspect that youth tended to agree was the concept of preservation of diversity or multiculturalism in order to perpetuate a positive Somerville identity. As specified earlier in this section, most, if not all of the youth informants that were interviewed highlighted this diversity characteristic of Somerville as something that they feel is something crucial to preserve, as it is a true defining trait of what makes the city unique. Although there are definitely plenty of “diverse” communities across the United States as our society becomes more and more globalized and focused on inclusivity, what exactly is it that makes Somerville stand out from the rest? Some youth informants would say it is the mixture of pride that exists out of this, while others would say it is the perpetuation of learning and growth that multiculturalism dictates. Youth informants Geraldine and Farah touch upon the importance of diversity especially when Farah says in response to my question about what she likes the most about the city and says, “The multiculturalism because everyone I know is from a different county or place and then we all feel different but we can see the things we have in common.” She appreciates the fact that although there are different people from multiple countries and different ways of interpreting the world around them, yet despite this, they are able to look beyond the differences and emphasize the ways in which all groups share a common purpose and lifestyle. In discussing the importance of youth contributions to community development, we see that Farah believes in a passing down or transmission of positive images from one generation to another. This transmission aspect is extremely crucial when it comes to socialization of youth and a trickling down of a culture of acceptance towards what is considered what may be initially perceived as “different”. Since the culture of Somerville has slowly molded to be one of acceptance as multiple different immigrant groups have lived there and continue arriving, we see that the culture is very much defined by the continuous reinforcing of societal norms relating to acceptance and learning to grow alongside

groups one has initially thought of as “the other” while now they are living alongside you. Interestingly enough, as highlighted above, we see that teens and adolescences constitute the most racially and ethnically diverse segment of the city in general. Almost 50% of the youth population report speaking a language other than English. Most of these youth are those that are forced to migrate to this country alongside their parents and others come on their own from countries such as El Salvador, Haiti, Brazil, among other Latin-American countries. Additionally, this prompts the discussion of the fact that not only are youth major agents of the preservation of diversity, but they are also the main sources of it especially when it comes to the creation of a youth culture that values inclusivity and the importance of a multicultural society.

Additionally, we see a resurgent movement among Somerville youth that tries to emphasize this sense of preservation of positive youth ideals and urban youth culture. First, in the city, over the last 5 years, people have noticed the emerging popularity of a clothing brand and marketing brand by the name of “Villen”; it can be seen everywhere. According to a local Somerville News blog, we see that it is “A new style is sweeping the streets of Somerville. It’s on the shirts of local teenagers, and the stickers on their cellphone. Villens, it seems, are everywhere in the city” (The Somerville News 2010). Most remarkable, however, is the impact this urban youth street-culture movement is having on the perception of young people in the city not only stemming from their own definitions of what it means to be a Somerville youth, but also what it means to be from the city in general. In an attempt to revitalize community youth identity and “before you say, ‘there goes the neighborhood’, Steve Morris, the main force behind the Villen clothing line, has a different idea for his street-level movement” (The Somerville News 2010). From this quote highlighting the aspect of witnessing a changing neighborhood, it can be said that the Villen clothes movement is not only a way for youth to reclaim a positive identity in

Somerville, but also as a preservation method that takes a stand against gentrification in a significant way. It is embracing a holistic and inclusive view that encompasses “Somerville Pride” as the brand itself represents the willingness to accept Somerville as a community identity in its purest form—that is, accepting the negative aspects as well as the positive aspects of community or accepting the similarities among people as well as the significant differences. As the creator of Villen brand reiterates, “It’s not a clothing line for people who mug people on the bike path. We just try to take our experiences from growing up and turn them into something people want to wear and that people are affected by” (The Somerville News 2010). The Villen brand is meant to be a form of self-expression, a self-expression that is rooted again, from a source of pride, struggle, resilience, and most importantly, a collective appreciation of all the experiences that contribute to the creation of a true Somerville identity. We see the impact of this clothing brand on youth populations in Somerville with the objective to counteract the negative perceptions of youth and drug culture in the upcoming section.

In addition, residents of Somerville can also sense the ever-growing presence of grass-roots community non-profits such as S.O.S (Save Our Somerville) as being a direct action against redevelopment, displacement, and gentrification in the city. Most importantly, there have been negative labels or stereotypes placed upon Somerville youth as being “yuppie-haters”, but with the work of S.O.S, youth are trying to reclaim their identity not only as a way to change these stereotypes, but as a way to advocate for “the people of Somerville, MA who feel as if they have no voice. S.O.S is powered by average people who want positive change for their community. Through sponsoring art projects, speak outs, community events, and other forms of organizing, S.O.S wants to build stronger community ties to all people of Somerville” (S.O.S 2006). Most importantly, however, is the organization’s emphasis on this idea of preservation and

continuation of Somerville ideals through the dedication of youth and their desire to become positive agents of social change.

Conflict in Youth Culture:

Although one can come to the conclusion that youth cannot only be positive preservation agents of diversity within a community, but of community solidarity, it is still crucial to analyze the obstacles and tribulations that may prevent youth from being positive agents of change. In examining interviews, one can see that a major issue impacting the development of a positive youth culture in Somerville is the role of drugs in the community. On numerous occasions the youth informants spoken about the negative influences drugs can have on not only their fellow peers, but even within their own families. In an interview with Stephanie, she spoke about how she noticed that drug and alcohol abuse serves to “break down the community”. Additionally, Rosalie also spoke about the negative influences of drugs when reiterating how exactly these types of addiction impact her; she said: “It personally impacts me because I see many people that are intelligent and smart throw away their careers for drugs.” In an interesting portion of a focus group with Teen Empowerment youth, drugs was an extremely emotionally-charged topic for the fact that many of the youth’s family members have personally struggled with drug abuse and thus this topic was something that they had become acquainted at a very young age. Terrel underscored a harsh reality that speaks to the realities of many youth Somerville when he said,

“Somerville is a trap because of the drugs. There’s so many good people who are not even 25 year who are straight up junkies like no ands, ifs, or butts about it. Just straight up feens, fizzles...we’re talking about young adults, people who just graduated from high school in the last 5 years. That plays a part in what goes on in Somerville. That’s part of Somerville’s culture”

The youth nodded in a somber unison that reinforced this unfortunate truth that Terrel spoke of. Drug culture has become synonymous with youth culture in Somerville and only encourages

images of deviance from out-groups and those who are not belonging to the youth population.

For example, as creator of the Villen brand highlighted,

"You have the more lower class of Somerville experience drugs and violence, kind of what the city used to be," said Mark McLaughlin, who works with Morris selling music on the clothing line's site, BeAVillen.com. "Then you have the more affluent people who are not necessarily facing those issues and aren't even necessarily aware of them. Two people that were neighbors, living in completely different worlds." (The Somerville News 2010)

I then proceeded to ask if there was any way to change this. Is it possible to counteract the negative impact of drugs on an urban community such as Somerville? Terrel answered with, "I mean it's hard to change drugs. It's hard to change a multi-billion dollar industry you know what I mean? Whenever there's money to be made, it's going to be hard to stop." In response, Audrey echoed this by saying, "That's the thing...it's the money. If there are those people that are still providing and get money for it, it's not going to stop 'cause everyone needs the money. They are not going to stop in the way they obtain their income." In order to analyze what exactly brings out this desire to acquire more and more money no matter the impact on community cohesion, we must look to conflict theory for explanation on how drug culture can inhibit the development of a positive youth culture in Somerville. One aspect of conflict theory is the structural inequality aspect as there are inequities built in to our modern social institutions and for this reason, different groups in society will compete for various resources in society. Most notably, Karl Marx is the most well known developer of this theory as he wrote about it in terms of class struggle and individual groups' relation to the means of production. Similarly, conflict theory encapsulates this spirit of competition with relation to resources available in a given society or culture. It highlights major components of inequality, power, scarcity of resources and the changing extent of human interactions as a result of said competition. In relation to this theory's impact on youth culture, we can see how this is manifested through the accessibility of drugs in

Somerville. In order to be able to escape the structural inequalities that are functioning against certain groups in the larger society, teens often must resort to deviant acts of selling and buying drugs to be able to obtain more money and thus be able to support their families. Many times their parents or guardians have fallen victim to addiction as well and youth themselves must uphold responsibility that comes from being the head of household. Terrel highlights this reality in a focus group when he says,

“How do we help the youth with the stress that we’re going through? The stress of knowing that if I go home, my mom overdosing ... you know what I mean? I’ve seen crack .. one of the worst drugs out here today since the 80’s ... at the age of 3 because my nana was an addict. RIP but she was a functional addict you know what I mean? Eventually, those drugs killed her just like Ryan’s mom, she tried to take her life before too and tried to overdose...a couple years back and she didn’t but then a couple years forward and it happened. When stuff like that happens, its crazy because my and my mom, we don’t get alone the greatest you know what I mean because my mom wasn’t able to do certain things for me that I needed her to do at the time and I have resentment over that you know and I try to talk and have a conversation and I’ll say something, but she catches feelings over what I say and when I try to express my emotions towards her. I mean she turns the whole thing out of proportion and then she thinks I’m calling her a bad mother. I’m not calling her a bad mother...”

As we can see from Terrel’s response to a focus group question about the impact of drugs on community and his own personally experiences with them, it is important to be able to make the connections between drugs and the extent to which they can sever social networks in a community. Not only does it force youth to acquire certain responsibilities that they are not quite ready to take on yet, but also most importantly, they enter a world of isolation due to their interactions with drugs. Due to these types of interactions, society places them at the peripheries of the community according to the dominant culture’s perception as to what is constituted as being “deviant”. Once a youth commits an action that is outside on their realms, they, like their violation to the status quo, are labeled as deviant as a result. What occurs following this initial labeling is what is of interest to this particular study, however. Through the use of labeling

theory of deviance, one can see that after being identified and defined as deviant, people and youth in particular will start to accept a self-fulfilling prophecy where they will take on this role and commit actions that reinforce this label. Eventually, that youth begins to perceive and define him or herself as deviant or whatever the label may be. Not only must a youth deal with the pressures of not potentially belonging to a disadvantaged minority group in some cases or the pressures of generally not having enough resources to be able to make a living in a gentrifying city such as Somerville. They must also tread lightly for many in the community already label youth populations as being deviant with regards to drug and alcohol abuse. For example, this point is accentuated through the efforts of Villen movement in Somerville especially through the words of Somerville News blog writer, Andrew Firestone (2010) when he writes:

The renegade factor involved in the label comes from the frustration that many young Somerville residents felt regarding their image during the late 1990s, early 2000s. "Somerville for a long time had a bad reputation and the brunt of that is always given to the youth," said McLaughlin. "Somerville kids are [said to be] 'scumbags, they're junkies, they're thieves. They're tough guys, they start fights.' So we're the bad guys. (Andrew Firestone 2010)

Many times, however, these labels come to define a youth as they decide to sell drugs in order to make a living—from then, he/she must continue in constant pursuit of new clients who unfortunately, a majority of the population comprise of other youth as this type of network is established through word of mouth and clandestine communication. Thus, ensues a cycle of drug usage among the youth populations of a city such as Somerville and we see many youth fall victim to the ever-growing drug market in urban areas. Relating to conflict theory, we see that this increasing number of youth drug users corresponds with a combination of both the desire to acquire resources in a competitive society as well as the need to cope with anxieties of self-defining deviance and inequity.

In addition to conflict theory and labeling theory as major theoretical frameworks from which to analyze the responses of youth informants, we can also see the relevance of the peer on peer influences in the transmission of certain behaviors in youth culture. For example, many youth informants expressed the power youth can have on the shaping of each other's identity. Because of this, the transmission of various youth culture values is easily transferred to different members of society as youth very much depend on the social interactions to construct their own identities. One of the ways in which this transmission can occur is in a negative light with respect to drug abuse as being a prevalent way to cope with environmental stresses relating to lack to resources. Consequently, youth will influence others who are in similar economic or socioeconomic positions as them to be able to engage in a type of camaraderie built around drugs as a social activity. In a couple of interviews, it can be noticed that youth use drugs such as marijuana as a bonding activity indoors as a way to again, relieve stress, but also to maintain social solidarity among their own peer groups and social networks. In analyzing Erving Goffman's theory of symbolic interactionism and more specifically, his dramaturgical analyses, one can find parallels between the idea that social interaction, the social construction of self all have to do with how one "performs" a particular identity to the outside world. This "performance" so to speak is all about maintaining face and being able to maintain a specific character that falls within the prototypic ideal of what actions that identity is "supposed" to consist of (Goffman 1959). This, however, can be problematic in youth culture because they want to be able to establish rapport with other fellow peers within their circle of friendships (through the use of drugs or otherwise) they also have to be able to fall within the social boundaries of the larger society as most people already label them as deviant. In the focus group

with Teen Empowerment youth, Ryan highlighted this as he talked about this influential aspect of peer-relations when he said:

“The thing about drug abuse is when kids see it like personally my mom attempted suicide, she tried to overdose on um pills. Youth take it one of two ways, they either follow that route when they see something like that or they would say that they are not going to be a part of it, I’m not going to be like that and like to determine which way they are going to go its all about the education on it. Me, I’m smart. I know it’s not worth it. I know I’m not going to go down the route—I’m not going to be like my family. But a lot of kids, they’re like hey, they’re doing it so why not do it?”

In addition to making it clear that youth agency is still definitely a component of these peer interactions, it is extremely important to note how exactly it is that often times, youth are heavily influenced or even pressured by their peers to do drugs in an attempt to forcefully reassert dominance in a already instable social construction of the self. Again, many of the youth who do engage in these actions are those who not only have backgrounds characterized by uncertainty and instability in general. This is not the case for every youth, however. For even a larger percentage of youth, their deviant behavior is an attempt to solidify an identity rooted in a culture of struggle and even be able to relate back to the idea of “Somerville Pride”. For example, as I have learned from my youth informants, the concept of “Somerville Pride” is founded upon the ideal of accepting harsh negative realities such as unemployment, poverty, and crime for what they are and realizing that along with the positive qualities of the city, they too that contribute to the forming of a Somerville culture. For example, we see multiple examples of this definition when Audrey says, “I’m proud of being a part of a place that stresses this pride and solidarity no matter what you’ve been through or struggled through. That struggle is what brings people together. I love being a part of that and that’s why I love it so much and wouldn’t want to change too much about the city’s identity.” Additionally, Terrell builds upon this within the context of gentrification with his response during a focus group, in which he said,

“I think a lot of the Somerville Pride comes from like similar how Mexicans have pride, how Haitians have pride ... but then again culturally, Mexicans always get shitted on and Haitians also get shitted on, but in the end those groups are two of the proudest people you will ever talk to in your life. Haitians have so much Haitian pride and Mexicans have so many Mexicano pride like they go crazy with both – that’s the same thing with Somerville you know what I mean. Somerville, out of all the cities, was the scum, slum, Scumaville, whatever it used to be but we said, you know what? We’re going to keep pushing forward, we going to be better, we going to have pride, we going to love the city because we’re all from this one city and its just like Somerville is an identity and we don’t want yuppies coming in. We don’t want all these lawyers and doctors and all this stuff coming in because now we go Starbucks and Pinkberry and stuff that we can’t even afford...”

As such, we are able to see that the reestablishing of deviant behavior among youth could be seen as an attempt to revitalize ideals relating to a type of social cohesion rooted in the culture of struggle and “Somerville Pride”.

Lastly, in referring back to the labeling theory when it comes to explaining youth culture as deviant is not accurate and is not productive to place this label upon a whole group. It can become a major barrier between the developments of positive self-perception as well a positive community identity. It is possible to say that Somerville youth culture and youth culture in general is socially constructed? Due to the describing of “the teenage years” in our Western culture, we use the following words to categorize this population: troubled, hormonal, conflicted, rebellious, and moody. Most importantly, based on these perceptions, we draw the conclusion that due to these characteristics, youth must always be deviant and on the verge of violating a social norm or established law of some kind. In an article by Hartinger-Saunders (2008) she says, “...the concept of “adolescence” was an American discovery linked to a prominent psychologist, Stanley G. Hall, who claimed the stage of adolescence was marked by a ‘lack of emotional steadiness, violent impulses, and unreasonable conduct yet, he felt this stage was one of maturation where youth could be shaped and molded into responsible adults” (p. 92). However, if we look to other cultures around the world and specifically in the work of anthropologist

Margaret Mead, one can conclude that this is not the case. Mead (1928) leads comparative research on examining Samoan teen years and how it differs from Western conceptions. She comes to the conclusion that the concept of adolescence itself is a culturally bound phenomenon or socially constructed. Mead highlights the fact that Samoan young people going through the teen-age years were laid back (due to sexual freedom), however, Western youths were always stressed and rebellious because the extreme social control regarding their sexuality. Yes, it is true that youth and adolescence is biologically determined as a specific age group that everyone undergoes where hormones are very much unbalanced thus causing bodily changes, however the difference lies in the experiences of youth. The teenage years of a youth living in the United States is going to be much different than a child living in a country in Africa and for that reason can be said to be a child's position within the social structure is most likely more telling about the characteristics of that youth's lives rather than by just being a youth. Consequently, due to the fact that there are labels placed on youth that categorize them as unstable, one can observe how exactly the dominant group (the older group) is able to assert their own definitions of what it constitutes to be a youth upon this younger population. Similarly, according to Hartinger-Sander (2008):

The importance of a social problem contends that the importance of a social problem is dependent upon the power and social status of those defining it as such and the number of people it affects. Clearly, the threats felt by the upper and middle class were influential in sparking a broad social response to delinquent behavior. Regardless of whether or not the child saving movement was a self-serving form of social action, it can be credited toward taking the preliminary steps necessary in identifying delinquency as a social problem warranting public attention and remediation. (P. 91-92)

If this is true, it is crucial to ask how this ends up impacting how exactly youth are able to form their own identities when it seems as if a dominant group is also trying to instill their own perceptions upon this group. We can see these types of interactions in an interview with Ryan

where he specified the difference between yuppies (who interestingly enough have shifted into positions of power due to their socioeconomic status) and Somerville youth: “I wouldn’t classify all new people who come into Somerville as yuppies. There are those who are more uptight are yuppies and I feel like Somerville is more like a “do your thing” and embrace yourself kind of place and not a “Do this, don’t do that” type of place.” Additionally, we see less of a tolerance towards youth expression as in this population is interpreted more so as a “social problem” or “social ill” rather than fully functioning participants or perpetuators of community identity like they can be. Now more than ever Somerville notices a change with the fluctuating waves of young urban professionals into the city and they do in fact represent a more “uptight” presence in the city. However, although this may be a seemingly positive thing, they are transmitting a specific label into the youth of Somerville as being “troublesome” or even so far as being called social irritations to the dominant group of the city. This in turn impacts how these youth see each other as well as their role within the city. Youth are witnessing a disconnect from the mainstream urban culture due to their deviant label and instead of focusing on what they need to do to not be labeled as such, they are isolated and further extend the cycle of mistrust, isolation, and a general inhibiting of youth’s ability to realize how they too can be preserves of positive community change and community identity.

Looking Beyond a Changing Social Reality

According to my previous analyses, one can observe the ways in which youth can be major agents of community preservation in light of gentrification as well as sources of social change, however, they still face many tribulations due to issues with poverty and drugs that prevents them from developing alongside the community in a positive symbiotic relationship. No matter what the socioeconomic status of a youth living in Somerville, however, one can observe

the impact of technology on the development of youth identities. In various interviews, youth specified the impact technology is having on the ways they are able to interact with other peers their age. Due to the our increasingly connected world, we are losing sense of what it takes to build community among different members of society, but most importantly within people in your own social networks. How many times can someone go to a restaurant with a group of friends and have the table be completely silence for long periods at a time because everyone is on their smartphones? We enter a paradoxical realm where we find that although people are more connected than ever with ever-expanding popularity of social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, but at the same times become so incredibly disconnected from each other that even holding a face to face conversation with someone is rapidly becoming an interaction characterized by antiquity. Why have a face conversation when I can just login to my Skype account or use my iPhone to Facetime my friend in the next room? Accessibilities and the options we are given instead of traditional types of interaction further facilitate the growing market of technology in our modern time. Consequently, this spurs a commodification of certain kinds of technology, so that we to come to value a certain brand more than what it actually can do. As specified by Karl Marx, we see his notion of the fetishism of commodities as something that is truly characteristic of our modern times especially when it comes to technology. Most of the time we as consumers just go off by the name brands because of the brand alone is representative of a socioeconomic class people strive to be a part of. How can we observe the changes technology is producing and how these changes are impacting youth interactions today? Interview with youth informants underscored the ways in which technology has altered the meaning of the building of social relations, reciprocity, and togetherness into a youth community. In an interview with Meghan she said,

“I don’t think that even the changes in Somerville, like yes they are great changes but no one is really thinking about they are going to change everything else just like all these companies coming out with these new gadgets like they don’t think how its going to change like things like obesity...that’s a huge issue... kids aren’t going outside because they have all this technology and its more becoming more of an issue because of it. Everything leads to something else and that’s the same with the community like everything leads to something and these changes in the community lead to something we don’t really know what its going to be.”

In addition, this changes the ways youth are thinking about the spatial configurations of their individual communities. If they are not going outside and playing with their peers or “hanging out” outside then what does this mean for the spaces that are typically associated as being “for youth” such as parks, movie theaters, and community centers? If their use is slowly dwindling then the city may interpret that as a general disinterest in the space and may redevelop it to be a different type of use for different people. Is technology the sole force that is preventing youth and adolescents from exploring their physical communities? Meghan attributes these changes in activity patterns in youth to being a question of lack of space and opportunities, interestingly enough. Thus she believes that because youth have been traditionally pushed into the peripheries of society usually due to a general misunderstanding of this segment of the population and stereotyping. Said stereotyping is what leads youth to fall under the radar and many occasions feel as if they do not have options in a shifting community.

Technology is a major reason that is contributing to changing community perceptions for youth, but is it possible that this very concept could be responsible for the spurring of positive youth social change in response to gentrification? Now more than every youth are using social media sites to promote their own identities or the identities of causes they see as important to others belonging to their age groups. For example, with the Villen brand that I have highlighted in earlier in this chapter is a prime example of the importance of social media in the transmission of community ideals. With the Villen brand, it is common that youth place Villen sticks on their

mobile devices, so that when they are texting or engaging in a phone call, those around them will be able to see this brand. Although the creator of the brand says that the Villen movement is a “street-level” movement or a type of grass roots movement, he cannot deny the importance of the web to youth movements such as these. While attending Teen Empowerment meetings during this past winter break, I noticed how part of their outreach methods for major events had to include social media as one of the major ways to obtain youth attention and attract more teens to be able to become familiar with the organization’s message. Also, associated with this Villen movement is a rap group that has also emerged from within the fundamental principals of this movement; the group is called Villside Goonz. They, like the Villen Enterprises stress the issues that many youth and teenagers face in the city today such as problems with drug or alcohol abuse, poverty, and the emphasizing of the need to preserve the culture of Somerville for all that it is. The ways they are achieving to transmit their lyric messages is primarily through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter as youth can post their songs on their page and then other youths can share their posts to their own networks of friends. The importance of technology is not solely a negative thing for youth as it can be a way for youth to be able to organize and carry out a major movement within the city; it is a movement to enhance community, preserve local culture, and perpetuate diversity.

To fully be able understand the impact of gentrification on youth culture in Somerville, one must be able to analyze the movements that have emerged as a direct result of it. Youth are at a fascinating time in their lives where their identities are easily influenced by the social interactions they have with others their age and their environment. Consequently, youth are indeed impacted by changing power structures with in the city in relation to gentrification. Most of all, they are impacted by prevailing inequalities that function to continuously act as a dividing

force within a community. However, due to the diversity that mirrors the youth population in a city such as Somerville, it is important to recognize how not only youth can be positive agents of its preservation, but also be able to take a stand against changes to their community identity and character. A preservation of “Somerville Pride” is a crucial ideology that needs to be transmitted to the different segments of the population within it. Youth can be that connecting force between the old “pull yourself by the Bootstraps” Somerville residents and younger urban professionals that inhabit the city. From the information gained from conducting in-depth interviews, I was able to gain insight into the experiences of Somerville youth and their relationship to the changing urban realities surrounding them. I believe that youth can definitely become agents of positive social change through their resilience, creativity, innovation, but most importantly, their dedication to the redefining and reclaiming of what it means to be an urban youth in midst of great change.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Focus Groups

Overview of the Focus Groups

The focus groups conducted for this thesis took place at the following two organizations in Somerville: Teen Empowerment and the Liaison Interpreters Program of Somerville, a youth group under the larger immigrant advocacy group called the Welcome Project. Teen Empowerment is an organization with locations in Boston, MA and Rochester, NY that seeks to empower youth and adults so they can be able to develop their own powerful tools and “become agents of individual, institutional, and social change” (Teen Empowerment 2008). Through the organization of spoken word performances, community dialogues, or rap performances, youth and adults are interested in working with them to think about life’s most difficult social problems. Together, they are able to transmit their messages of positive social change in such a way that others will be motivated stand up against inequality. Additionally, “At TE’s youth organizations sites, youth and adult bring authentic youth voice into the dialogue about improving their communities, mobilizing the energy of urban youth to create meaningful change, and facilitate mutually respectful relationships between youth and adults” (Teen Empowerment 2008). As a former youth organizer for this organization, I was familiar with the organizational structure of Teen Empowerment and was thus able to establish connections not only in contacting the organization, but to the youth who attend their programs. For this particular focus group, there were six youth participants all from different socioeconomic statuses, different ethnicities, different experiences growing up, but the thing that bounded them together is their Somerville youth identity. Of course this identity is fluid, but this fluidity is what spurs a constant redefining and reclaiming of youth identity in Somerville. These definitions are

extremely valuable to youth as they can utilize them to inspire others through the sharing of their stories, be able to mobilize others, and be able to transmit positive messages of social change.

The LIPS program, on the other hand, has a slightly different approach to how its youth strive to achieve social change. This group is comprised of bilingual high school students who are committed to learning language interpretation skills and be able to utilize to establish multi-lingual justice in the city of Somerville. The LIPS website encapsulates their main objectives with the following:

For many bilingual and bicultural youth, the language of their parents' home country is often seen only as a deficit, their bilingualism seldom encouraged. Yet, the children of today's immigrants, like earlier waves of immigrants to this city, often okay the vital role of family interpreter/translator and mediator in social and civic interactions with mainstream culture. LIPS helps young people to transform their bilingual strengths that they use in with family members into an asset that can be used in the community. (The Welcome Project 2013)

For this particular focus group, there were fifteen youth participants that were able to engage in this focus group discussion and I was able to find similar results as my focus group with TE in regards to the fostering a more casual dynamic as opposed to interview setting. In this case, youth were also quite hesitant to answer with in-depth responses during interviews, but during focus groups, this changed dramatically and youth were willing to participate and contribute. Overall, however, I was able to conclude that in Somerville, where diversity of every kind is found, LIPS is a major force in perpetuating messages about the importance of embracing bilingualism, multiculturalism, and conserving the persevering spirit of a Somerville identity that is rooted in the identities of all the immigrant groups that helped mold the city into what it is today.

Additionally, I administered two focus groups at each organization to be able to conduct larger scale discussions about specific topics as the ones previously mentioned. A significant

portion, if not all elements of our identities are shaped by the interactions and experiences we have with members of our communities and immediate social networks and because of that, we perceive ourselves based on the perceptions people have of us. Because of this, I believe focus groups were definitely helpful in obtaining a more representative overview of the youth experience from being able to hear said youth bounce ideas off each other and discuss societal and community issues affecting them in their current realities. Interestingly enough, however, it proved to be true that focus groups were most revealing even compared to interviews as one focus group in particular was extremely heated at one point with youth becoming emotional at a particular area of disagreement when it came to the opinion of another focus group informant. What stood out to me as a researcher is the fact that I initially assumed that interviews were apt to be most revealing since it is a one-on-one dynamic, which would this promote a more confidential atmosphere. However, many youth still did not feel comfortable being asked questions and feeling as one of my informants said, “like a lab rat”. Although I was a former participant and member of both organizations, it was still difficult to establish common ground with youth informants during interviews for the simple fact that I was “not like them” anymore. I was a college student and I was there to do something called a thesis and thus needed information on their opinions in order to be able to complete my project; this is how many youth informants viewed my objectives, so at times it was difficult to establish rapport with said youth. With focus groups, however, the dynamic was completely different in that it was much more relaxed and casual for youth. All of the youth partaking in each of the focus groups knew each other and already considered themselves friends, so because of that, the focus group turned out to be less formal, which assuaged any feelings of nervousness on the part of the youth. Many were extremely open to express their thoughts and share personal details about their lives relating to

drug abuse, sexuality, or illegal activity. Although, I am glad youth were able to feel comfortable in sharing those details, I am also intrigued by the extent to which youth interactions were able to dictate the overall dynamic of these two methods of obtaining data. In the end however, I was able to obtain a substantial amount of collective information that helps to draw conclusions and shape my analyses regarding definitions of community for young people in gentrifying communities. Simultaneously, I was also able to acquire comprehensive and extensive personal accounts of these said experiences that have functioned to provide insight into the social construction of youth culture in light of gentrification in Somerville.

Analysis of Focus Groups

Some of the major concepts mirrored in the focus groups are directly correlated with points underscored in the interview analyses. One concept in particular that is highlighted in one of the focus groups is that of youth's relationship with their surrounding environments. To what extent are youth direct products of their environments? Do youth have agency to be able to actively decide the path that they would like to take, especially when they may be extremely negative things incorporated into a youth's environment? During a TE interview, Terrel talks about the impact others had on his decision to start smoking marijuana. He says,

"Its like ... back in the day, I said I wouldn't smoke right now, but I always knew I would smoke at some point in my life because its all around you know what I mean? Friends were smoking, people in my family were smoking, my best friend at the time was smoking so like the way I see it is like everything around me is involved in it...so yeah the way I see it... I probably will end up smoking. I never said I wouldn't smoke at all. Stress plays a lot into smoking, seeing a lot of family members go through things does it too. I could take medication, I could take anger management pills but, I've seen what pills have done in my family as far as abuse goes and substance abuse and I wasn't trying to be a pillhead (someone who is addicted to pills). I'd rather smoke a blunt than become a pillhead."

One can see how the accessibility of drugs is very much transmitted through social contexts and structural inequality rather than personal decisions to be deviant. For example, with Terrel's

example, it is evident that since an early age he was around different substances that many of his peers and many of his potential role models were using. The most important aspect of what Terrel said in the focus group, however, is the aspect of stress and connection to what people may think is deviance. The way youth think about deviance is completely different than how the older dominant culture thinks about deviance. For youth, deviance seems to be at spectrum and it is not to say that one way of perceiving deviance is more superior, but it is interesting to realize that deviance within youth culture is very much social constructed based on power hierarchies in society, as is youth culture in general. What is considered deviant in-group is often dictated by the perception of the white, educated, heteronormative perspective. Deviance is perpetuated by interaction with others – others within your own social groups or even others from a completely different group. The main point, however, is the fact that deviance (as defined by a dominant culture) usually places its members at the peripheries of society, which only ends up perpetuating it again, through their life decisions. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts or label theory as used earlier. In relation to change, Audrey brings up an interesting dynamic between a changing competitive world and a youth who is labeled as “deviant”:

“Yeah, but its hard because everything you see, you see the same thing. Its like if you are changing and no one around you is changing, so you become stagnant eventually too. So once you say, I’m going to stop, but you go outside and someone else is doing it. Because you were the only one changing, you are isolated in your transformation, so you tell yourself that you are going to stop in order to have more people around you to feel more comfortable.”

We see the detrimental impacts of isolation on youth and their tendency to experiment with drugs in urban communities. We must also realize that the creation of the label of deviant, however, is a powerful tool that divides social groups. Although for youth, it seems that engaging in deviant acts is usually something that enhances social solidarity, we must acknowledge the issue of the reason behind this. Why does the fact that deviance and youth

culture are socially constructed matter? Why does it matter that youth identities are fabricated through social interaction and the perceptions people have of them? These questions are crucial, however, because they propose the potential for youth to reclaim what it means to be a youth in Somerville and be able to redefine deviance.

Another major concept highlighted in the focus groups is the idea of struggle and the preservation of community identity a changing society. In previous analyses of a the existence of a type of pride that is unique to Somerville's (often called "Somerville Pride") community identity, one can conclude that acceptance of all the negative things that define Somerville in addition to all the positive things. In its most fundamental definition, Somerville Pride is a way to taking a stand and saying that you love the city for all that it is despite not always having the most glamorous of labels as we have come to know with things like "Slummaville". Most of the time these labels were attributed to youth, as they were the ones who for a lack of better words, were the scapegoats in this context. Due to our Western way of thinking about adolescences as a tumultuous time, people are quick to say that every "deviant" act that a young person may engage in or do is a direct cause of their need to rebel against the mainstream and somehow assuage the anxiety that they are feeling to all these emotional ebb and flow of our society's perception of adolescents. Even more important then is to analyze the function of the concept of "Somerville Pride" in the city. Terrel explains very prevalent realities that occur in urban settings when he says"

"I mean it all depends because Somerville is like a low-class city you know what I mean. A lot of people from Somerville may front and be like "yeahh, I'm making money or yeaah, I got the new J's but in reality, you got the new J's but the last two weeks of every month you aren't eating no food you know what I mean. Your light bill goes off because you can't pay it or you have no cable. There's a lot of things behind it. I used to think when I was younger that other kids around me had it so much better than me because I had a hard life. I wasn't really seeing that other kids had struggles too, kids have problems they're going through as well...it wasn't just me. I kinda learned to live ... well yeah, I learned that if you live in

Somerville, you going through something. There's something you're going through—no one out here is not through something. No one has an easy life in Somerville.”

The important take-away message from Terrel's explanation is that with Somerville identity comes an acknowledgement of struggle in tribulations, but also how that has allowed one to prevail in the face adversity. In recognizing the impact of all the various immigrant waves on Somerville, we can see that this concept of “struggle” was definitely characteristic of trying to establish a new life in a country that is very different from one's own. Each immigrant group had its own struggle and obstacles that they faced as a collective unit while trying to seamlessly blend into the mainstream culture. Thus, many European immigrants that arrived in Somerville and in multiple cities throughout the United States, acquired a very rugged “pull yourself by your bootstraps” mentality that emphasized the values of hard work, perseverance, and a tenacity that is unique to the community identity of Somerville. How does this way of thinking still exist today, however? From analysis of focus groups, it is evident that this perception of resilience is something that transcends generation and we see the emergence of youth culture adopting aspects of older immigrant “Bootstrap” culture especially through the transmission of the importance of struggling. According to Terrel, “If you live in Somerville, you going through something. There's something you're going through—no one out here is not through something. No one has an easy life in Somerville.” With youth's embracing of modern manifestations of this way of thinking with the emerging of the Villen brand for example in that it tries to capture the everyday experiences of the people, of a citizens of Somerville, a Villen. McLaughlin who was interviewed on a Somerville News Blog says this brand serves the purpose of “bringing tons of kids from different cultures, different economic and racial backgrounds, and its saying, 'hey, we're all from Somerville, we're proud of it.'" There is an interesting interplay of diversity and similarities that add to the strengthening of “Somerville Pride” and that is the fact that although

there are so many different groups in Somerville whether it be racial backgrounds, ethnic, or economic, at the core, everyone has issues that arise from trying to do well in such a competitive world as this. The youth in Somerville are crucial components in the conservation of this community identity as it serves to shape their own identities as well. Consequently, the embracing of similarities and differences not only defines the community identity, but functions to bring the community together and reaffirm social solidarity rooted in Somerville's past history, present, and will help to set the context for its future.

Youth have been traditionally misunderstood and misrepresented in society. For the context of this study, we also see that youth perspectives have been disregarded within major gentrification discourses. Gentrification in Somerville is drastically changing the physical landscape of the city and due to people's connections with spaces in urban settings; one can observe the impact this could have on Somerville's community identity. As more and more people move into the city, there is an ever-widening economic gap within it that instead of serving as another way to further enhance existing diversity, it is creating significant disconnect among neighbors. As Mark McLaughlin says from BeAVillen.com, "You have the more affluent people who are not necessarily facing those issues and aren't even necessarily aware of them. Two people that were neighbors, living in completely different worlds." This dividing factor is a direct effect from an increasing sense of competition of resources in a capitalistic society that we live in. Because youth will be the next generation to inherit the impacts of the decisions elder policymakers make right now, it is of crucial importance that adolescence be seen not as a time characterized by deviance, but as a time where young people are at their most open to change. As such, it is necessary to regard youth, not in contexts of deviance, but as preservers of community identity and being the ones who will responsible for spurring social change in what people

typically have considered “broken communities”. In midst of gentrification processes, it is necessary to view youth as agents of positive social change through their resilience, creativity, innovation, but most importantly, through their dedication to the redefining and reclaiming of what it means to be urban youth in midst of great change.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

Gentrification, as an urban phenomenon, has been at the forefront of dialogue within major social science research fields, as it is a process that prompts fascinating interchange regarding changing definition of community for city residents and those that are new to the city. However, traditional interpretations of gentrification have solely focused on the narratives of the displaced or poor pre-gentrification residents living in declining “broken” cities who have been negatively affected by the displacement. Using Somerville, MA as a case study for gentrification, however, has provided a fascinating context in which to highlight the contributions of urban youth whose perplexities have been long disregarded in traditional gentrification literature. Through gaining insight of youth perceptions, it prompts the understanding of how gentrification can alter the social and cultural configurations of a city or neighborhood. This study functioned as an examination of youth and adolescents’ opinions of changing urban realities in light of gentrification as well as a way to unfold the narrative which could serve as a way to underscore youth as valuable assets in preserving and promoting positive community identity.

I was able to conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups with youth at two separate organizations in Somerville. The organizations were Teen Empowerment and The Welcome Project. Through these means, the youth informants were able to express their definitions of community, ideal communities, and how Somerville parallels this image. Additionally, many youth expressed their growing concerns with the growing number of urban professionals who may be facilitating the forces of gentrification in youth communities. As such, many youth have instead constructed images that reinforce the struggles (economic or otherwise) they face as not only a way to preserve this perseverance struggle narrative, but also a way to reassert their community identity to the outside world. Through the use of the Villen label, youth and

adolescents in the city of Somerville are able to be major proponents of positive community growth and social solidarity rooted in Somerville's past history and present changing realities. Additionally, they are able to begin establishing a context of change for the future in recognizing that youth do have a voice and a crucial influence over municipal developments.

The focus group conducted helped to solidify these observed trends and allowed me an even more personal reflections on the topic of gentrification and youth involvement as interestingly enough, youth felt more comfortable in a group discussion dynamic rather than an one-on-one setting between myself and a youth informant. They were able to feel reassured by their peers when voicing a particular opinion, but also did not feel afraid to express an idea that contradicted the majority. For this reason, focus groups proved to be extremely telling especially in getting a glimpse with the impacts of drug culture on Somerville youth culture, how this functions as an obstacle for youth-led reforms, and most importantly, how youth are changing this reality one day at a time through shared experiences and tribulations.

The overall importance of my study lies in uncertainty of the effects of gentrification in a community such as Somerville. Because this phenomenon is indeed a process, it is not clear as to how exactly cities will be changed as a result of it. We know that there are definitely changes occurring and people of higher socioeconomic statuses coming into the city for education and occupational opportunities, but we do not know the extent of these changes. For this reason, it is crucial to begin educating youth about these developing changes, as their generation is the one who will be the population to grapple with the outcomes. Again, because of this uncertainty, it is important to highlight that city politics should not disregard youth voices in decision making for they are the ones who will inherit the consequences, whether they be positive or negative. Another strength of this study lies in the highlighting of the ways in which youth can not only be

forces of the future of a community, but they can be preservers of community identity as well. Youth represent a fascinating combination of what is and what a community will become.

A principal limitation of this study lies in the particular informants that I recruited from both Teen Empowerment and The Welcome Project. Because these youth informants are already in positions where they come into contact with discussions of gentrification and youth empowerment, they themselves are more familiar with some of the topics I have addressed in this study. I provide a small glimpse of the youth population in Somerville and their values, however I would have liked to obtain a more comprehensive account of youth in order to have acquired an even more diverse subset of the population. In addition, although my particular study focuses on Somerville as a case study for youth empowerment in midst of a gentrifying community, I do not intend for this analysis to seem representative of all medium-sized urban cities. Experiences living in urban regions can vary from state to state and as such, my study should not be considered to be a model for how all diverse working-class gentrifying cities develop. These limitations just serve as a way to underscore certain qualities about youth populations and changing community perceptions and as a call for more research to be conducted on this topic due to its traditional disregard especially within gentrification literature.

In recent international news, we see that with increasing technological advances and the ever-interconnecting forces of globalization reach us, revolutions and various movements across the world are in the hands of youth. With the recent youth-led peaceful protests against a repressive government in Venezuela, we are able to see how youth have come together to transmit messages of change to an entire nation. Even in analyzing youth roles in the major revolutions or movements in the past, youth have always been at the forefront of change due to their ability to hone their unique creativity, energy, and motivation to be able to think of

unconventional strategies or innovations. Youth have an important story to tell and it is time that people listen. Youth are the essence of community of identity and thus can be facilitators of its preservation and evolution. Youth can be major agents of social change in a community. In the words of Huey Newton said, “The revolution has always been in the hands of the young. The young always inherit the revolution.”¹ Most importantly, it is crucial to remember that today’s youth are the people who can change the world as well as the people that are changing it.

¹ This quote is widely used and circulated on the Internet especially when it comes to explaining the relationship between youth and social activism. However, I have been unable to find a definitive source for where and when Huey Newton said it.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form (Youth Individual Interviews)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (Individual Interviews)

My name is Kathleen Portillo and I am a student at Union College in Schenectady, NY. I am inviting you to participate in a research study for my Sociology Senior Thesis. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. A description of the study is written below.

I am interested in learning about youth and adolescent perceptions on gentrification. You will be asked to engage in a dialogue or open discussion regarding the issue of gentrification, definitions of community, and youth involvement with youth/adolescents such as yourself. This will take approximately one hour. The risks to you of participating in this study are sharing personal experiences relating to any of the discussion topics. Ensuring confidentiality will minimize these risks.

During the study, any data files that contain names will be held securely and confidentially and be destroyed at the end of the study. Any written documents or publications from the study will not include identifying information.

If you no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

By signing below, you indicate that you understand the information above, and that you wish to participate in this research study.

_____	_____	_____
Participant Signature	Printed Name	Date

You may consent to having your interview recorded via digital voice recorder or you may decline. Please sign your initials by the appropriate statement below to indicate these wishes.

_____ I consent to being recorded via digital voice recorder
 _____ I do not consent to being recorded via digital voice recorder

Appendix B: Parent Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Kathleen Portillo and I am a student at Union College in Schenectady, NY. I am inviting your son/daughter to participate in a research study for my Sociology Senior Thesis. I have received the approval from Warren Goldstein-Gelb, Director of The Welcome Project to conduct research at this organization. A description of the study is written below.

Title of Project: Yuppies and Bootstraps: The Impact of Gentrification on the Development of Social Capital and Community Involvement of Inner-city youth in Somerville, MA.

Principal Investigator: Kathleen Portillo
portillk@union.edu
(617) 767-1342

Advisor: Janet Grigsby
Lippman 205, Union College
807 Union St.
Schenectady, NY 12308

1. Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to expand on previous research by exploring the impact of gentrification on the socialization and acquiring of social capital for inner-city youth. Gentrification research has largely ignored the adolescent and youth population. The few studies that have considered them have done so only in the context of deviance. Using analyses of in-depth interviews, surveys, and focus group sessions with adolescent residents of Somerville, MA, this study will shed light on the ways in which youth think about their changing urban realities. Conclusions drawn will clarify how gentrification processes impact definitions of community for young people, and also document ways in which youth can be valuable assets in promoting community identity.

2. Procedures to be followed: Your child will be asked to engage in a dialogue or open discussion with other youth in Welcome Project's youth group, The Liaison Interpreters Program of Somerville (L.I.P.S) regarding the issue of gentrification, definitions of community, and youth involvement in city politics. Each focus group session will take approximately one hour. During these sessions, your child will be able to express his/her opinions about the topics stated above.

3. Potential Risks: There are minimal risks associated with your son or daughter's participation in these focus groups. However, whatever your child chooses to express will also be heard by the other youth participating in the focus group, so this could be a potential risk to him/her. Ensuring confidentiality will minimize further risks. Specific methods of how confidentiality will be maintained are outlined in the next section.

4. Confidentiality: During the study, any data files that contain your child's name will be held securely and confidentially. They will be destroyed at the end of this study. Any written documents or publications from the study will not include identifying information.

5. Voluntary participation: Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your son or daughter can choose to stop at any time. In addition, you can also choose to withdraw your child from this study at any time. Your child can refuse to answer any of the discussion questions that will be asked during the focus group sessions. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

6. Consent: By signing below, you indicate that you **DO NOT** want your son/daughter to participate in this study.

Please sign and return this form to Kathleen Portillo. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach me at portillk@union.edu or (617) 767-1342.

I **DO NOT** want my child, _____, to participate in this study.
(your child's name)

Parent's Printed Name

Parent's Signature

Date

Please return this form in the postage paid enclosed envelope to: Kathleen Portillo
105 Woods Ave.
Somerville, MA 02144

Appendix C: Focus Group Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Kathleen Portillo and I am a student at Union College in Schenectady, NY. I am inviting you to participate in a research study for my Sociology Senior Thesis. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. A description of the study is written below.

I am interested in learning about youth and adolescent perceptions on gentrification. You will be asked to engage in a dialogue or open discussion regarding the issue of gentrification, definitions of community, and youth involvement with youth/adolescents such as yourself. This will take approximately one hour. The risks to you of participating in this study are sharing personal experiences relating to any of the discussion topics with fellow participants of these focus group sessions. These risks will be minimized by making sure that other participants understand the concept of a “safe space” so everyone feels comfortable enough to share personal stories. In addition, I will provide a debriefing period at the end of this focus group. If you no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

During the study, any data files that contain names will be held securely and confidentially and be destroyed at the end of the study. Any written documents or publications from the study will not include identifying information.

By signing below, you indicate that you understand the information above, and that you wish to participate in this research study.

_____	_____	_____
Participant Signature	Printed Name	Date

You may consent to having your interview recorded via digital voice recorder or you may decline. Please sign your initials by the appropriate statement below to indicate these wishes.

_____ I consent to being recorded via digital voice recorder
 _____ I do not consent to being recorded via digital voice recorder

Appendix D: Question Guide for Interviews

1. How long have you lived in Somerville?

- a. What do you like most about the city?
- b. If there was something you could change about Somerville what would it be and why?
- c. Do you plan on living here for a long time?

2. What has been your overall experience in Somerville?

- a. Do you enjoy living/working here?
- b. What changes have you noticed?
- c. How do you feel about those changes?
- d. Are you proud of living in Somerville?

3. Could you tell me about your interactions with fellow peers/ people your age?

- a. Do you know your neighbors? How many? How did you come to know them?
- b. How frequently do you interact with your neighbors?
- c. Do you engage in any types of socialization such as going to parties? If so, where do you and your friends typically spend time together or do these socializing activities together?

4. What parts of Somerville do you typically spend time in?

- a. Are there any restaurants or bars or other public/commercial areas that you particularly enjoy?
- b. Do you do most of your shopping, recreation, and socializing in Somerville? If not, why? Where?
- c. Are there any parts of Somerville you don't go to? Where? Why?

5. What do you know about the expansion of the Green Line into Somerville?

- a. In what ways do you think this could change Somerville?
- b. How do you feel about these possible changes?
- c. Do you anticipate using it? Do you use public transit now?
- d. What do you think the city of Somerville or Somerville residents need to do in order to prepare for the expansion of the Green Line?

6. Would you consider Somerville to be youth-friendly?

- a. Do you think there a lot of places for youth to interact and socialize with each other?
- b. If you think Somerville is youth-friendly, what makes it so?
- c. If not, what do you think the city could do to improve that?

Note: Original Interview questions adopted from the following
dissertation with permission from Scholar

Gecker, Whitney A. "Gentrification Is Political: How Local Government Fosters Community Change." Diss. University of Massachusetts Boston, 2013. Print.

Appendix E: Question Guide for Focus Group

GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. Would you consider Somerville to be youth-friendly?
 - a. Do you think there a lot of places for youth to interact and socialize with each other?
 - b. If you think Somerville is youth-friendly, what makes it so?
 - c. If not, what do you think the city could do to improve that?
2. What does the term “gentrification” mean to you?
3. How does the term “gentrification” relate to Somerville?
4. Do you view this as an issue for the city?
5. How are adolescents like you impacted by this?
6. What current youth-friendly spaces exist?
7. How do youth and adolescents in Somerville socialize (“hang out”) with each other?
8. Where do you adolescents in Somerville go to have fun?
9. What characteristics would an ideal youth-friendly community look like?
10. How does Somerville match up with your ideal image of community?
11. Are you proud of living in Somerville?
12. Do Somerville politicians take the youth-perspective into account when making decisions?
13. What does community mean?
13. How would you define your community?

Appendix F: Debriefing Template

DEBRIEFING TEMPLATE

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in my study that will be used as a requirement for the completion of a Sociology major. Your responses will be crucial in trying to learn more about youth and adolescent perceptions of changes in their community (an example being, the process of gentrification). As stated in the informed consent form you signed in agreement to participate in this study, your responses will be kept confidential, but not anonymous. In other words, only I will be the only one to know that your responses came from you. General readers of this study will have no way of tracing your responses to your identity. The purpose of this is to minimize risks involved in the study.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the ways in which youth think about their changing urban realities. Conclusions drawn will clarify how gentrification processes impact definitions of community for young people, and also document ways in which youth can be valuable assets in promoting community identity.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the Sociology Department at Union College at 212 Lippman Hall, Union College 807 Union Street, Schenectady, NY 12308 and at (518) 388-6292. You can also feel free to contact me at portillk@union.edu or (617) 767-1342. Once again, thank you for your help during this session.

Please check this box if you would like to know about the results of this study: ☐

Participant Signature

Date