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STAND UP AND TELL THEM YOU'RE FROM DETROIT: BELONGING, ATTACHMENT, AND REGIONAL IDENTITY AMONG SUBURBAN DETROITERS

by

PAUL CURRAN

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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2013

MAJOR: SOCIOLOGY

Approved by:

____

Advisor Date

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Preface: An Autoethnography

In early 2006, I accompanied my boss on a sales call to San Francisco. During the Q&A, one of the potential clients asked what part of Michigan our company was based, to which my boss responded "Auburn Hills." The client had a confused look on her face and – after a short pause – he expanded: "about 30 miles north of Detroit." One of the male clients, perhaps an NBA fan, chimed in "oh yeah, isn't that's where the Pistons play?" For some reason, the awkwardness of this exchange stuck in my head.

A few months later, my sister and I accompanied my father to Ireland to visit his family. Dad hadn't been home in about ten years, and Beth and I were eager to finally meet some of our cousins from Ireland – or, "the old country" as Dad called it.

Belfast was the first destination on the itinerary. A cousin met us at the airport and within a few hours of landing we were enjoying a bottle of wine with him and several other family members. During a lull in the discussion, my cousin Suzanne turned to Beth and me and asked "now, in what part of the States do you live?" Simultaneously, I said "Detroit" and Beth said "In Michigan… the Ann Arbor area… about a half-hour outside of Detroit."

As my mind wondered on the long flight home, I started thinking about these two incidents. People I know to be extremely smart and articulate responded to a simple question with what seemed to be an unnecessarily awkward response. While their responses were more detailed and accurate, the additional details were hardly helpful given the audience.
Why not just say Detroit? Were they making a conscious effort to disassociate from Detroit? I am not oblivious to the negative imagery associated with Detroit, but never thought saying I am from Detroit would reflect poorly on me or on my employer.

I love Detroit. I think it's cool to live in the birthplace of the automotive industry, the home of a professional hockey dynasty, and the town that inspired, in my opinion, the best subgenre of rock and roll. There is, however, a growing cognizance that perhaps the long-term negativity associated with Detroit – the "stigma" some refer to – has taken its toll on many of my fellow suburbanites. Has this stigma become a barrier to community cohesion? Is Detroit caught in a downward spiral of community detachment? These thoughts lay the foundation for the thesis that follows.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Stand up and tell them you’re from Detroit” was a marketing theme used by a Detroit television station in 1984. It was created, presumably, to evoke feelings of civic pride throughout metropolitan Detroit. Detroit is a community plagued by lingering image problems shared by many large cities in the United States: high crime rates, urban decay, and underperforming public schools. However, unique to Detroit is the frequently strained and complex relationship with its suburbs. Civic leaders in the city and the suburbs acknowledge a symbiotic relationship, yet community cohesion remains elusive as demonstrated by the recent debates over the State-appointed emergency financial manager (Detroit Free Press 2012).

It is possible that strained relations between Detroit and its suburbs have resulted in a weak or absent shared “regional identity.” A regional identity often emerges from a strong sense of territorial belonging (Cooper and Knotts 2010; Gasparini 2010; Mendelsohn 2002) and is important because it facilitates a committed and engaged community (Greif 2009). Greif finds a strong shared identity fosters a more gratifying social setting and provides a deterrent to crime. Further, Greif’s work suggests a strengthened regional identity could provide greater community cohesion and a stabilizing effect across the metropolitan Detroit area.

The purpose of this study is to explore the interrelationship between territorial belonging, place attachment, and regional identity in an urban-suburban context. Specifically, I seek to analyze suburbanites’ perceptions of and attitudes toward Detroit with a focus on why some may be proud – and others reluctant – to identify themselves as “Detroiters.” The central research question for my study is: What does being a “Detroiter” mean to long-time residents of suburban Detroit? Using qualitative interviews with residents from around the Detroit metropolitan area, I explore this topic in four ways: (1) suburbanites’ generalized characterizations of the region’s

central city, (2) definitions of a Detroiter, (3) displays of belonging and attachment to the area, and (4) barriers to a regional identity.

Nomenclature of this Thesis

I provide the following discussion to establish the meaning of certain geographical terminology used throughout this thesis. The terms "the City of Detroit" or "the City" refers to the region's central city, Detroit, which is located in the state of Michigan in the Midwestern portion of the United States. The City of Detroit covers 138 square miles and has a population of 706,000. The city abuts the Detroit River, which provides an international border with Canada. Major thoroughfares make up the remaining borders, with Eight Mile Road providing most of the city's northern border.

I use the terms "Detroit" or "Metropolitan Detroit" to refer to the entire metropolitan area that includes the City of Detroit as well as its neighboring communities. This area covers approximately 3,900 square miles and has a population of 4,300,000. I use the term "Suburban Detroit" to refer the area of Metropolitan Detroit outside of the borders of the City of Detroit.

For purposes of this thesis, I use the term "Detroiter" to refer to the dominant regional identity used throughout the region (dominant in that it is used more commonly than terms such as Michigander, East-Sider, or West-Sider). Derived from the name of the region's central city, the meaning of "Detroiter" is a key to understanding what the city of Detroit means to study participants and how perceptions of the city impact their attachment to the region.

Organization of this Thesis

The remainder of the thesis is organized as follows: In chapter two, I review the literature on belonging, attachment, and regional identity, noting how these concepts relate to this study. I also identify possible barriers to a strong regional identity. In chapter three, I describe the

methodology. My analyses are presented in chapters four through seven. Chapter four introduces the concept of the “generalized other” – that is, an exploration of suburbanites’ characterization of the City of Detroit. Chapter five presents an analysis of the various definitions of “Detroiter” used by residents of Suburban Detroit. In chapter six, I outline the relationship between the acceptance of the Detroiter identity and one’s attachment to the region. Specifically, I use a conceptual framework of place-based attachment derived from the work of Lupi and Musterd (2006) to consider how displays of attachment and belonging translate into a shared regional identity. Chapter seven examines the potential barriers to a regional identity with particular focus on the impacts of loss-of-community issues, competing regional identities, and racism. In chapter eight I provide a brief summation of the findings and propose possible directions for future research.

Summary

This thesis investigates the theoretical concepts of belonging, attachment and regional identity and answers the question: what does being a Detroiter mean to long-time residents of Suburban Detroit? I propose that the meaning of “Detroiter” can be summarized with three overarching definitions – the first based on shared values and beliefs, the second on shared experiences, and the third on authenticity and credibility. Based on these definitions, I argue a regional identity that is widely embraced by residents of Suburban Detroit is weak, ambiguous, or non-existent. Those who lack attachment to the region generally see no unifying characteristic that binds them with those residing in other communities in the region, especially those living in the predominately-black central city. Furthermore, those who do exhibit attachment do so with little or no recognition of the institutional and systemic racism that has plagued the community over the past 70 years.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study is an empirical counterpart to Gasparini's (2010) analysis of the relationship between territorial belonging, place attachment, and identity. Gasparini lays out various models which generally support the construct that a strong regional identity requires place attachment, and that place attachment requires a strong sense of territorial belonging.

Belonging → Attachment → Identity

This model provides the theoretical framework of this thesis. According to Gasparini, individuals with a strong sense of belonging maintain the "identity of the specific system" and those with a weak sense of belonging often resist said identity. That those residing in a marginalized community would have a weak sense of belonging seems intuitive. However, Gasparini, also asserts that in "marginalized" communities plagued by "harsh experiences" a strong sense of belonging is just as probable. Thus, in the case of Detroit, negative portrayals of Detroit in the national media could actually enhance one's attachment to the community.

Gasparini also asserts that multiple identities and attachments can coexist in a given system. This suggests that – to truly understand an individual's sense of belonging to Detroit – one must understand the sense of belonging to their neighborhood, to the suburb in which they reside, and any other place-based "systems" to which they are associated. This thesis explores the extent to which multiple attachments or identities exist in the suburbs of Detroit, and if so, whether multiple attachments present a barrier to a shared Detroiter identity.

Territorial Belonging and Place Attachment

The origins of "belonging" as a sociological construct can be traced to the classic sociologists from the Chicago school. Robert Park used ecology-based explanations of life in his analysis of the urban ghetto. In the early 20th century, it was common for newly arriving

immigrants to concentrate in ethnically homogeneous communities. Such was the case in Detroit, which is known for its Polish, Irish, Mexican, and Greek enclaves. While much of these migration patterns can be attributed to public policy of the time, many immigrants expressed great comfort living among those perceived to have a similar ethnic background, as these neighborhoods provided "the social ritual and moral order" with which they were familiar (Park and Burgess 1925).

Jorgensen (2010) provides a more contemporary analysis of belonging, finding communities with similar social profiles can have divergent levels of belonging. This suggests that to understand the degree of belonging, researchers may need to go beyond traditional demography-based sociological variables such as income and ethnicity. Lupi and Musterd (2006) explored placed-base belonging through the nuances of suburban life. They find the socioeconomic profile of a community is not a determining factor as to whether the community had strong or weak social cohesion. Their analysis considers five types of what they call "territorial ties" – economic, social, cultural, political, and habitual. These ties – particularly the cultural, economic, and social ties – guide my analysis of participants' sense of belonging to their suburb and to the Detroit metropolitan area.

Over the years, scholars have expanded the definition of "belonging" to go beyond a place-based construct. Indeed, in Gasparini's analysis, belonging is defined as any "active feeling of bond, implying attachment and therefore developing loyalty to something belonged to" (Gasparini 2010). For this study, I limit the term "territorial belonging" to the more traditional place-based construct: a place where their specific needs, desires, and preferences are satisfied by their choice in community. For many, of course, the luxury of choosing their place of residence is not an option (as in the case of low-income families).

"Attachment" or "place attachment" is often defined as one's emotional bond or link to a place (Windsong 2010). Attachment has been operationalized and measured in a variety of ways and in a variety of contexts. Greif (2009) uses quantitative measures in her study on the impact of racial composition on neighborhood attachment. Greif finds that racial composition of the neighborhood has a "meaningful" yet "modest" statistical association with attachment among whites and blacks, but not among Asian and Hispanic populations. Brown and Werner's (1985) study of suburbia suggests attitudes and behaviors combine to reflect degrees of neighborhood attachment, with the actual street-level physical environment the facilitator of neighborhood attachment. Scholarship that specifically explores the concept of place attachment in the context of attachment to a major American metropolitan area is sparse.

Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) assert that place attachment – as a social process – contributes to community cohesion through the development of shared meanings of a particular place, which, when internalized, leads to the adoption of a place-based identity. The notion that a placed-based identity can be formed from one's attachment to a place is central to this thesis. Attachment is the component that transforms the term "Detroiter" from just a nominal descriptor of a person who resides in the region into a meaningful regional identity.

Place-Based or "Regional" Identity

Identity as a sociological construct has been defined as "the distinctive characteristics of a person's character or the character of a group which relate to who they are and what is meaningful to them" (Giddens 1990). Note two critically important dimensions of this definition: individuality and meaning. While the meaning of a regional identity is drawn from the shared values, behaviors, and beliefs of the greater community (Sampson and Goodrich 2009), adoption of a regional identity is purely individualistic. A person who grew up in New York City might consider himself

a New Yorker even if he has spent decades living abroad. For him, the title of "New Yorker" is not just a nominal label used to designate residents of New York City – his level of attachment gives the title a distinct, personally-relevant meaning. This means that – when considering the legitimacy of a regional identity – borders are irrelevant.

Various terms are used to describe place-based identities. Cooper and Knotts (2004,2010) use the term "regional identity" in their analysis of identity in the southern United States. Using secondary and content analysis, they find "collective identity with the Old South is declining, as the use of 'Dixie' has decreased precipitously across the United States." They posit a growing African-American middle class with greater political and economic clout as a driver of the evolving Southern identity, where Southerners become less inclined to identify with the "Dixie" label.

Mendelsohn (2002) documents the complexity of interrelated identities with his study of belonging and what he calls "national identity" among French Canadians in Quebec. Mendelshon measures identity by directly asking survey respondents if they identified themselves as Canadian, French Canadian, Quebecer, or some other category. In their study of placed-based agency and identity in housing projects, Gotham and Brumley (2002) introduce the term "using space" to conceptualize their observations of how housing residents find "safe space" within an otherwise violent, dysfunctional environment. Through observations and qualitative interviews, Gotham and Brumley find residents form a place-based identity around their safe spaces – specific places inside the projects which provided them a "modicum of dignity, self-worth, and personal autonomy." For purposes of this study, I refer to a "regional identity" as any place-based description (a town, a neighborhood, etc.) an individual uses in the definition of their personal identity.

Barriers to Shared Regional Identity: Loss of Community

The Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft typology was developed by Ferdinand Tonnies for use in his analyses of societies, groups and social relationships. Gemeinschaft (community) is often characterized by neighborly, close-knit rural communities where family and religion are the institutions of social control. Gesellschaft (society) is characterized by city life and heavy-handed social control (laws, police, and prisons). Tonnies argues that as society becomes more complex, it moves from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft. While other classical theorists offered similar types of societal evolution schemes, Tonnies' perspective is somewhat unique in its pessimism. For Tonnies, the complexities of social life brought about by modernization and industrialization would clearly have been seen as a degradation of society (Martindale 1960). Many contemporary scholars gravitate toward Tonnies' pessimism as well, bringing forward what has been referred to as the "loss-of-community" argument. Essentially, the argument states that as a society increases in complexity, individuals lose their allegiance to primary groups such as families. This leads to a loss of support structures and a rise in social pathologies (Lee et al. 2004). Contemporary scholars extrapolate "loss-of-community'' beyond modernization, exploring the effects urbanization, suburbanization, as well as personal mobility and connectivity.

Scholarship related to the loss-of-community argument has produced conflicting and controversial results. Hunter (1975) finds the urbanization of Rochester, New York between 1940 and 1970 has a negative effect on one dimension of community, but no change in the extent to which residents engage in "informal neighboring" and an overall improvement in "the sense of community." While Greif (2009) finds communications technology and personal mobility leads to a gradual degradation of the significance of the neighborhood, Mesch and Talmud (2010) find that internet connectivity actually enhances civic participation and engagement.

Wolodoff (2002) posits that perceptions of disorder appear to isolate people from neighborhood and community activity. People are less likely to feel attached to a community if they feel their neighbors are untrustworthy, conflict-oriented, and neglectful. According to Lee et al. (2004), the assertion that detachment from the neighborhood and the greater community is the result of the growing complexity of society ignores or discounts racial inequality as a root cause. Lee et al. describes the decline-of-community thesis as having a “decidedly anti-urban bias” because it fails to take into account the disadvantaged position of many urban residents, particularly the impact of racial discrimination.

Detroit provides an interesting canvas to explore the loss-of-community argument. It is unclear if unflattering portrayals of Detroit in the local and national media present a barrier to a shared Detroiter identity or if such reports have a unifying, “esprit de corps” effect. Given the current state of affairs in Detroit, some suburbanites may find no compelling need to seek or desire better city-suburb cohesion. In this study I identify themes consistent with the loss-of-community argument and how such sentiment impacts attachment to the region.

Barriers to a Shared Regional Identity: Color-blind Racism

The Civil Rights Movement has brought a reduction in blatant forms racism and increased support for racial equality, albeit at a glacial pace (Schuman et al. 1997).While few words carry as strong a negative connotation as the word “racist,” there is disagreement regarding the meaning of the word. Doane (2006) refers to racism in the U.S. as a “contested concept,” asserting that competing definitions of racism have had a negative impact on the effectiveness of racial discourse in the United States. While overt expressions of racist attitudes have become increasingly socially unacceptable in American society, more subtle variants have emerged. Scholars refer to “color-blind racism” as the process by which explicit reference to race is replaced by coded language (Bonilla Silva 2002). Color-blind racism provides an environment conducive for “socially-acceptable” racial discourse by removing or marginalizing issues of inequality. Studies of color-blind racism expose latent, institutionalized racist policies and practices within social institutions ranging from government loan programs (Nopper 2011) to classroom school environments (Rodriguez 2008). The lens of color-blind racism also uncovers racial underpinnings in interactions and perceptions at the individual level. For instance, Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2002) describes color-blind racism through an analysis of rhetorical strategies used by whites. Bonilla-Silva argues such devices allow whites to avoid explicit references to race, while emphasizing the “cultural and social differences between races.”

Two major themes of color-blind racism relevant to this study are “abstract liberalism” and “minimization.” Abstract liberalism refers to the application of liberal principles to issues of race in a loose, “abstract” manner. It is common for discussions of race to invoke concepts such as freedom and equality, but absent from such discussions is recognition of the institutional racism that puts minorities at a disadvantage (Bonilla-Silva 2010). For example, when Americans express

faith in their criminal justice system and cling to the notion that "justice is blind," there is no recognition that poor men of color receive disproportionally tougher sentencing (Cole 1999). "Minimization" typically occurs when the progress in American race relations over the past 30 years is used as a means of dismissing legitimate claims of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Indeed, the feeling that discrimination has all but disappeared in this country was common among study participants.

The Context of Detroit

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Detroit was the most segregated metropolitan area in the United States (Iceland et al. 2002). Extreme racial segregation leads to a deterioration of economic conditions in black communities (Massey and Denton 1998). Segregation and flight were prevalent within the city of Detroit as early as the 1940s. White residents sought to block the entry of blacks into their neighborhoods by aggressively opposing the building of public housing projects in predominantly white areas (Farley et al. 2000). When blacks did successfully settle in a predominately white neighborhood, whites were quick to leave. For example, the 12th Street neighborhood completely transformed from being 98% white in the late 1940s to being 96% non-white in 1967 (Sargue 1996).

The suburbs provided no safe harbor for blacks during these years. Suburbanization in the 1940s and 1950s was heavily influenced by the racist policies of real estate agents, many of whom refused to sell blacks property in predominately white suburban neighborhoods (Sargue 1996). Agents who did sell to blacks were essentially boycotted out of business and such behaviors were reinforced by state and federal government policies, which excluded blacks from government-backed loan programs (Sargue 1996).

Detroit's first major race riot occurred in 1943, and from 1943 to 1967 the Detroit police department's primary mission was to keep racial tensions under control so as to protect the city's tax base. For the predominantly white police force, protecting the tax base meant disrespecting and brutalizing black residents. Despite progressive policies instituted by Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, the Detroit Police Department in 1967 was mostly white. Tensions between the police and the city's blacks directly led to the event that was the tipping-point for a massive race riot in 1967 (Farley et al. 2000).

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, blacks took the brunt of many government policies – including being brutalized by police, declined equal access to FHA housing loans, and restricted to deteriorating public schools. Not only were blacks marginalized by government institutions and policies, but by labor leaders as well. Union leaders blocked access to the more lucrative skilled trade positions, providing white workers higher earning power and thus, more housing options (Sugrue 1996).

Lingering resentment from government policies of the past and continued structural racism has had a reinforcing effect on the segregation of Detroit (Kryzan and Farley 2002; Farley et al. 2000; Bates and Fasenfest 2005). Much of the contemporary neighborhood selection literature asserts so-called racial self-segregation in urban and suburban settings can be attributed to white people "clinging to stereotypical attitudes" and black people fearing "the hostility of unwelcoming whites" (Kryzan 2002; Massey and Denton 1999). In Detroit, racial hostility in the suburbs meant blacks "had to depend increasingly upon racial solidarity as their primarily ideology. Integration and interracial cooperation were not scrapped, but became ideologically subservient to the objectives of black political development" (Darden 1987). Indeed, a comparative study of Detroit and Jersey City by Lawless (2002) concludes that Detroit is unique in the extent to which its

economic policy is interwoven with racial politics, resulting in distrust between the city and suburbs. Lawless concludes that this level of distrust has had a negative impact on economic revitalization programs.

Institutional racism plays an important role in understanding the history of racial tension between the city and suburbs the history of Detroit. Whether by design or due to unexpected consequences, bureaucratic policies have benefited the middle-class at the expense of the disadvantaged. When Detroit's suburban population began to grow in the early 1900s, several social forces resulted in a disproportionate percentage of the black population remaining in the city. Farley et al. (2000) describes how external forces such rapid growth, wars, and the Great Depression meant "the city could do nothing to turn the demographic tide of suburbanization." While social forces brought the winds of suburbanization, it is systemic, institutional racism that has left Detroit one of the most segregated communities in the U.S.

Summary

This study explores the possibility of a shared Detroiter identity – a regional identity that is adopted by residents of the predominantly African-American city as well as the predominantly white suburbs. Many scholars find the way a regional identity is adopted is more nuanced and typically goes beyond aspects of race (Licterman 2008; Ellison and Musick 1993), so it is unclear how the high level of segregation across the metropolitan area influences the acceptance of the Detroiter identity. Nor it is clear that feelings of belonging and attachment are negatively impacted by so-called loss-of-community factors such as blight and crime.

Perhaps – as Gaspanini (2010) asserts can sometimes happen – the marginalization of Detroit is having a unifying effect on the greater community. Despite years of animosity between the city and suburbs, there appears to be some anecdotal evidence of emotional attachment to

Detroit among suburbanites. In April 2011, Charlie Sheen began a nation-wide tour of a comedy/variety show. His first venue was Detroit's Fox Theater. About 20 minutes into the "show," Sheen said he was going to "tell some stories about crack. I figured Detroit was a good place to tell some crack stories." That comment was met by boos and jeers and he was eventually booed off the stage (Associated Press 2011). That the rowdy, fun-loving, mostly white, mostly suburban crowd would turn on Sheen over a derogatory comment about Detroit suggests there is at least some degree of attachment in the community.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

Given the uniqueness of the Detroit metropolitan area and the nature of my research questions, I chose to conduct a qualitative study. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is appropriate when the goal is to understand the context in which individuals see the world. I used a case study methodological approach, which Creswell describes as an exploration of a bounded system (a case) through in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information. My study would be considered a "multiple case" study, as I interview several suburbanites (cases) to build a comprehensive understanding of the collective group (suburban Detroiters) (Yin 2009).

Data Sources

I conducted a total of 19 semi-structured interviews with adults residing in suburban communities around Detroit. Interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. I recorded the interviews using my iPhone and converted them to .mp3 format. Recordings were then transcribed, with pseudonyms used to protect the identity of the respondents. The interviewees chose the time and location of the interview, with most opting to meet either in their home or at a local public library.

I used a highly purposeful recruitment strategy to increase the likelihood of finding themes and patterns in the data. As such, all respondents share the following characteristics:

- Reside within 15 miles of the Detroit city limits.
- Have been a resident of the Detroit suburbs for most of their adult lives
- Have lived in their current community for at least the past 12 years
- Are between the ages of 39 and 55

Five respondents were recruited from a database maintained by Morpace International, a market research firm based in Farmington Michigan. Morpace sent an email to its panelists explaining the

study and asking for volunteers. Contact information of interested panelists who met the recruiting parameters was forwarded to me. I then personally contacted each qualified volunteer to arrange the interview. From these initial interviews, three referrals were collected. When taking referrals, I was careful to ask for people who fit the demographic parameters but would likely provide perspectives different from their own. Two additional respondents were referred to me by personal acquaintances. I recruited the remaining participants by intercepting people at community events or when entering a public library. Table 3.1 provides a description of the participants in this study.

Table 3.1
Sample Composition

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Mona	Female	54	White
Joy	Female	46	White
Ruby	Female	51	White
Don	Male	49	White
Tanya	Female	47	White
Kathy	Female	47	White
Sandy	Female	42	White
Lou	Male	55	African-American
Pete	Male	55	White
Carrie	Female	39	White
Angie	Female	48	African-American
Dave	Male	53	African-American
Betty	Female	40	White
Wilma	Female	45	African-American
Lila	Female	55	White
Henry	Male	54	White
Ralph	Male	49	White
Martha	Female	39	African-American
Mike	Male	46	White

The interview guide addressed the following themes, beginning with non-threatening subject matter and ending with a discussion on race:

- Belonging and attachment to the participant's suburb
- Perceptions of other suburbs and of the City of Detroit
- Belonging and attachment to the Detroit Metropolitan area
- Acceptance or rejection of the "Detroiter" identity
- Thoughts and feelings about the City of Detroit
- Defining "Detroiter" and reasons for accepting/rejecting the Detroiter identity
- Thoughts and feelings on race; how it impacts the image of Detroit and its impact on the acceptance/rejection of the Detroiter identity

I began each interview by asking the respondent to describe the community where they grew up. This line of questioning was valuable to build rapport, as it was a non-threatening topic that seemed to help participants gain comfort in sharing. Additionally, it seemed to have a priming effect, getting the participants comfortable using descriptive language about people and communities. After discussing the community where they were raised, I then asked them to compare that community to the community they now live. This segued nicely into the core questions related to attachment and belonging, which were asked for both their suburb and the Detroit metropolitan area in general:

- What do you like or dislike about your community?
- Do you feel at home in this community? Why/why not?
- How would you describe this community to someone from another state or country?
- How would you define the culture of this community?
- Is there anything you dislike about this community?

Prior to discussing the Detroit metropolitan area in general, a projection exercise was used to level-set the respondents' preconceived notions of Detroit. I asked respondents to imagine several communities as if they were people invited to a pot luck dinner. Respondents were asked

to described the "people" and identify the food or beverage the "person" was bringing to the party. The exercise always included the respondent's city, a few other well-known suburban communities, and the city of Detroit.

The discussion of the Detroit metropolitan area led into the core question: Do you consider yourself a Detroiter? A premise of my thesis was that the experience of living in the suburbs of Detroit allowed one to develop an internalized definition of the word "Detroiter." Based on this definition, one would either embrace or reject the Detroiter identity. Responses to this question, along with responses to follow-up and probing questions, provided a mosaic of meanings of being a Detroiter.

Data Analysis – Coding of Acceptors and Rejecters

Transcripts were loaded into an Excel database to help facilitate coding. I first assigned respondents into one of two groups which I label "Acceptors" and "Rejecters." A three-step coding process was used to identify acceptors and rejecters. In step-1, data from those who provided a clear response to the question "Do you consider yourself a Detroiter" were used (9 of the 19 respondents). Their transcripts were used to build an initial coding framework (which also became the basis for the overarching definitions outlined in chapter 5).

In step-2, the respondents who were less clear in their self-identification were evaluated using coding framework developed in step-1. Data for this phase typically came from three portions of the interview:

1. *What do you like about living in Detroit?*

   This question was asked after discussing attitudes about their suburb. The question was purposely unclear, as the goal was to see how they reacted to the premise that they lived in Detroit. A reaction of "I don't live in Detroit" would be indicative of a rejecter.

2. *Do you consider yourself a Detroiter?*

This question was asked after discussing attitudes about the Detroit metropolitan area (likes, dislikes, describe the culture, etc.).

3. You said you did/did not consider yourself a Detroiter. Why do you say that?
This question was asked near the end of the interview and was thoroughly probed.

The third and final step for coding acceptors and rejecters was done after the definitions of Detroiter were fully developed. Step-3 involved a review of all 19 interviews to ensure internal consistency between the overarching definitions and the acceptor/rejecter classifications.

Data Analysis – Additional Coding

Subsequent analyses outlined in chapters 6 and 7 employed both focused and open coding strategies (Emerson et al. 1995). Focused coding was used to document the varied responses to core questions. In addition to understanding participants' internalized definitions of "Detroiter," focus coding proved helpful in fleshing out additional themes related to belonging and attachment. Open coding was then used to uncover unexpected themes. This effort was helpful in exploring issues related to the loss-of-community thesis, for example how perceptions of a diminished automotive industry have impacted the regional identity.

Scope and Limitations:

I interviewed residents of Suburban Detroit who were between the ages of 39 and 56. A study that explores the concepts of attachment and regional identity among residents of the City of Detroit would be compelling as well. Given my research questions, however, interviewing residents of the city did not fall within the scope of this study.

Purposely recruiting only those between the age of 39 and 56 may present a limitation to the study. My strategy for excluding younger and older suburbanites was to achieve a higher degree of homogeneity, which, I believe, had two key benefits. First, a limited age range increased the

likelihood of finding insightful patterns and themes within the data. Second, it provided a baseline historical perspective; ensuring respondents had comparable exposure to positive and negative events in the Detroit area. Anecdotally, I know of many young professionals and artists who have moved to into the city seeking the types of urban lifestyles they have been exposed to in other U.S. cities. By excluding young people from the study, I may have missed some interesting, perhaps more progressive, perspectives. Similarly, by excluding older suburbanites, I am discounting the views of those with a much deeper historical perspectives.

A second limitation to this analysis was the limited focus on African-Americans and Whites. A growing Latino population has been emerging in the metropolitan area and a significant Arab population now exists. There is no doubt Hispanic and Arab suburbanites likely have unique perspectives on the subject. However, it was beyond the scope of this thesis to adequately explore various ethnic dynamics. Given the issues noted above related to the context of Detroit, I limited my analysis to differences between African-American and White suburbanites.

Finally, there may be some issues related to selection bias. When recruiting volunteers, I positioned myself as a graduate student seeking help for his master's thesis research project. This likely attracted those with a greater appreciation for education, as my pool of respondents had above-average levels of educational attainment compared to the general population (all but five were college graduates). It is unclear if a panel of suburbanites with lower levels of educational attainment may have yielded different results.

Personal Reflection

This thesis describes a theoretically-motivated "inductive" inquiry. As such, I attempted to make no assumptions as to what I was going to hear from my respondents, and was completely

open to whatever insights might emerge from the data. In an effort to account for any personal biases that may impact my interpretation of the data, I reflected on my personal background:

> *I am a 44-year-old white male who has always lived in predominantly white, middle-class or working-class suburbs. I am a Christian and participate in a faith-based charitable organization that has exposed me to extreme poverty in the city. My father was raised in Belfast, Northern Ireland. At the age of 16, he was beaten by a British soldier. That experience prompted him to migrate to the United States at the age of 18. Being a white, middle-class male from the suburbs likely impacts my interpretation of respondents' racially-charged comments. My skepticism of government and sensitivity for the underclasses likely impacts my interpretation of the data as well. I tend to believe people are generally good. While I understand the difference between institutional racism and individual acts of bigotry, attaching the word "racism" to responses volunteered by seemingly good-natured people was difficult for me.*

Summary

I conducted a qualitative study that explores the theoretical constructs of belonging, attachment and regional identity in the context of suburban Detroit. My goal for the data collection was to understand the way 19 individuals see the world – that is, to accurately document their perceptions and attitudes. My goal for the analyses was to leverage established theory to classify and categorize the data. My goal in the interpretation of the analyses was to draw conclusions that are supported by the data.

Chapter 4: Detroit – The Generalized Other

This thesis explores the rhetorical meaning of "Detroiter" as used by people who do not reside within the city limits. It is reasonable to assert that the acceptance and rejection of the Detroiter identity would be tied to one's "generalized" understanding of the region's central city and its inhabitants. Indeed, most respondents indicated they spend little time in the city of Detroit, and a few indicated they purposely avoided the city.

The term "the generalized other" was introduced by George Herbert Mead as a social psychological concept. It involves the generalization of a collective group, and how such generalizations impact perceptions of the self. Merton built upon this concept, making it more applicable to sociologists in the functionalist tradition. For Merton, the generalized other was applicable to any reference group which formed one's sense of understanding – be it an internalized understanding of the self or an outward-focused understanding of a group to which he does not belong (Martindale 1960). As noted by Holdsworth and Morgan (2007), the application of the generalized other in social science research has had limited use and has been operationalized in a variety of ways, but typically converges on the notion that attitudes within the community impact an individual's perceptions of themselves or of some reference group. For purposes of this study, I use the term 'generalized other' to describe the imagery associated with Detroit among suburbanites and explore the extent to these associations are used to rationalize their acceptance or rejection of the Detroiter identity.

Table 4.1 summarizes data from the word association and personification exercises I conducted as part of my interviews. Responses from Acceptors and rejecters of the Detroiter identity were consistent. In the word association exercise, respondents described the city as "desperate" and "in crisis" but also having "potential" and even being a "diamond in the rough."

The personification exercise asked respondents to describe four or five cities as if they were people invited to a potluck dinner party. Respondents generally described all the party guests similarly, with minor differences based on the perceived affluence of the city. For example, the affluent community of Birmingham was almost always described as wearing more expensive clothing and bringing higher-end cuisine. Detroit was typically described as a person of lesser means, but dressed appropriately for a party. Detroit's contribution to the party was either a home-cooked dish or take out from well-known Detroit restaurants.

Table 4.1
Word Associations and Personification

	Acceptors	Rejecters
White	Detroit is… Troubled, Sad, Desperate, Fun Personification: African-American male, clean-cut, well-dressed but not wearing brand-name clothing; bringing something home cooked	Detroit is… Potential, a Wreck, in crisis Personification: African-American, a "Dennis Archer type," business casual, collared shirt; ethnic dish or ribs from the best restaurant in town
African – American	Detroit is… Desperate, Diamond in the rough Personification: African-American male, nicely dressed; bringing a main course	Detroit is… Outdated Personification: Home-cooked dish; Greens, baked beans; Designer clothes

During the personification exercise, both African-American male respondents volunteered comments regarding the attitude of the Detroit representative at the potluck dinner. Dave noted that Detroit "would be defensive" for fear that he might not be accepted by the other guests.

They would have a mannerism about them. More defensive. Defensive, but at the same time accepting... They're going to be defensive because they don't know how everybody is going to take what they are bringing and take them coming in.
Author: And that's because why?
Dave: Probably because of demographics… color.

Similarly, Lou explained the Detroit representative would bring food that would make him "comfortable" – suggesting that attending such a party would be uncomfortable for someone from Detroit.

As far as food goes, I would say very ethnic – ethnic in the sense of something that most people probably wouldn't even consider eating.
Author: You used the word ethnic for Southfield as well. So the woman from Southfield brought something that would be more universally enjoyed (ham) but this person is bringing something that would be… What's the word?
Lou: …I want to say soul food but I know that's a broad, broad statement; but that's what I think that is what he would probably be more inclined to bring. That's what he'd be more comfortable with given his economic situation.

Crime, Blight, and Ineffective Government

Towards the end of the interview, participants were asked about their feelings toward Detroit. Regardless of whether they were Acceptors or rejecters, factors such as crime, blight, and ineffective city government were frequently cited as reasons why the suburbs provide a better quality of life than the city of Detroit. Several respondents expressed a desire for an urban lifestyle, but felt the city of Detroit was not a viable solution for them due to crime, poor schools, and the lack of city services.

All respondents felt their community was considerably safer than Detroit. Detroit was seen as a violent, dangerous city. Even those who embraced the Detroiter identity indicated they avoid going into certain areas of the city out of fear for their personal safety. Perceptions about the amount of crime in the suburbs and the nature of crime in the suburbs provided respondents a sense of security. Joy, a 47-year old white woman, provided a typical explanation regarding the amount of crime in suburban communities "There might have been four murders in Livonia last year – there have been like 400 in Detroit." Kathy, a 48-year old white woman from a more affluent community, spoke about the nature of crime in Detroit versus crime in the suburbs:

Author: There were some murders not far from here recently. How does the crime here differ from the crime in Detroit?
Kathy: I think the crimes that take place here are more – for lack of a better word – crimes of passion. The one you're referring to was a man who just snapped. Whereas in Detroit, I think it's just random acts of violence.

Concerns about crime frequently overlapped with concerns of abandoned houses. While there was nearly universal empathy expressed for the residents of Detroit who are "trapped" in high-crime neighborhoods, respondents were more conflicted on the issue of blight. For some, blight was a source of great sadness and anger. Several described the wonderful architecture of Detroit homes and how painful it was for them to see such homes in disrepair or dilapidation. Perplexing to many was that so many abandoned buildings sit unattended year after year. Henry, a 55-year old white male, offered this observation:

In the 60s and 70s there was tremendous social upheaval. In the 20s to 30s and 40s, Detroit was a vibrant community. All of a sudden it just seemed to get twisted and rundown. Flight from the city. Tremendous drop in population... I know that Detroit did not recover well from that.

Other respondents expressed concerns about occupied homes which residents seemingly could not afford to maintain. For example Lou, a 55-year old African-American male, explained:

They don't have the money to maintain the property as it should be. When you tell someone who's making minimum-wage they need to water the lawn, they're going to be thinking: why should I water my lawn when I need to spend money on water to wash my clothes for work? You're talking about an economic level that is so tight that things most people might take for granted get sacrificed. And where else can they live? There's no other area they can live in that price range within 200 miles. So I think economics has a lot to do with it.

Likewise, Ruby, a 51-year old white woman, expressed great concern and sadness for those living in substandard housing:

It's saddening to drive through the neighborhoods. I'm a people person. I do a lot of community service in the city and really care about the people. It's just so saddening to drive through the neighborhoods and know that people are living in these homes.

Color-blind Racism

As expected, overt racist sentiment provided by respondents was rare. During the projection exercise, only one respondent made an explicitly racist characterization of the Detroit persona:

> *Author: Detroit - what does Detroit look like and what are they bringing to the party?*
> *Pete: I don't know what they're bringing as far as food. I don't picture them dressed like we're dressed. I envision them with pants hanging down. Hat on backwards. I don't know about the party materials (pause) don't know if it would just be alcohol.*
> *Author: (pause) So, not like Novi and Livonia [which were bringing beer and wine]. Do you mean illegal substances?*
> *Pete: Yeah, maybe some illegal substances.*

Color-blind racism was most evident in comments about relations between the city and suburbs, typically using a minimization device. Henry, who is white, expressed this sentiment in terms of what he called "reverse racism."

> *Typically when people talk racism, it is talked about in terms of white racism towards blacks, which I think has tempered over the past 30 years. What is more apparent now is black racism against whites.*

This comment from Ralph provides a good mix of minimization and abstract liberalism – as he minimizes the prominence of racism by comparing today's attitudes towards race to those of previous generations.

> *I tell my kids – it's one of my favorite sayings – 'I'm prejudice against being prejudiced.' Really, we're all prejudiced in some way. It's just a matter of degree. When I grew up, my dad was very, very prejudiced. I grew up saying my kids won't be like that. And I've been successful. My kids are not prejudiced.*

Carrie's reference to people wearing "baggy pants" in pejorative terms was quickly couched to tamper-down the racial connotation. Carrie had grown up in one of the more affluent suburbs and now resides there as an adult. She felt the community's ability to isolate her from crime had

diminished over the years, citing "bus routes" that brought "unsavory characters" "up" to the Oakland-county suburb:

> *I think that [with the increase in crime] it's almost turning ghetto. I thought [my town] was isolated from that, but now we're at the epicenter. We're on all the bus routes, and that makes it very simple to come up. So there's been an integration of a lot of unsavory characters, unfortunately… The people walking down Orchard Lake Road – I don't want to be afraid of them [but I am].*
> *Author: What makes you afraid of them?*
> *Carrie: Stereotypes. The way they look. Rough around the edges. Pants coming off their ass. Walking in packs like hoodlums. (pause) Not black or white, just hoodlums.*

For most respondents, crime and blight were seen as merely the natural outcome of an ineffective city government. Respondents were quick to connect corruption within the city government and the social ills of the city, but failed to connect the plight of the city to the history of racial inequality.

There was also a lack of recognition of the media's role in validating color-blind racist sentiment. Ruby, for example, accepted the dominant media narrative and directed her frustrations with those who gloss over the city's problems with corruption.

> *They're not taking care of people, and taking care of people includes police, fire, and emergency vehicles. That's not just sensationalized on TV. That's reality. You can see it. It's all the corruption. It's really disheartening.*

Tanya and Don expressed disappointed with an "us versus them" mentality among fellow suburbanites, but then rationalized these attitudes by citing the "mess created" by the leaders of Detroit.

> *Tanya: I don't like that the city is in such tremendous financial strain. And I don't like that sometimes there is an "us versus them" attitude. "Us" being the suburbs. Although I can certainly understand given the mess that the people and leaders of Detroit have created.*
> *Don: There seems to be a lack of trust. Especially when I look at Detroit City Council and some of those things they've done. I think it's crazy.*

The theme that the people of Detroit are victims of corrupt and incompetent government was common. Note the subtle differences between Tanya and Don's comments, however. Tanya refers

to the “people and leaders” while Don lays blame exclusively on city leadership. Some respondents expressed an attitude that the people get the government they deserve; others took a more condescending stance that the people are merely dupes being exploited by corrupt leaders.

Henry and Mike spoke of corruption from a historical perspective, referencing the issues documented by scholars such as Sugrue (1996), Darden (1987), and Lawless (2002), but with no recognition of the underlying racist policies. Henry provided a “seemingly reasonable” rationale for the suburbs hesitation to help the city. Mike felt the problems of the city in 2012 derive from the “divisiveness” of the Coleman Young administration of the 1970s and 1980s.

> *Henry: I think they've had some failure of leadership there. The leadership is not trying to build bridges. From Coleman Young to Kwame, they've been very divisive. And the people who left Detroit have had no interest in investing back in Detroit… [no interest in] mending the fence the other way.*
> *Mike: [discussing Coleman Young] It seemed like they wanted to keep a separation between the suburbs and the city. I thought that was damaging. And the city has not recovered.*

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to establish an understanding of how respondents viewed the city of Detroit so as to provide context for the analysis chapters that follow. I have outlined the range of imagery associated with Detroit and documented how perceptions of Detroit have little or no relationship with the acceptance of the Detroiter identity. Concerns about crime, blight and ineffective government were prevalent among both Acceptors and rejecters.

It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of comments about the city and its inhabitants were not pejorative – in most cases they were expressions of sadness or frustration with the circumstances in which the city finds itself. Tanya summarized:

> *It’s sad. Sometimes I drive thru the city on the way to work and I just feel bad for the people who have to live in these areas where the houses are burned out, the grass is over grown and there is no grocery store. Other major urban cities like San Francisco, Chicago, New York,*

> *Philly – while they might have their problems – they have been able manage their problems better.*

Minimization and Abstract Liberalism were the most common forms of color-blind racism. Nearly all participants expressed sincere empathy for residents of the city, albeit somewhat condescending in nature and tone. The presence of color-blind racism was observed among acceptors and rejecters. It was observed by those who avoid the city of Detroit, and by those who spend a great amount of time in the city working, socializing, or doing charity work. This assessment supports the argument that those who exhibit attachment to the region tend to rationalize away the social injustice that has put the city in the dire situation which it now finds itself.

Chapter 5: The Meaning of "Detroiter"

In this chapter I illustrate how the meaning of Detroiter varied greatly among suburban residents. From the 19 interviews, I categorized the meanings into three overarching definitions which I labeled the cultural, experiential, and authentic definitions of a Detroiter. In all three cases, the city of Detroit and perceptions of its inhabitants played a role in the definitions' formation and application. Theses definitions provided a basis for understanding the acceptance and rejection of the Detroiter identity. Table 5.1 outlines the three definitions.

Table 5.1
Definitions of "Detroiter" among Suburbanites

	Definition	Acceptor	Rejecter
Cultural	A Detroiter is a person who identifies with the culture or value system of the Detroit metropolitan area	Articulate a common culture with which they identify; culturally, the city and suburb are seen as one	Cannot articulate a common culture or can articulate a common culture but do not identify with it; culture of city is incongruent with the culture of the suburb or their value system
Experiential	A Detroiter is a person who shares a specific experience with those living in the Detroit metropolitan area	Articulate a shared experience with which they can relate; the experience of those in the city and suburbs are similar	See no similarities between life in the city and life in the suburbs; neither the city nor its inhabitants are relevant to their daily lives
Authentic	A Detroiter is a person who has a credible understanding of city life, regardless of how long they have been living in the suburbs	Grew up in Detroit, which gives them unique perspectives on the Detroit experience; understanding city life is the defining factor	Grew up in the suburbs or outside the area; feel they lack the knowledge to truly appreciate or understand the Detroit experience

The Cultural Definition – Acceptors

The cultural definition involved the articulation of a common, shared culture across the Detroit metropolitan area – a culture shared by the city and the suburbs. Many acceptors of the Detroiter identity described Detroit as offering a friendly, family-oriented culture. For some, it shared "Midwest values" with other metro areas around the Great Lakes like Chicago, Milwaukee, and Cleveland. For others, Detroit's blue-collar work ethic made it somewhat unique. Several

mentioned ties to manufacturing, unions or the automotive industry in general as providing the common bond. Tanya explained:

I don't think the people in Detroit are as hung up on moving up the career ladder. I think the people in Detroit are more family-oriented. And I think, maybe, it comes from being a union town... the Union has provided for peoples' families. I think that was generally the goal [of Unions in the 60s and 70s].

Mona, a 50-year old white female from an affluent community also articulated a cultural-based definition of Detroiter. Mona traveled a lot for her job and saw Detroiters as down-to-earth and grounded, but no less sophisticated as those in other metropolitan areas.

I hate New York and LA. It's not the same vibe you get here... There's a pretentiousness there that you don't see here… I sit on the board for [a classical musical society in Detroit]. In other cities these types of positions are pure status symbols. This board is made up of people who genuinely care about the music.

Lila described a resilient, aspirational person with a positive outlook:

The word 'spunky' comes to mind… an open-minded, cheer-leader-type of individual. Team-oriented.

The individuals I interviewed who used a cultural definition of Detroiter were quick to acknowledge the racial and socioeconomic differences between the residents of the suburbs and the city, but they still articulated a common culture between the city and suburb. For some, the only difference between city and suburb was a more prevalent underclass or criminal element in the city. Indeed, most of the women I interviewed indicated that the fear of crime was a major factor for not spending more time in Detroit. However, the general notion among Acceptors was that a criminal element can be found in any major urban setting and represents only a small percentage of Detroit residents, as emphasized by Tanya:

Even though there's lots of crime in Detroit, I know most of the people are good people and wish good things for the city. The criminals are a small percentage. Most of the people are generally good and try to follow the law.

When Mona was asked about crime in Detroit, she made it clear that it was not a factor in forming her view of a Detroit culture:

For me, I get a bit uncomfortable after dark even in areas [of Detroit] I know to be safe. But I'm the same way in downtown Birmingham. You have to be aware of your surroundings. That's everywhere. That's just common sense.

The Cultural Definition – Rejecters

Two respondents articulated a common, shared Detroit culture, but it was a culture with which they did not identify. Don had spent time as a youth in London Ontario and juxtaposed the cultures of the two communities. He describes the Detroit area as having "potential" and was optimistic for its future, but felt there was an underlying negativity that permeated the community. Don had what Lupi and Musterd (2006) refer to as weak territorial ties, essentially choosing to live in the Detroit area only for economic reasons. That is, he and his wife were required to be in the Detroit area for their jobs. His preference would be to live in community that was smaller, slower-paced, ethnically diverse, and cosmopolitan.

I don't know if I would live here if I had the choice. We came here because of our jobs. But I don't think it would be a choice for me... There's a lot of segregation – something we didn't have in Canada... You have to watch what you say because race seems to pop-up into everything whether it's there or not. There's a lack of trust.
Author: You spend a lot of time in the city and are active in the community, help me reconcile that.
Don: I don't like it here… it's looking beyond that to see the potential. It's one that I usually try to describe some positive things that are going on… I try not to focus on what all the news channels do. I don't think that helps anybody.

Martha, a 39-year old African-American woman, grew up in what she described as "an upper middle-class" suburban town in Ohio. She felt the culture of Detroit was in contrast with her aspirational disposition.

> *I think of myself as progressive, upwardly mobile, career-oriented. People have been engrained here – you graduate from high school, you get a job at the plant. As long as you have a job at the plant you're doing good. That's a success in Detroit. For me, working in a plant until you retire is not a goal. That's not how I was raised.*

The Experiential Definition - Acceptors

The experiential definition referred to some type of common experience shared by all living in the Detroit metropolitan area. For many, the common experience was a connection with the automotive industry. Nearly all participants mentioned some connection to the automotive industry and several reflected fondly on the industry as a stabilizing force in their childhood communities. While there was a general recognition that the industry's influence on the community has waned over the years, a few respondents in this study felt the automotive industry still played a prominent role in the milieu of Detroit.

Two participants used this definition in their acceptance of the Detroiter identity. In fact, for Lou, a 57-year old African-American male, it was the auto industry that actually defined a Detroiter:

> *There is something that binds all of us… I believe it has everything to do with the auto industry. The auto industry is really everything – everything that we do. Whether or not you work directly for an auto company, or you know someone who does. You're someone who either works there, or is supported by someone who works there, or works a job that has been created to support the people who work there. We are all tied to the spiritual essence of building cars.*

Carrie, a 39-year old white woman, expressed this sentiment as well, saying "when the President said in his acceptance speech that the automotive industry is back on its feet. That equals Detroit."

While the automotive industry was the most powerful component of the experiential definition, there were others. Some mentioned participation with Detroit-based charitable organizations and major events (festivals, auto shows, etc.). The "well known sports teams" were top of mind when Ralph, a 50-year old white male, was asked what he liked about Detroit. Tanya, a Detroit Tigers season ticket holder, expanded on that sentiment:

> *Not all the big cities have the sports teams. I think it's a very sports-oriented culture in Metro Detroit because not only do we have the pro teams we have U of M and MSU as well. I think it's probably something unique to the culture of Detroit. The people in Detroit really like their sports.*

The Experiential Definition - Rejecters

Many rejecters of the Detroiter identity gravitated to the "experiential" definition. For them, there were no relevant, shared experiences that tie city and suburbs. Many of these suburbanites expressed an indifference to the area - the city was not seen as a positive or negative thing, it just existed. Suburban communities were developed to such a degree that some found little or no reason to venture into the city. Many felt that equally pleasant entertainment and restaurant experiences could be enjoyed the suburbs. News reports of crime in the city drape a pall over its viability as potential destination. Joy, a 47-year old white woman explains "Livonia has everything you need – restaurants, theaters, shopping. Why drive 20 to 30 minutes into the city when it's all right here?"

Others rejected the Detroiter identity with this definition because they felt the problems of the area were beyond their capacity to help. They were busy people with problems of their own, as Henry articulated:

> *I feel bad for the people who live there, but there's not much more I can do [in addition to volunteer work at St. Patrick's parish]. I guess I have distanced myself from the types of problems that the city is having. I'm not vested in that - It's not me.*

Some felt that shrill political discourse and news reports of corruption has likely caused many to disengage from civic-oriented activities, limiting the opportunity for productive interactions between city and suburbs. Lou made the following observation related to disengaging suburbanites:

> *Unfortunately the voters voted [Dennis] Archer out and things started to decline quickly. I think when that happened, the surrounding cities probably felt like the city doesn't want to help itself… [Suburbanites said] 'let's just sit back and wait and see what the city wants to do with itself.' So it's a wait-and-see situation.*

The Authentic Definition - Acceptors

The "authentic" definition is similar to the experiential definition, where the unifying experience was actually having lived in the city of Detroit. All those who had lived in the city as an adolescent used this definition in their acceptance of the Detroiter identity. For these acceptors, they saw no commonality between the city and suburbs, yet they felt the experiences of their early life give them adequate credibility to refer to themselves as a Detroiter – regardless of how long they have lived in the suburbs. For Dave, a 55-year old African-American male, even those who were raised in affluent areas of Detroit or had the means to avoid unpleasant aspects of city life could rightfully claim the Detroiter identity.

> *Author: I was born in Detroit, but have lived in Livonia almost my whole life. Am I a Detroiter?*
> *Dave: I would not consider you a real Detroiter because you really know nothing about the city. You were initially born there, but your parents moved you out. So you really never ran the streets, played there, went to school there… You have to spend time there to claim that title.*
> *Author: What if I had grown up in that [affluent neighborhood in Detroit]… parents sent me to Catholic Central… lived there but was able to avoid a lot of the…*
> *Dave: (responding before the question is completed): You would be a Detroiter. You still would have had to deal with the neighborhood.*

Ralph, a 50-year old white male, provided an interesting twist on the authentic definition. Despite having never lived within the city limits, he felt the knowledge and understanding of growing up in close proximity to the city gave him the legitimate claim to the Detroiter identity.

> *People say they are from Detroit but they don't know what Baseline Road was, what McNichols Road was, Fenkle Road. They had no clue. This guy in the service – he told everyone he's from Detroit. I said 'hey, I'm from Detroit.' Turns out he was from Hartland. I was like 'you ain't from Detroit.'*

The Authentic Definition - Rejecter

One respondent used the authentic definition in her rejection of the Detroiter identity. As a school teacher who spent a few years teaching in Detroit, Sandy expressed great appreciation and empathy for the struggles endured by those living in the city. Having grown up in a middle-class suburb, however, she felt claiming to be a Detroiter would be a slight to those who had actually been raised in the city and to those who reside there now. Sandy, a 40-year old white woman, explains:

> *I think a lot of people in Detroit have struggles with not having enough money and I've never had to worry about those things. I didn't come from a wealthy family, but we didn't really ever have to worry about money. We always had a safe environment. We didn't have a lot to worry about.*
> *Author: So, help me out. Is it out of respect for the people struggling in Detroit that you don't want to…?*
> *Sandy: I guess I think it would be inauthentic for me to claim an experience that I haven't really experienced. I feel like I'm more of a suburbanite. I've always lived in suburbs. To me it's different than being from the city.*

The "Literal" Definition

It should be noted that several suburbanites initially offered a "literal" definition: a Detroiter is someone who lives in within the city limits of Detroit. Upon probing, however, it was clear that for many this response was a mechanism for rationalizing their rejection of the Detroiter identity. They were, in fact, actually using one of the three overarching definitions outlined above.

Pete, a 58-year old white male from an affluent community, employs a variation of the experiential definition in his dismissal of the Detroiter identity. In this exchange, he notes his expectation that a suburbanite from the Chicago area would have a greater sense of pride in "his city."

> *When I go out of town, I don't say I'm from Detroit.*
> *Author: Why is that?*
> *Pete: Because I don't live in Detroit. Never have. I say I'm from a town about 30 miles outside of Detroit.*
> *Author: Does the guy from Shaumburg Illinois tell people he's from Chicago?*
> *Pete: Probably does.*
> *Author: What's the difference?*
> *Pete: He's proud of his city.*

Note how Pete clearly differentiates the City of Detroit from his suburban community ("30 miles outside" the city), but then speaks of the Chicago area a unified region ("his city").

Summary

In Chapter 5, I analyzed how the participants defined their attachment to Detroit. I categorized the meanings of "Detroiter" into three definitions: cultural, experiential, and authentic. These definitions were not mutually exclusive, as several participants touched on aspects of two definitions when explaining their acceptance or rejection of the Detroiter identity. Table 5.2 breaks down the 19 participants by Acceptor and rejecter status, and identifies the definition or definitions used. The cultural and experiential definitions were the most common and used by both acceptors and rejecters. Among the five African-American participants, four used both the cultural and experiential definition. These definitions provided an efficient means for categorizing my data and organizing my analyses. Moreover, understanding what "Detroiter" means to suburbanites provides the needed context for Chapters 6 and 7, where I explore the conditions that promote the acceptance of the Detroiter identity.

Table 5.2
Definitions of "Detroiter"
As Used By Acceptors/Rejecters

Acceptors	Mona	Female	54	White	Cultural
	Tanya	Female	47	White	Cultural
	Carrie	Female	39	White	Experiential
	Betty	Female	40	White	Experiential, Authentic
	Lila	Female	55	White	Cultural, Experiential
	Ralph	Male	49	White	Experiential, Authentic
	Mike	Male	46	White	Experiential
	Angie	Female	48	African-American	Cultural, Experiential
	Wilma	Female	45	African-American	Cultural, Experiential
	Lou	Male	55	African-American	Cultural, Experiential
	Dave	Male	53	African-American	Authentic
Rejecters	Joy	Female	46	White	Cultural
	Ruby	Female	51	White	Experiential
	Kathy	Female	47	White	Experiential
	Sandy	Female	42	White	Experiential, Authentic
	Don	Male	49	White	Cultural
	Pete	Male	55	White	Experiential
	Henry	Male	54	White	Cultural, Experiential
	Martha	Female	40	African-American	Cultural

Chapter 6: Belonging and Attachment in Suburban Detroit

In this chapter I explored the ways in which suburbanites exhibited displays of belonging and attachment to the Detroit metropolitan area. In their case study of two suburban communities in the Netherlands, Lupi and Musterd (2006) operationalized place attachment using a multi-dimensional framework of "territorial ties." My analysis used a variation of this framework because it fit well with my thesis (the context of suburbia) and was in agreement with Gasparini's belonging-attachment-identity model. It is important to note that other scholars posit frameworks that run counter to Gasparini's model. For example, Gustafson (2002) argues identity is one of three underlying dimensions of place attachment (social relationships and the natural environment being the others). The purpose of this chapter was to explore how the Gasparini model applied to suburban Detroit and describe the ways in which place attachment manifests itself.

I modified the Lupi and Musterd framework in two ways. First, Lupi and Musterd use a single dimension to encompass all interpersonal relationships – family, friends, or even impersonal relationships such as colleagues in an office. In my study, several participants referenced family obligations as a reason for staying in the area, while others spoke of the ways in which family members were integral to their social life. Tanya, for example, described attending Detroit Tigers baseball games with her in-laws as one the way she socializes within the city limits. Ruby spoke about having to care for an elderly parent and how that obligation was key to delaying her plans for relocating. My data showed that social ties emerging from voluntary interpersonal relationships were very different from those emerging from obligatory interpersonal relationships. Consequently, I separated obligatory familial relationships into their own unique territorial tie.

The second modification involves what Lupi and Musterd (2006) refer to as the "political" territorial tie, which they define as "concern for the place, and involvement in organizations and

initiatives, both passive and active." None of my respondents were active in political organizations, but several were involved in charitable work or commercial activities that made them highly engaged in the community. For my study, I expanded the meaning of this territorial tie to encompass any voluntary behavior that enhances ones engagement with the community. I referred to this expanded dimension as the "engagement" territorial tie.

Thus, the six territorial ties, operationalized as yes/no dichotomies, are as follows:

- Cultural: Identifies with a distinct culture of the area
- Engagement: Voluntarily participates in activities that enhance attachment to the area
- Social: Social relationships are tied to the metropolitan area
- Habitual: There is a strong familiarity or comfort level with the area
- Familial: Family obligations that tie a person to the area
- Economic: Ties to the community based on personal finances or employment status; impersonal, transactional or functional

Table 6.1 provides a visual representation of the extent to which specific territorial ties were exhibited among suburbanites, broken down by Acceptors and rejecters of the Detroiter identity. The analysis involves at a total of 114 observations (6 ties per respondent, 19 respondents); 66 observations for 11 Acceptors and 48 for eight Rejecters. Each checkmark represents a participant who exhibited that particular territorial tie while the "x" represents a participant who did not.

The pattern suggests support for the Gasparini model, with exhibitions of territorial ties much more prevalent among those embracing the Detroiter identity (47% of possible observations for Acceptors versus 23% for Rejecters).The divide between Acceptors and Rejecters becomes more visible when focusing just on cultural and social dimensions, which Lupi and Musterd (2006) suggest evoke the strongest feelings of attachment.

Table 6.1
Ties to the Detroit Metropolitan Area among Suburbanites
By Acceptor/Rejecter of the "Detroiter" Identity

	Acceptors	Rejecters
Cultural	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Engagement	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Social	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Habitual	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Familial	✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Economic	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗

✓ = one participant exhibiting that territorial tie

For comparison purposes, I replaced the acceptor/rejecter dichotomy with demographic covariates race and gender. Tables 6.2 and 6.3 illustrate how the pattern in Table 6.1 is diminished. As a percentage of total observations, expressions of territorial ties by white respondents and African-American respondents were 35% and 43%, respectively, a difference of only 8 percentage points (by comparison, the difference between Acceptors and Rejecters was 24 percentage points).

Table 6.2
Ties to the Detroit Metropolitan Area among Suburbanites
By Race

	White	African-American
Cultural	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗
Engagement	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Social	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗
Habitual	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗
Familial	✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Economic	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗

✓ = one participant exhibiting that territorial tie

Likewise, women and men respondents expressed roughly the same percentage of ties. It should be stated that while men and women had the same total amount of expressions, the type of

expressions were different. Habitual and economic ties were more common among men, while familial ties were observed only among women.

Table 6.3
Ties to the Detroit Metropolitan Area among Suburbanites
By Gender

	Female	Male
Cultural	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Engagement	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Social	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Habitual	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗
Familial	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✗✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗
Economic	✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗ ✗	✓✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✗ ✗

✓ = one participant exhibiting that territorial tie

Expressions of attachment that typically came from two interview questions: "Why do you feel at home in metro Detroit" and "How would you describe Detroit to someone from another state or country." A participant's responses to the former question occasionally touched on several of the territorial ties. For example in this passage from Dave, who grew up in the city, we heard his comfort in the familiar surroundings (habitual) and an appreciation for the resiliency of area residents (cultural):

> *It's home. It's where I've been all my life. It's what I know. It made me who I am so there's nothing I dislike about it. Family is there. My roots… Plus, if you can get along here you can get along anywhere.*

Reconciling Attachment and Perceptions of the City

As noted previously, negative perceptions of the city of Detroit were common among acceptors and rejecters – blight, crime, and corruption were mentioned by both groups. One could argue there is a disconnect: how does someone grow attached to a region where the central city is perceived in such negative light? Some might suggest this disconnect was a form of color-blind

racism. That is, acceptors see the community as a big happy family (abstract liberalism), with little thought of social inequalities across the region (minimization).

Gasparini (2010) would argue that there was no disconnect at all. As noted in the literature review, Gasparini asserts that in some situations, place attachment can actually be enhanced when one feels their community is marginalized. What was interesting about Detroit in this regard was that acceptors' see the source of marginalization as both external (e.g., from the national media) and internal (from the power-elite of city government). References to corrupt politicians such as former Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and city council member Monica Conyers were common. Many also referred to Coleman Young, the city's mayor in the 1970s and 1980s, whose administration faced numerous allegations of corruption. This phenomenon was clearly evident among acceptors of the Detroiter identity, for whom there was a clear delineation between the residents of the city and city leaders.

When asked to describe Detroit to a person from another state, many acceptors articulated a self-justifying or protective rationale. There was an expectation that they must first dispel preconceived notions about Detroit before laying out the positive qualities of the area. Statements such as "It's not as bad as you think" or "Don't believe what you've heard" were common.

> *Carrie: Everything isn't scary about Detroit and it gives you an opportunity to tell them about all the great things going on… You really have to couch the negativity… That's unfortunate.*

> *Lila: When you say Detroit their faces just go "eeesh." They feel it's the worst. They think it is a terrible community. You try to explain to them what they hear about is just a sliver of what really goes on here. You explain that what they hear about goes on everywhere… it's really sad.*

Summary

In this chapter I categorized the types of territorial ties exhibited by residents of suburban Detroit. I demonstrated that acceptors of the Detroiter identity exhibit quantitatively more and

qualitatively stronger territorial ties than do rejecters of the Detroiter identity. When looking at other factors such as race and gender, the pattern became less clear. Results from this analysis provided support for literature that posits a regional identity is an outcome of place attachment rather than some underlying component. I also outlined the ways in which attachment manifests itself among suburbanites, which included two theoretically-grounded explanations as to why some acceptors of the Detroiter identity can hold negative perceptions of the city, but still become attached to the region.

Chapter 7: Barriers to a Shared Regional Identity

In this chapter I explored the possible barriers to a Detroiter identity. Focusing mostly on the eight Rejecters, I looked for evidence to support variations of the loss-of-community thesis. I also examined whether attachment to one's suburb presents a barrier to a shared Detroiter identity. Finally, I looked for expressions of racial intolerance or hostility on the part of Rejecters.

Loss-of-Community Thesis

The loss-of-community thesis (LOC) typically refers to the controversial notion that the presence of urban decay causes individuals to detach from their community. Contemporary scholars have expanded the debate on the LOC, with published research documenting both the positive and negative effects personal mobility and connectivity. To some extent, each these variations of the LOC were observed within my pool of rejecters.

As noted previously, the notion that urban decay is a driver of community detachment has been strongly debated in scholarly literature. My data aligns with those challenging the assertion. In fact, for many Rejecters, poverty and blight in the city limits actually facilitated interaction with the city. Ruby and Henry, for example, spent time in Detorit volunteering at soup kitchens and food pantries. Don described the rewarding nature of his volunteer work with the Blight Buster organization:

> *You don't often get a chance to work side-by-side with inner city kids. It was really neat because it gave you a different feeling for them. There were about 25 inner city kids and 25 volunteers, so you saw different types of people who share the belief that things can change.*

Don went on to explain how he used the blight in Detroit to help show visitors how well the city is progressing:

> *My sister-in-law is coming to town tomorrow, so we plan to do a kind of 'urban blight tour' because they've never seen anything like this.*
> *Author: That kind of makes Detroit sound like some type of freak show?*

Don: [shaking his head in disagreement to the freak show question] It's seeing the old buildings that are still there that in most cities would have been torn down. Things you can never see anywhere else… I have a route mapped out. We always go middle of the day. We won't go down at night.
Author: Correct me if I'm wrong – it does not sound like a positive presentation of Detroit.
Don: I do both. I take them into areas that have been blighted and then take them to other areas. So I'll take them down to the Ren Cen, mid-town, and show them the rebirth part. Trying to give both sides of the coin.

Themes related to personal mobility and connectivity were not seen to be root causes of detachment, but made the Detroit area more attractive to those with more transactional or economic ties to the area. Don, who indicated he and his wife only live in the area because of their jobs, talked about how they spend most weekends at their cottage in western Michigan. Likewise, Kathy, whose husband is only licensed to practice law in Michigan, explained her plans to become a "snow bird" after her children graduate high school. Thus, the data did not suggest that personal mobility shaped individuals detachment from the community, but that personal mobility allowed one to take up residency in areas where they may have weak or non-existent ties.

Competing Regional Identities

The data in this study did not support the theory that attachment to other place-based systems presented a barrier to acceptance of the Detroiter identity. Most of those who rejected the Detroiter identity expressed little attachment to their own community (or any other place). Two Rejecters expressed attachment to their suburb but not to the Detroit area in general. Both of these respondents applied the cultural definition in their rejection of the Detroiter identity – that is, they felt the culture of their community was somewhat unique and could not be applied to the area in general. Joy, a 47-year old white woman, felt the culture of her middle-class suburb aligned well with her work ethic and practical sensibilities.

People who live in [this suburb] are hard-working people who care about their community and care about their schools. People here really get involved – either in the schools, or with

> *sport leagues, or with activities. It’s not an affluent community, but the people work hard to maintain a level. There’s also a kind of a work-smarter-not-harder mentality.*

Henry, an executive-level engineering professional, enjoyed that his community was somewhat ethnically diverse and provided him an opportunity to interact socially with other working professionals.

> *People here are typically professionals who commute to work, and I’m one of those. We fall in the same general wage scale. It’s not a bunch of well-paid lawyers. It’s easy to get a group together for a beer and socialize.*

Racial Hostility and Intolerance

The final question in the interview was an open-ended discussion about racism and its impact on respondents’ feelings toward Detroit and the metropolitan area in general. Racist attitudes – while definitely present – were not necessarily a barrier to acceptance of the Detroiter identity. Again, similar types of responses were provided by acceptors and rejecters. For most, racism was evident in the mistrust between the city and suburbs. Both Henry and Lou saw the level of mistrust as counterproductive, with racism as its root cause.

> *Henry: There’s a feeling among many people in Detroit – I won’t even say most – that there’s no good thing a white person would ever do for them. Therefore everything has to be viewed with suspicion.*
> *Lou: We can’t avoid race. Race is in the fabric of this country… It applies here just like it applies everywhere else… There is apprehension on the part of city inhabitants to believe there are people outside the city limit that actually have good intentions. At the same time, there are people living outside the city that look at the people of the city as being a burden or a drain on the state. That has to stop.*

Martha, a 39-year old African-American woman, saw racism in the distribution of government funding, with resources funneled to predominately white communities and away from predominately black communities. “Not sure why it is,” she said, “but it’s hard to rule out racism.”

Sandy discussed color-blind racism in the suburbs through what she referred to as "code-words."

I think a lot of peoples' negativity about Detroit is really about race. In [the suburb] I teach, there's a lot of negativity about school-of-choice, but really I think it's just a euphemism for African-American, because most of our school-of-choice kids are African-American. I think there's some of that too – what people are saying about Detroit is what they're saying about black people in this area. My friend's mom says she's afraid to drive through Southfield - which is preposterous. Southfield is a pretty safe city, but it is predominately African-American. I think what she's really saying is 'unsafe' is a synonym for 'black'.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Scholarship suggests that by exploring the way in which a regional identity is adopted or rejected, we gain an understanding of how community cohesion can be attained. This thesis provides a qualitative analysis of the interrelationship between territorial belonging, place attachment, and regional identity in the context of suburban Detroit. My analysis revolved around the acceptance or rejection of the Detroiter identity by long-time residents of suburban Detroit. Eleven of my 19 respondents self-identified as a Detroiter (Acceptors); while eight did not (Rejecters). I found that a regional identity embraced by residents of Suburban Detroit is weak, ambiguous, and, in a few cases, non-existent. Those who lack attachment to the region struggle to articulate any type of cultural or experiential characteristic that binds them with their neighbors. Those who do exhibit attachment to the region, do so with little recognition of the institutional and systemic racism that has plagued the community, particularly as it relates to the central city of Detroit.

In the first portion of my analysis, I documented whether a respondent is an Acceptor or Rejecter of the Detroiter identity and then overlaid the imagery they associated with the city. I found that sentiment toward the city had little or no relationship with the acceptance or rejection of the Detroiter identity. That is to say, attachment to the region is not necessarily dependent on flowery perceptions of the region's central city.

Next, I found the meanings of "Detroiter" could be summarized with three overarching definitions, which I refer to as cultural, experiential, and authentic. Under the cultural definition, a Detroiter is a person who identifies with the shared culture of the Detroit metropolitan area. Most of those who used this definition in their acceptance of the Detroiter identity spoke about Detroiters being hard-working, down-to-earth, and resilient. The experiential definition is used by those who

equate the term "Detroiter" with some type of shared experience. The most common and powerful shared experience was a connection to the automotive industry. The authentic definition was used by those who felt the label "Detroiter" should be reserved to those with some credible tie to the City of Detroit. The cultural and experiential definitions were the most common and used by both acceptors and rejecters.

I then produced an analysis of belonging and attachment to the community using a framework of six "territorial ties" derived from the work of Lupi and Musterd (2006). In the scope of this qualitative study, the relationship between attachment and regional identity was shown to be stronger than the relationship between attachment and demographic factors such as race and gender. Acceptors of the Detroiter identity exhibited more types of territorial ties than did Rejecters. Furthermore, Acceptors gravitated more toward the stronger types of ties (for example, cultural and social ties). Attachment to Detroit among suburbanites was evident in the protective and defensive tone acceptors used when describing the area to people from another state or country. Statements like "Don't believe the bad things you've heard" were common.

Finally, I explored several possible barriers to a shared regional identity. With regard to the loss-of-community thesis, urban decay was not found to be a driver of community detachment. While concerns about crime, blight and ineffective government were common, acceptors generally expressed a sense of solidarity with the city. Negativity directed at the city was mostly limited to expressions of sadness about poverty or frustration with what was perceived to be an inept or corrupt city government. In fact, I found some acceptors of the Detroiter identity held highly negative perceptions of the city, but still exhibited attached to the region (which is consistent with Gasparani's work related to marginalized communities). While acceptors of the Detroiter identity exhibit attachment to the region, few expressed appreciation for the history of institutional racism

that has plagued the region. The frequent use of rhetorical devices such as minimization and abstract liberalism suggests that, for many suburbanites, acceptance of the Detroiter identity is itself a form of color-blind racism.

Although the traditional loss-of-community thesis was not fully applicable, contemporary social forces may create a comparable effect. Future research might explore the relationship between place attachment and the role of personal mobility and connectivity. It is likely that personal mobility facilitates (perhaps encourages) residency for those with no intention or desire to establish territorial ties. Likewise, connectivity allows telecommuters to enjoy economic opportunities offered by a region such as Metropolitan Detroit, but without actually taking residence in the area. These phenomena may become a greater issue as access to enabling technologies grows. A study that measures the correlation between telecommuting and regional attachment would be compelling.

Lastly, the diminished role of the American automotive industry may spawn some loss-of-community effects. For many, the auto industry is a defining element of being a Detroiter. Another compelling study might be one that explores loss-of-community effects related to Detroit losing of credible claim to being the auto capital of the world.

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ABSTRACT

STAND UP AND TELL THEM YOU'RE FROM DETROIT:
BELONGING, ATTACHMENT, AND REGIONAL IDENTITY AMONG SUBURBAN DETROITERS

by

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Research shows that communities with a broadly embraced regional identity provide residents with a more gratifying social experience. A regional identity often emerges when residents exhibit a sense of belonging and attachment to their community. Detroit provides an interesting canvas to explore these concepts given a long history of tension between the city of Detroit and its suburbs. Despite these challenges, anecdotal evidence of suburban solidarity with the city exists. The purpose of this study is to explore the interrelationship between territorial belonging, place attachment, and regional identity in an urban-suburban context. Using in-depth interviews with long-time residents of suburban Detroit, I explore the meaning of being a "Detroiter." Why are some suburbanites eager – and others reluctant – to embrace a Detroiter identity? I found that a regional identity embraced by residents of Suburban Detroit is weak, ambiguous, and, in a few cases, non-existent. Those who lack attachment to the region struggle to articulate any type of cultural or experiential characteristic that binds them with their neighbors. Those who do exhibit attachment to the region, do so with little recognition of the institutional and

systemic racism that has plagued the community, particularly as it relates to the region's predominately black central city.

Autobiographical Statement

Paul Curran received a B.S. in Business (Advertising/Public Relations) from Ferris State University in 1990 before starting his career as a commercial market research analyst. After several years in the workforce, he decided to return to school to pursue an advanced degree. His interest in history, economics, and philosophy attracted him to the Sociology department at Wayne State University, where he is working towards a Master of Arts degree.