“No Matter What, I Got Everybody’s Back”:
Planning for Beloved Community in the Inner-Ring Suburbs

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the United States, civil rights movements have been inspired, moved to action, and given courage by the vision of a “beloved community.” This thesis posits that urban planning fields, too, should take this vision seriously as a guide for designing community development strategies that create more opportunities for active love and relationship across deep social divides.

This research explores what planning for beloved community might look like in practice, using Bellevue, an inner-ring suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as a case study from which to glean lessons for broader planning practice. The research analyzes data from 26 interviews and focus groups with 21 high school students to understand whether and how planning with an explicit aim to strengthen relationship across difference (such as race and class) can generate community strategies different than those currently recommended in the planning literature. The data reveal that this type of planning ultimately has potential to reframe a community’s assets and challenges in a way that can identify strategies not proposed in typical planning approaches, illuminate more radical ideas for local planning intervention (for example, rejecting the exclusivity of local school district boundaries, redesigning policing institutions to be care-focused, or building upon local resistance to materialism and class consciousness), challenge planners to become more vulnerable to deep relationship in their community engagement practices, and shift perceptions of who can be planner by illuminating skills that are often undervalued in education and career pathways. In the face of many failed approaches for achieving and maintaining equity between groups of people, generating strategies that support relationships across race, class, and other divides may be a valuable focus worth reinvigorating in the planning profession.

Thesis Advisor: Mariana Arcaya, Assistant Professor

Reader: J. Phillip Thompson, Associate Professor
"In either case, love is possible only between two freed spirits. What one discovers in even a single experience in which barriers have been removed may become useful in building an over-all technique for loving one's enemy. There cannot be too great insistence on the point that we are here dealing with a discipline, a method, a technique, as over against some form of wishful thinking or simple desiring."

Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................................................. 3  
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................................................................. 5  
Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................................................. 6  
1. Beloved Community as a Vision for Planning .................................................................................................................. 7  
   Beloved Community ............................................................................................................................................................ 8  
   Beloved Community in Planning Practice .......................................................................................................................... 17  
   Research: A Beloved Community Vision at Work ............................................................................................................... 21  
2. Inner-Ring Suburbs as a Site for Beloved Community .................................................................................................... 24  
   Introduction ............................................................................................................................................................................ 24  
   Inner-ring Suburbs ............................................................................................................................................................... 25  
   Development Strategies of the Inner-Ring Suburbs ................................................................................................................ 34  
   Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................................................. 40  
3. The Potential for Relational Work in Bellevue, PA ............................................................................................................... 41  
   Introduction ............................................................................................................................................................................ 41  
   Methodology ........................................................................................................................................................................... 43  
   Findings .................................................................................................................................................................................. 45  
   Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................................................. 62  
4. Youth-Led Planning Strategy for Building Beloved Community .......................................................................................... 64  
   Introduction ............................................................................................................................................................................ 64  
   Methodology ........................................................................................................................................................................... 65  
   Findings .................................................................................................................................................................................. 69  
5. Recommendations and Conclusions ................................................................................................................................. 106  
   Discussion ............................................................................................................................................................................. 107  
   Recommendations ............................................................................................................................................................... 111  
   Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................................................ 116  
Bibliography ............................................................................................................................................................................. 117  
Appendix A: “Othering” as an entry point for discussing active love .................................................................................. 120
Throughout the history of the United States, people fighting for freedom and dignity have been inspired, moved to action, and given courage by the vision of a “beloved community.” Martin Luther King, Jr., who seeded the term into widespread consciousness during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, expressed in his 1966 speech “Non-violence: The Only Road to Freedom,” that “Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives” (King, 1966). For him, beloved community was the vision underlying and fueling the African American struggle for redistribution and against dehumanization.

In this thesis, I argue that urban planning and community development fields, too, should take this vision seriously and focus planning strategies toward building beloved community; and that the fields should value high-quality relationship and active love across difference as much as they value traditional planning goals of improved mobility, affordable housing, or economic development.

My research explores what planning for beloved community might look like in practice, using Bellevue, an inner-ring suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as a case study from which to glean lessons for broader planning practice. I conduct interviews and focus groups there to understand whether and how planning with an explicit aim to strengthen relationship across difference (such as race and class) can generate community strategies different from those currently recommended in the planning literature. I find that this type of planning ultimately has potential to reframe a community’s assets and challenges in
a way that can identify strategies not proposed in typical planning approaches, illuminate more radical ideas for local planning intervention, challenge planners to become more vulnerable to deep relationship in their community engagement practices, and shift perceptions of who can be planner by illuminating skills that are often undervalued in education and career pathways.

This introductory chapter sets the stage for my research, describing the images I have in mind when using the term beloved community, as well as how concepts of relationship and love can inform the planning profession both theoretically and practically.

**Beloved Community**

The term beloved community is attributed to Josiah Royce, a philosopher and historian who lived through the turn of the 19th century, and the phrase has inspired thought in many philosophical, religious, and social justice traditions. The literature I draw upon to inform this discussion comes mostly from the African American civil rights movement, black feminist theory, and liberation theology. The topic is, of course, expansive, and I only touch upon it here at a surface level to set the stage for how it relates to the planning profession. Planners who do intend to take the vision of beloved community seriously have a rich body of literature beyond what I reference here that will provide a lifetime of study and inspiration.

In this thesis, I use the term beloved community to denote a vision for the type of community that would be possible if our society learned how to love across deep social divides such as race, class, or mental ability. This is a community in which wealth is shared, social hierarchies are disassembled, and people across all differences can live together with respect and in close communion with one another.

This is necessarily a vision in which notions of collectivity and community are elevated more highly than in our current society, and one that simultaneously values the dynamic uniqueness of individuals. Grace Lee Boggs, reflecting on King's vision of beloved community, wrote that "He called for a radical revolution in values and a new social system that goes beyond both capitalism, which he said is 'too I-centered, too individualistic,' and communism, which is 'too collective, too statist.'" She noted that the community would be built through "self-transforming and structure-transforming' direct actions," and that it would require shifts at the levels of our deepest personal values and most powerful political, economic, and cultural systems (Boggs, 2004). In this community, all people feel safe and free, but their safety and freedom is dependent on the safety and freedom of others. They achieve this liberation collectively, not through increased security that provides only superficial levels of human freedom within particular confines and often at the expense of others who are further marginalized. The relational nature of this liberation is not a restriction, but rather an acknowledgement that humans need each other, and that we cannot be free, especially spiritually free, if others are left behind.

Howard Thurman, a theologian and mentor to Martin Luther King Jr., wrote that "the Beloved Community is created by the quality of the human relation" (H. Thurman, 1966). He emphasizes that it is this relationship, not individual gain, that should be the focus of our actions and intentions and suggested
at a lecture that, "our loyalty to the individual is derivative because the thing that is primary is my devotion to the tie that unites me to you and you and you and you" (Jensen, 2016). According to Thurman, and consistent with the viewpoint I take in this thesis, there is no definitive metric or design of beloved community; rather, building the beloved community will require removing the current barriers that divide people across race, class, and other differences, and creating the conditions necessary for good relationship between all people.

The specificities of the conditions necessary for facilitating strong relationship will likely look different everywhere, but there are some general principles that can guide practical action. For instance, Kipton Jensen, who examines beloved community philosophies in his article The Growing Edges of Beloved Community: From Royce to Thurman and King, suggests that for all three of these men "the notion of the beloved community signaled a loyal commitment to radical because unconditional love, social justice, and an acknowledgement of the inviolable dignity of persons" (Jensen, 2016). In the following paragraphs, I focus on three general characteristics of beloved community that may be important considerations for guiding planning action: equity, attention to the immaterial, and agape love.

Equity

The beloved community necessarily requires equity if people are to fully engage in the negotiations inherent in any relationship. In his book Jesus and the Disinherited, Thurman describes the superficiality of relationships between people in different economic and social classes, specifically "between whites and Negroes," "servant and served," and writes that though they may interact intimately, "once the status of each is frozen or fixed, contacts are merely truces between enemies—a kind of armistice for purposes of economic security." In this way, "the ultimate fate of the relationship seems to be in the hands of the wider social context" (H. Thurman, 1949). The quality of relationship must be evaluated by both parties in the relationship, and it immensely difficult for good relationship to flourish between people with such different levels of power or material resources. It is also difficult to find time and energy for the hard work of love and care when struggling for access to basic needs.

Thus, the beloved community will not arrive without conflict. Thurman emphasizes that the idea of the beloved community

has a soft and sentimental ring. It conjures an image of tranquility, peace, and the utter absence of struggle and of all things that irritate and disturb. But my thought is far from such a utopian surmise. . . . Disagreements will be real and germane to the vast undertaking of man's becoming at home in his world and under the eaves of his brother's house" (H. Thurman, 1966).

King similarly proclaimed, "Let us be dissatisfied until every man can have food and material necessities for his body, culture and education for his mind, freedom and human dignity for his spirit" (King, 1970). Wealth must be redistributed and the poor must wrest resources from the wealthy who are unlikely to
hand them over voluntarily. Even if equity were to be achieved, conflict would continue to surface as unique humans debate over the best ways to govern, distribute resources, and messily search for the balance of how much to restrict the actions of some for the flourishing of others. In short, the beloved community is not a softening of social justice aims, a pacification where there needs to be confrontation; rather, it is a social arrangement that will require much work and struggle.

Attention to the immaterial

Good relationship across social divides requires much more than material equity, and as we know from our personal relationships, are a constant negotiation of both material and immaterial needs. Good relationship requires certain levels of emotional, cultural, and spiritual quality and connection, and thus if the planning profession is to take seriously the notion of beloved community it must also address a community’s needs beyond the physical realm.

The planning and political worlds have often ignored the immaterial aspects of life, assuming that if resources are well distributed, the problems of inequity can be solved. For example, school integration, an effort focused primarily on the distribution of educational resources, did not adequately address the immaterial aspects of the relationships between white and black communities. Integration policies did little to address the pain of black students who had to spend their days in places where they felt unwanted, vulnerable to danger, inferior, or unable to share aspects of themselves that did not fit into white cultural norms. Similar “integration fatigue” has also been described at the neighborhood level (Briggs, 2005). Speaking about her experience of school desegregation as a girl in her essay *The Chitlin Circuit: on black community*, bell hooks writes:

What I remember most about that time is a deep sense of loss. It hurt to leave behind memories, schools that were "ours," places we loved and cherished, places that honored us. It was one of the first great tragedies of growing up. I mourned for that experience. I sat in classes in the integrated white high school where there was mostly contempt for us, a long tradition of hatred, and I wept. I wept throughout my high school years. I wept and longed for what we had lost and wondered why the grown black folks had acted as though they did not know we would be surrendering so much for so little, that we would be leaving behind a history (hooks, 1990).

She continues the essay, acknowledging the wrongs of forced segregation while also questioning the way in which many black people were convinced that "making it" meant gaining materially in a white world at the expense of their own culture. Furthermore, the minuscule progress this country has made in school desegregation suggests that attention to material redistribution alone is inadequate for sustainable change.

Thurman, too, emphasizes that integration is not merely a spatial phenomenon. He notes that integration goes beyond the mere presence of people from different backgrounds, and that in a truly
integrated community people “must be able to participate meaningfully in the various phases of their
living if their relationship is to be positive and creative.” He continues that “Meaningful experiences of
integration between people are more compelling than the fears, the inhibitions, the dogmas, or the
prejudices that divide.” Though the creation of “meaningful experiences” seems perhaps a small
intervention, Thurman suggests that “if such unifying experiences can be multiplied over an extended
time, they will be able to restructure the fabric of the social context” (H. Thurman, 1966).

Good relationship will require deep emotional and spiritual change from both parties, not merely
assimilation of one group into the culture of another. Paulo Freire discusses that people in the upper
rungs of social hierarchies are not free as long as others are struggling and that their freedom and full
humanity, too, depends on reaching a state of relationship and equality. He writes, “as the oppressed,
fighting to be human, take away the oppressors’ power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the
oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression” (Freire, 2000). While planners have
typically aimed interventions toward low-income or marginalized communities, planning for beloved
community will require attention to emotional and spiritual conditions in all rungs of society.

Increasing attention to the immaterial is in some sense a rejection of consumerism; a recognition
that material possessions are not a measure of one’s value. Jenson wrote about King’s repeated warnings
that “Enlarged material powers ...spell enlarged peril if there is no proportionate growth of the soul,” and
that “When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important
than people...the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered”
(Jensen, 2016). For those whose self-valuation rests heavily on their ability to accumulate wealth and to
navigate the education and career pathways that support wealth-generation, rejecting materialism and
developing grounding in relationship may be humbling and difficult. For others it validating. For instance,
King wrote that for the black man, “His religion revealed to him that God loves all his children and that the
important thing about a man is ‘not his specificity but his fundamentum,’ not the texture of his hair or the
color of his skin but the quality of his soul” (King, 2002). Ultimately, for all people, recognizing human
value outside of their material assets will be liberating.

Shifting focus toward immaterial, emotional, spiritual, and relational realms has been central to
liberation movements. Boggs, describing King’s vision of beloved community, wrote that he “began to
project a new kind of radical revolution that would begin the shift from a ‘thing-oriented society to a
person-oriented society’” (Boggs, 2004). She suggests that the focus on the immaterial aspects of
humanity, rather than only on material redistribution, are what marked the success of some civil rights
movements. For instance, she writes about the Montgomery Bus Boycott:

In those days most radicals, including myself, conceived of revolutionary struggle as an
insurrection, a seizure of power by the oppressed from their oppressors, by the victims from the
villains.
By contrast, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a year-long, nonviolent, disciplined, and ultimately successful boycott by an African-American community, struggling against their dehumanization, not as angry victims or rebels, but as new men and women, representative of a new more human society. Using methods that transformed them, they triggered the human identity and ecology movements that over the last 40 years have been creating a new civil society in the United States (Boggs, 2004).

The Mississippi Freedom Schools of 1964, too, took seriously the study of the power of the immaterial as central to the education necessary for teaching the tools of liberation. Unit Six of the Freedom School curriculum is entitled “Material Things and Soul Things” and asks students to question "whether the material things have given the ‘power structure’ satisfaction." It notes that “The possessions of men do not make them free. Negroes will not be freed by: a) Taking what the whites have. B) A movement directed at materialistic ends only." It also emphasizes the multiple forms of power including “Truth Power (Power to Convince and Persuade)” and “Soul Power (The Power to Love)” (Mississippi Freedom School Curriculum, 1964). The lessons ask students to envision new societies where both material and immaterial needs are fulfilled.

It is in this immaterial realm that people from drastically different walks of life can begin to find common ground and seek to move toward a new beloved community. hooks writes of the feeling of “yearning” as a shared space between people from many walks of life that “opens up the possibility of common ground where all these differences might meet and engage one another.” She notes that this type of longing is within all of us, from people who yearn for the “freedom to control [their] destiny” to those with great wealth who “wonder why so much feels so meaningless.” Jennifer Nash, who writes about the practice of love in her article Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality, alludes to a similar space of feeling where, like the space of yearning, a wildly diverse public can join to move toward new futures. She discusses scholarship, rooted in queer theory, that is invested in understanding “public feelings” and describes June Jordan’s call to turn toward affective attunement:

Jordan asserts, “I am entering my soul into a struggle that will most certainly transform the experience of all the peoples of the earth, as no other movement can, in fact, hope to claim: because the movement into self-love, self-respect, and self-determination is the movement now galvanizing the true, the unarguable majority of human beings everywhere” (270). Jordan’s claim—that she is participating in a struggle of like-minded subjects, an “unarguable majority”—reveals that the public sphere she wants to create is one rooted in a shared commitment to “self-love, self-respect, and self-determination.” What her “unarguable majority” shares is a commitment to a utopian vision, a commitment to “transform[ing] the experience of all the peoples of the earth.” Jordan’s political community is not based on the elisions of identity or a shared (imagined) sameness, but on a conception of the public rooted in affiliation and a shared
set of feelings. It is this affiliation—however tenuous, however momentary, however fragmentary—that allows Jordan to shift from a minoritarian politics to a conversation about an “unarguable majority” (Nash, 2013).

Nash emphasizes that Jordan is not ignoring the immense and painful social inequalities, “how they are allocated in ways that coincide with race, gender, class, and sexuality,” and their effects on the “material, social, and psychic lives of those subjected to brutality.” However, Nash writes that “jettisoning identity as the foundation of her public sphere, Jordan’s plea for love transcends the ‘logic of pain’ that Wendy Brown identifies as lying at the heart of many calls for identity politics (Brown 1995, 64).” Ultimately, Nash asks us to consider “how a radical ethic of care, rather than an assertion of shared injury...can form the basis of a public” (Nash, 2013).

Love

The immaterial, emotional, and spiritual realms of human experience are immensely textured and often indescribable, but one specific aspect of the immaterial that is important to elaborate on here is the concept of love, which is central to the idea of the beloved community. Jensen notes that “the mystery of loving membership in a community whose meaning seems divine is the specific condition of that particular ‘genuineness’ which constitutes the ‘graced or beloved community’” (Jensen, 2016). He describes the place of love in Royce’s conception of beloved community, writing that:

For Royce, the beloved community “does not consist simply in making a transition from an individual to a social level, but in the establishment of that special community which does not breed individualism because it embodies some higher and therefore super-human form of love powerful enough to transform the individual and at the same time do away with the fatal outcome of natural social cultivation which is based on nothing higher than human talents and potentials” (1950: 76). Royce understood in his own way that participating in a community united by love transforms the individual. This transfiguring relationship, this “mystery of loving membership in a community whose meaning seems divine” (1913: 140), is for Royce the “specific condition” of that particular authenticity that constitutes “the graced or beloved community” (Nagl 2012: 110; also 2004).

The love I focus on in this thesis is a public love, not the private love of our families, friendships, and romances.¹ Nash describes Jordan’s description of this public love: “If ‘communal affect’ constitutes

¹ Our conceptions of public love are indebted to many sources, such as religious tradition and queer studies; for this discussion I draw mainly from black feminist literature and African American liberation movements.
the ‘ties that bind utopian communities,’ then black feminism’s love-politics creates a public culture based on a collective ‘public feeling’ of love, or what Jordan calls ‘a steady-state deep caring and respect for every other human being, a love that can only derive from a secure and positive self-love’ (Jordan 2003, 272)” (Nash, 2013).

In practice, this public love requires active attunement to breaking down barriers, often biases, prejudices, or a general lack of caring that build up within us without us noticing, and manifest in our tendencies to overlook people with certain visible identifiers. Chipping away at these barriers may require seeking out and engaging with people who seem different or make us uncomfortable. Nash writes that “For some black feminists, love-politics has been amplified as a call to orient the self toward difference, even in the face of fear or anxiety.” She cites the contributions of Audre Lorde, who writes, “I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices’ (Lorde 1984, 113)” (Nash, 2013). Public love will require that all to turn to the places within us that fear others, training ourselves in a way that “names that fear, and actively labors to topple it.” Jordan, similarly writes that "If I am a Black feminist serious in undertaking self-love, it seems to me that I should gain and gain and gain in strength so that I may without fear be able and willing to love and respect, for example, women who are not feminists, not professionals, not as old or as young as I am, women who have neither job nor income, women who are not Black’ (Jordan 2003, 271).” Nash writes that, “for Jordan, the political act of ‘undertaking self-love’ is the process of embracing difference, of becoming more expansive in one’s conception of political community” (Nash, 2013).

This work to organize political communities “not around the elisions (and illusions) of sameness, but around the vibrancy and complexity of difference,” as Nash writes, will be serious, difficult, and active work that begins with looking deep into our own emotions and perceptions of others. Nash suggests that Walker, Lorde, and Jordan share “a fundamental conception that love is a labor of actively reorienting the self, pushing the self to be configured in new ways that might be challenging or difficult” (Nash, 2013). In our socially and spatially segregated worlds (along many dimensions, such as race, class, and political ideology), finding opportunities to practice this love will require intentional effort to move out of our natural comfort zones.

Thurman, King, and other civil rights leaders similarly called for the hard work of loving people who are difficult to love, often without receiving anything in return. King clarifies, though, that “In speaking of love at this point, we are not referring to some sentimental emotion. It would be nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense” (King, 2002). He continues to describe the various types of love in the Greek New Testament—eros, philia, and agape. Eros and philia are romantic and affectionate loves, respectively, and not the type of public love that is the focus of this discussion. Agape love, on the other hand, is the type of love that he challenges members of the public to offer to one another:
Agape means nothing sentimental or basically affectionate; it means understanding, redeeming good will for all men, an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. When we love on the agape level we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves them. Here we rise to the position of loving the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed he does (King, 1957).

King describes agape love as “understanding, redeeming goodwill for all,” an “overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative”. He notes that “agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people...It begins by loving others for their sakes” and “makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both...Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community” (King, 1958).

The agape love Thurman and King describe is grounded in the black church, with distinctly religious roots. Jensen, for instance, describes scholars who “insist that ‘the logic of King’s dream was theologically specific: beloved community as the realization of divine love in lived social relation (Marsh, 2005: 3)” (Jensen, 2016). However, the concept of public love can be found in secular humanist philosophies, secular ethics, and many areligious communities and thus is broadly applicable to a secular planning profession. Luc Boltanski, for instance, considers agape love from a secular framework in his book *Love and Justice as Competences* (though he acknowledges the religious roots of this concept). He notes that this type of love is “built entirely on the notion of gift” and that it is “unable to recognize value” in its objects. This love does not attempt to possess or change, and it is not attached to any ideology but to unique persons (Boltanski & Porter, 2012). He continues:

With agape, neighbours are detached from ‘any relation of family, friendship, or nationality’ (Spicq 1958, 1:186). But, compared to philia, the notion of agape reveals still other no less remarkable properties. In fact, in contrast with philia, based on the notion of reciprocity..., agape as a gift expects nothing in return, either in the material form of objects or in the immaterial form of requited love. The gift of agape has nothing to do with counter-gifts.

It is possible that there are circumstances in which love will come into conflict with other values. For example, frameworks that view justice as the highest value may require actions different than those required by frameworks in which love is given highest importance. Boltanski suggests that agape love is one regime of action, which humans can move in and out of, perhaps to and from other regimes of action such as justice. Others suggest that love is necessary for justice; without love, justice is reduced to litigious technicalities. King reconciles the two frameworks, suggesting that “power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love” (King, 1967).
Perhaps the most noticeable extensions of agape love in our country’s history have been the work of oppressed groups of people committing to join with their oppressors to build a new society. Vincent Harding describes one of these instances, when, in 1865 black people in South Carolina held a major convention in the Zion Presbyterian Church in Charleston to consider how black communities should envision forging a new country after slavery. They created an “Address to the White Inhabitants of the State of South Carolina,” and Harding writes:

So the black Carolinians again addressed their fellow citizens: Facing all the former masters and current employers, all their future oppressors and persecutors, all the fearful masses who raged against real or fancied insurrection, all the men and women whose hands too often bore the blood of black innocents – facing all of them, these black lovers of a new America, these citizens of a country yet unborn, spoke to the white people of South Carolina and of every other state in the Union: “We would address you – not as Rebels and enemies, but as friends and fellow countrymen, who desire to dwell among you in peace, and whose destinies are interwoven and linked with those of the whole American people, and hence must be fulfilled in this country.” Harding notes that this was a “fearful dialectic,” and that it was an immensely courageous act to commit to rebuilding society with one’s “legal owners,” “despoilers of their women, breakers of their men, exploiters of their labors, murderers of their children, or a host of guilty bystanders.” “What manner of men and women were these?” Harding asks of those who extended “the right hand of fellowship,” refusing to forget the past but “seeking to overcome it, to transform its meaning through the creation of a new future” (Harding, 1981).

This agape love has been practiced very little by dominant powers in our country. Despite the love that Harding describes, for example, white landowners and politicians refused to open themselves to this relationship, to receive and give this love, and to the deep changes that would have resulted both in their innermost beings and in societal structures at large. Time and time again, our country’s governments or businesses or media have offered small tokens to indicate acceptance of marginalized groups into the material economy but never the deep agape love that would require our society to radically rethink its institutions, definitions of normative behavior, social arrangements, labor markets, and conceptions of freedom and security in order to make the beloved community possible.

These failures in reciprocity easily evoke skepticism that love without violence is powerful enough to fuel social change. Nonetheless, the love that oppressed people have shown throughout history in the face of extreme danger is not a sign of weakness or lack of options but a deliberate practice evolved from experience, intellectual and philosophical debate, religious and spiritual faith, and cultural wisdom, and its power should not be underestimated.
BELOVED COMMUNITY IN PLANNING PRACTICE

What would it mean for planners to, as Nash describes, use a "radical ethic of care" to "form the basis of a public"? As she writes, "love-politics practitioners dream of a yet unwritten future; they imagine a world ordered by love, by a radical embrace of difference, by a set of subjects who work on/against themselves to work for each other." Is it possible for planners to become these types of practitioners, to move beyond our focus on material redistribution to a deeper realm of building beloved community?

I ultimately answer "yes" to this question, and suggest that in fact planners are quite well positioned to assume more responsibility in building beloved community. In this section, I first discuss some of the concerns of planning for beloved community, continue to an explanation of why planners should nonetheless take the vision of beloved community seriously, and end with ways in which I think this vision would tangibly change planning practice. It is these tangible differences between "beloved community planning" and traditional notions of planning that I will explore in my research.

Concerns

An immediate critique of beloved community as a vision for planners is that this vision is not realistic, not powerful enough to guide practitioners concerned with urgent real world challenges. This view likely assumes that love and beloved community are soft and rhetorical notions, not powerful enough to bring about massive political, economic, and social change. Love especially should be left to the spiritual, religious, and personal institutions, and are beyond the realm of practical and political professions like planning. Thurman describes the abstractness of the concept of beloved community, an abstractness that may be difficult for planners to translate into practical action:

The term (Beloved Community) itself is an abstraction and becomes concrete in a given time and place in the midst of living human beings. It cannot be brought into being by fiat or by order; it is an achievement of the human spirit as men seek to fulfill their high destiny as children of God. As a dream of the race, it has moved in and out on the horizon of human strivings like some fleeting ghost. And yet, it remains to haunt and inspire men in all ages and all conditions. In some sense, it is always vague, and the blueprint for it is often outmoded before it can be translated into living texture (H. Thurman, 1949).

Furthermore, beloved community as a vision for planning runs the risk of becoming a diluted and superficial vision concerned with community pleasantries rather than a vision that deals directly with the harsh realities of racism, sexism, or other forms of oppression. Jensen notes that though Thurman “wrote extensively about the search for community after 1966, and while he remained preoccupied throughout his life with what he later called ‘the tie that binds life at a level so deep that the final privacy of the individual would be reinforced rather than threatened’ (1971: xiii), Thurman rarely used the phrase
beloved community following the assassination of King” (Jensen, 2016). Though Jensen does not speculate about why Thurman stopped using the phrase, I mention this here to question whether Thurman himself expressed doubts of the phrase’s usefulness in bringing about significant change.

Indeed, without adequate knowledge of the history or critical theory that gives great depth and meaning to the idea of the beloved community, planners run the risk of overlooking the pain and sacrifice already offered by marginalized groups struggling to attain this vision and thus may not strive toward it with appropriate urgency or clarity. As planners, we should all commit to our own ongoing learning of histories of marginalized groups to avoid losing sight of the type of beloved community that does justice to the vision. Furthermore, planning for beloved community should not turn into a cover for demanding conformation of marginalized groups into mainstream behavior, but rather a challenge to planners and people in positions of relative power to step out of their comfort zones and commit to love without expectation.

There may also be some concern that planners, often professionals affiliated with government institutions, should not meddle in the work of public love. Indeed, turning beloved community into a state project would corrupt it and distract from the messy, radical, and informal spaces where people are struggling with committing to building beloved community in the margins. Nash, in her discussion of black feminist love-politics writes that this work will not primarily be the work of the state, and that “Rather than looking to the state for remedy—as intersectional projects often do in their sometimes ambivalent call for doctrinal remedy—black feminist love-politics asks how affective communities can themselves be a site of redress” (Nash, 2013).

The Role of Planners

These concerns are valid and important to keep at the forefront of our minds; nonetheless I do still see a role for planners who are willing to commit to the serious work of building beloved community. In fact, I think that this orientation toward love and relationship will improve planning practice and reveal opportunities for community action that are not often discussed in typical planning strategies.

The work of building beloved community is ultimately creative work of imagining new futures—new social relations, new institutions, new governance structures—that will nourish all people and relations. Nash cites Kelly as describing black feminist love-politics as “the labor of ‘talk[ing] openly of revolution and dream[ing] of a new society, sometimes creating cultural works that enable communities to envision what’s possible with collective action, personal self-transformation, and will’ (Kelley 2002, 7)” (Nash, 2013). Nash similarly describes Lorde’s view of love as orientating her toward “a future that is not yet here but is unfolding.” Nash writes that:

It is a project strategically disinvested in remedying the present (or the possibility that the present could be remedied), and wholeheartedly invested in the future as a locus of possibility. ...

Practicing educated hope is the enactment of a critique function. It is not about announcing the
way things ought to be, but, instead, imagining what things could be” (Muñoz and Duggan 2009, 278). It is the interest in “collective escape,” in the visionary dreaming about “going off script” that distinguishes black feminist love-politics’ utopian impulse from the presentism of identitarian politics like intersectionality.

Imagining these futures is certainly within the realm of planning, and the profession has much to offer in designing practical strategies for “what things could be.” What economic, political, social, transportation, or housing systems will ensure that all people have the resources, energy, and time to be able to be in relation with one another across difference? Perhaps this will require providing some groups of people with more resources to meet basic needs and in other groups preventing over-abundance from interfering with their ability to be in relation with people across difference.

Of course, in response to concerns described above, planners should not aim to institutionalize love or the beloved community, but their orientation toward this vision can ensure that they are doing everything in their power to support the work of other residents who are struggling to create these communities. Planners at all levels have some power to push at their structural and social levels of influence to make it easier for communities to actively pursue this public love.

In fact, I find it reasonable, in the face of many failed approaches for achieving and maintaining equity between groups of people, that the love that holds relationships together may be the only force powerful enough to maintain equity over time across race, class, and other divides. Nash cites Robin D. G. Kelley, who argues, “‘Freedom and love may be the most revolutionary ideas available to us, and yet as intellectuals, we have failed miserably to grapple with their political and analytical importance’ (Kelley 2002, 11–12)” (Nash, 2013). Though perhaps planners are more comfortable to relegate love to the personal or apolitical realms outside of their professional practice, bell hooks notes that, “all the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic” (hooks, 2000). Discussing the love-politics of some black feminists, Nash, too, emphasizes a call for more “affective politics to describe how bodies are organized around intensities, longings, desires, temporalities, repulsions, curiosities, fatigues, optimism, and how these affects produce political movements (or sometimes inertias)” (Nash, 2013).

The planning profession has attempted many approaches to building healthy, inclusive, and prosperous communities, and on many scales have had great success. Nonetheless, as wealth inequalities are increasing and climate change is more urgent than ever, it is clear that we need bolder strategies. Perhaps committing to radical visions of beloved community and active agape love is one approach that entire communities, across race, class, and other differences, have not yet pursued with the force necessary for generating the creativity and courage needed to move forward. In fact, civil rights movements have shown that these visions are indeed powerful enough to restructure society, but they have been short-lived and disrupted by social and political opposition or internal fragmentation. As Lorde writes “the future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new
definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference’ (Lorde 1984, 123)” (Nash, 2013). And as King told an audience at the 1967 Southern Christian Leadership Conference:

I say to you, I have also decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind’s problems. And I’m going to talk about it everywhere I go. I know it isn’t popular to talk about it in some circles today. And I’m not talking about emotional bosh when I talk about love; I’m talking about a strong, demanding love. For I have seen too much hate. I’ve seen too much hate on the faces of sheriffs in the South. I’ve seen hate on the faces of too many Klansmen and too many White Citizens Councilors in the South to want to hate, myself, because every time I see it, I know that it does something to their faces and their personalities, and I say to myself that hate is too great a burden to bear. I have decided to love. If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love (King, 1967).

Beloved Community in Planning Practice

What then, does planning for beloved community look like in practice? I suggest that it is planning oriented toward strengthening relationship across social divides, and planning that relies on deep engagement with residents to understand how to do this.

Orientation is important in planning; it poses an ultimate aim that guides our actions and decisions. The beloved community has been this aim for many people—“the principle of all principles” for Royce and “the keystone of Martin Luther King’s theological ethics.” King explicitly told this to a reporter, saying that “I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we seek in life. And I think that end or that objective is a truly brotherly society, the creation of the beloved community.” Thurman, too, used human relationship as his guiding principle and ultimate valuation of goodness, and Jensen writes that “he had ‘only one basic statement about God, and that was that God is opposed to whatever divides and separates’ (1956: 65)” (Jensen, 2016). In the next session I explain why I think this orientation matters, and the ways in which I hypothesize it will tangibly change planning practice.

To understand how to make progress toward beloved community, I propose that planners must be deeply attuned to local relationships between groups of people. Andrew Binet’s 2015 master’s thesis in MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning makes the case that planners should attend to care and offers much insight into theories and practices of care that provide nuance about relational aspects of planning for beloved community (Binet, 2015). He suggests that planners attending to care will need to rely on “thick description” and “weak theory” and draws on Katherine Gibson to describe these terms:

Gibson-Graham (2014) draw a distinction between ‘strong theory’ and ‘weak theory’. Strong theories are “powerful discourses that organize events into understandable and seemingly predictable trajectories.” Neoclassical economics is a paradigmatic example of strong theory;
mixed income redevelopment as a welfare strategy is also predicated on strong theory. Thick description, they argue, resists the gravitational pull of strong theory by nature, and instead lends itself to “weak theory.” Weak theory attends to nuance and complexity, apprehends plural determinants of change, and yields to emerging knowledge rather than seeking to confirm something that is already thought to be known. In contrast to the defensiveness of strong theory, weak theory is “reparative” (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

To guide planning action toward beloved community, planners will need to spend time with various groups of people across social divisions to get a feel for the interpersonal and structural barriers between them. From this immersion, they can develop the weak theory that will guide further planning action.

**RESEARCH: A BELOVED COMMUNITY VISION AT WORK**

**Question and Hypotheses**

My research explores the question of whether orienting planning toward a vision of beloved community goes beyond rhetoric to perform actual work. In other words, will a focus on building relationship across difference generate community strategies that are different to strategies currently pursued by planners?

I hypothesize that indeed, an explicit focus on the aim of building relationship across difference will change how planners strategize and will reorient them to new and bolder interventions. More specifically, I foresee four ways in which redirecting our focus toward the possibility of beloved community will change the work of planners.

First, I hypothesize that a focus on relationship across difference will change how planners see a community’s most valuable assets and its most pressing challenges. The most pressing challenges will be the distorted relationships between groups of people; the most valuable assets will be the presence of love in the community and the potential for building upon and expanding it. This is quite different from many current planning strategies, which emphasize communities’ economic vitality or safety, for instance, and often overlook the quality of residents’ relationships. I will discuss some of the gaps and oversights of current planning strategy in Chapter Two.

Second, I propose that planning for the beloved community will change intervention strategies, as it will illuminate new places where planning intervention is needed, perhaps in domains that typically escape the notice of planners. For example, when building public housing in a neighborhood, planners are adept at designing the housing, managing development, or integrating the development into larger-scale plans, but often overlook the tense relationships between the incoming residents of the public housing and the neighboring longer-term residents. Little concern is given to acknowledging and addressing the psychological and emotional needs of residents moving to a town where they know they are unwanted; little concern is given to ensuring that the long-term residents view the newcomers as full and valuable.
humans and not as indicators of increasing poverty and the economic vulnerability of their neighborhoods. Time and time again, we see planning projects fail because of fraught relationships between divided social groups, and a focus on relationship in planning can begin to address this.

Third, I hypothesize that a focus on strengthening human relationship across difference will challenge planners to become more vulnerable and open to relationship in their community engagement practices. In fact, while “community engagement” is to some extent viewed almost as a technical process, an box to be checked in any given project, I proposed that planners working toward beloved community must see themselves as a member of this community, too, working alongside residents not only in an intellectual or professional manner, but as a fellow neighbor who also is open to being emotionally and spiritually transformed. This may require more vulnerability on behalf of the planner, and it most certainly will require them to reject feelings of superiority toward other residents.

Planning for beloved community thus may add another dimension to the role of a planner. John Forester suggests that ideally planners should aim to be deliberative, to learn together with residents and collaboratively plan and act. He writes of planning as “deliberative action that shapes others’ understandings of their cities, their selves, and, crucially, their possibilities of action, for better or worse.” He suggests that good deliberative planners are skilled, or should develop skills, in astute listening, agenda framing, practical judgements, political criticality, visioning, spatial analyses, consensus building, mediation and negotiation, narrative shaping, and facilitating relationships between residents (Forester, 1999). I suggest that planners who focus on beloved community might need to go beyond viewing themselves as external to the community, present for the purpose of deliberation, and begin to see them themselves as potential nurturers of and participants in the beloved community, open to authentic relationship (that goes beyond intellectual deliberation) with those with whom they plan.

Finally, I hypothesize that reframing planning to focus on building the beloved community will change the notion of who can be planner all together. Building the beloved community will require skills that are not necessarily rewarded with college degrees and high salaries; thus, we may have to look in unusual places for people best suited for this work. A challenge in some regards, this will also open our eyes to the many people whose skills currently lie dormant but whose creativity and insights could contribute to local community development.

In this thesis, I suggest that many of our social failures are in part the result of not taking love seriously enough and committing intellect, action, resources, and passion to building beloved community at major scales. Convincing practitioners to take love seriously at a professional level will be no easy task, as it may deviate from current planning tools and approaches and challenge current power structures. It will likely be a project attempted at the local scale, and built up from the actions of many small communities.
Overview

I explore the questions and hypotheses put forth above in a small town called Bellevue, bordering Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Bellevue is considered an inner-ring suburb, and in Chapter Two, I describe the characteristics of this type of place as well as development strategies recommended for it in the planning literature.

To understand local perceptions and nuances not conveyed by the academic literature, I conducted exploratory interviews in Bellevue, and these interviews led me to my research question and hypotheses. In Chapter Three, I discuss several findings from these interviews that revealed the ways in which Bellevue could benefit from planning focused on beloved community.

To understand how planning focused on relationship across difference might differ from current planning approaches in Bellevue or in the literature, I held two focus groups of high school students in Bellevue. I viewed the students as planners and our conversations as planning strategy sessions, and focused the discussion explicitly on how we might build stronger relationships across social division in Bellevue. I describe my findings from these student focus groups in Chapter Four. These findings respond specifically to the four hypotheses described above that describe how I believe a focus on beloved community can tangibly change planning practice.
2. INNER-RING SUBURBS AS A SITE FOR BELOVED COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

I chose Bellevue, a town bordering Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as the site of my research. There I tested my hypothesis that an explicit focus on beloved community will have tangible impact on how planners plan. I chose Bellevue because it is my hometown, the place where I was born and raised until age 18, and a place I continue to have great affection for and investment in. I visit often to see family and friends who still live there, and to some extent, I will always view this place as home.

In some ways, there is nothing particularly noteworthy about Bellevue to the city planners who study the grand metropolises of New York City or Paris. It is a town of about 8,000 people that lies between the central city of Pittsburgh and the outer suburbs developed in the era of highway expansion in the 1960s. It has an area of one square mile, a small walking school district with no buses, and little political power beyond its borders.

In other ways, though, the town is fertile ground for exploring practical means of building toward beloved community at a grassroots level. As I will describe in the following sections, the town is, by many measures, considered “economically vulnerable” and in search of new revitalization strategies that look
different than those relied upon by the its neighboring city or outer suburbs. Once predominantly white, the town is now diversifying racially and ethnically, generating opportunities for creating beloved community that are not possible in homogenous neighborhoods.

In the following chapter, I describe Bellevue in its particularities and as well as its abstract characterizations in the planning literature. I will subsequently describe the policy recommendations prescribed in the literature for this type of town, ultimately suggesting that they by themselves are inadequate for nourishing economically stable and inclusive communities. With this background about Bellevue and gaps in current policy recommendations, the stage will be set for further exploration in Chapter Three of the ways in which explicit focus on relationship and the beloved community can fill current planning blind spots.

**INNER-RING SUBURBS**

Bellevue is a type of place called the “inner-ring suburbs” in the planning literature. The inner-ring suburbs are the oldest suburbs, often built in the early to mid-20th century before rapid suburban expansion, with pedestrian-friendly design, infrastructure, and main street convenience (Puentes & Orfield, 2002). Many of these inner-ring suburbs, including Bellevue, are incorporated municipalities; self-governing with their own local planning powers, and distinct from the neighboring city (Hanlon, 2009). Figure 1 shows the location of Bellevue in relation to Pittsburgh and the outer suburbs.

There are many types of inner-ring suburbs, and several researchers have proposed sets of characteristics to categorize and compare them. Bernadette Hanlon identifies five distinct types of first suburbs — vulnerable, ethnic, lower income mixed, old, and middle class — and finds that the features that most strongly determine these types are socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, employment, and housing characteristics (Hanlon, 2009). In a book published a year later, she slightly refines these categories, suggesting that inner-ring suburbs fall into four categories — elite, middle class, vulnerable, and ethnic (Hanlon, 2010). Myron Orfield and Brian Mikelbank have also created classifications, though of suburbs in general, not specifically inner-ring suburbs (Mikelbank, 2004; M. Orfield, 2002). Orfield for instance, proposes six types of suburbs: at-risk segregated, at-risk older, at-risk low-density, bedroom-developing, affluent job center, very affluent job center. Another study by Orfield categorizes first suburbs by their level of racial and ethnic diversity (M. Orfield & Luce, 2013).

Bellevue could be considered among the suburbs classified as economically vulnerable and diversifying. These suburbs, once economically thriving have seen some economic decline over the past few decades (though Bellevue’s case, this decline has stabilized and perhaps reversed, and has not been

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2 These places are also referred to as first suburbs and first-ring suburbs. There are some distinctions between these typologies in the literature, though I use the terms more-or-less interchangeably here.
as detrimental as in some of its neighboring inner-ring suburbs). And, once predominantly white, these suburbs are now becoming home to increasing numbers of residents of different races and ethnicities. The following paragraphs describe these two characteristics in more detail.

**Economic vulnerability**

My research interest is in low to middle-income inner-ring suburbs, many of which have not experienced the growth of neighboring cities and suburbs and some of which continue to decline economically. These include the suburbs that Hanlon classifies as middle class, vulnerable, and ethnic, or that Orfield classifies as at-risk segregated and at-risk older.

This economic vulnerability is due in part to tenuous population stability and economic growth that resulted from the highway expansion and suburban boom of the 1950s and 60s, which drew many

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**Figure 1: Bellevue (outlined in red), the city of Pittsburgh and other inner-ring suburbs (light grey), and outer suburban municipalities (dark grey).**

*Source: Basemap from the Congress of Neighboring Communities (CONNECT), Pittsburgh.*
people away from the center city and inner-ring suburbs. Sugie Lee and Nancey Green Leigh analyze population growth between 1970 and 2000 in the Atlanta, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Portland regions and find that their inner-ring suburbs have not experienced the population growth experienced by the outer suburbs and, more recently, center city neighborhoods (Lee & Leigh, 2007).

Inner-ring suburbs often have less wealth-generating office space than center cities and outer suburbs and their business districts were impacted negatively by boxed retail developed outside their borders (M. Orfield, 2002). In addition, as Orfield writes, inner-ring suburbs also “lack the central cities’ strong business district, vitality, resources, high-end housing, parks, cultural attractions, amenities, and public infrastructure.” He adds that, “as a result, these communities often become poor faster and lose local business activity even more rapidly than the cities they surround” (M. Orfield, 2002). Hanlon adds more support to this claim, citing Robert Lang and Joel Garreau and writing that, “the industrial, working-class suburbs that developed during the height of the Industrial Revolution have declined, while the office park and retail developments of the outer suburbs have boomed” (Garreau, 1992; Hanlon, 2010; Lang & LeFurgy, 2003).

The decline of many inner-ring suburbs is not a natural occurrence but to large extent the result of policies that have overlooked and worked against their needs. A 2002 Brookings report notes that, “in general, first suburbs are undermined by large federal and state policies that, on balance, facilitate sprawl and concentrate poverty” (Puentes & Orfield, 2002).

Ultimately, while housing and retail space are often more affordable in first suburbs than in the neighboring city and outer suburbs, this, combined with stagnant population growth, means that these places also have a lower tax base and struggle with generating municipal revenue. Orfield found that suburbs he classified as at-risk had relatively low tax capacity, ranging from 66 to 74 percent of regional averages (M. Orfield, 2002). Figure 2 shows the tax capacity of the central cities, inner-ring suburbs, and outer suburbs compared to regional averages.

Because of these financial constraints, these suburbs often end up requiring high tax contributions yet provide low level of services (including public education). Current fiscal policy places responsibility on local governments to raise the revenues for local services and keeps inner-ring suburbs in a precarious position. These suburbs tax at high rates yet do not provide the high services of other places, making it more difficult to attract homebuyers and new businesses that would improve their tax base (M. Orfield, 2002).

Bellevue faces many of the challenges described in the literature, including the need to charge high taxes to generate enough tax revenue to provide social services. Once a wealthier suburb with trolley

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3 Lee and Leigh write of the strong impact of transportation systems on inner-ring suburbs. They describe how streetcars and then private automobiles took people out of the city and to its bordering suburbs, causing the inner-ring suburbs to boom after World War II. The Interstate Highway Act of 1956 then spurred the development of outer suburbs, and the inner-ring suburbs were left struggling to maintain their population (Lee & Leigh, 2005).
cars to assist commutes to the city, the town experienced great economic decline when much of
Pittsburgh's industry left or automated in the 1980s. Bill Toland, in an article for the Pittsburgh Post
Gazette, documents some of the stories accompanying this decline, and writes that between the period of
1979 and 1987, the "Pittsburgh region lost 133,000 manufacturing jobs" and unemployment in the
Pittsburgh metropolitan region reached 17.1 percent. "Deindustrialization was happening across the
country, but in few places were the forces of globalization felt so acutely – and so abruptly – as in
Pittsburgh, 1982 and 1983" (Toland, 2012).

At the same time, Bellevue has maintained much economic and main street vitality compared to
other Pittsburgh neighborhoods, despite the loss of major local businesses. Residents note that it is one
of the few places bordering Pittsburgh where they can walk to necessary amenities like grocery stores,
convenience stores, schools, and medical offices. Housing in Bellevue was built before World War II, and is
a mix of larger Victorian-style homes built for the wealthy and adjoined homes built for the working class.
The average home value is about $115,000, though most homes have been converted to rental units and
owner-occupied housing consists of about 35% of the total housing stock (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In
general, many residents describe Bellevue with cautious optimism; a place with much potential but
potential that is in large part dependent on how much outsiders will risk investing in business or residency
there. Figure 3 shows census indicators that provide some sense of the economic condition of the town.

![Tax Capacity Diagram](image)

**Figure 2: Tax capacity of center cities, inner-ring suburbs, and outer suburbs**

*Source: Myron Orfield, American metropolitics: the new suburban reality.*
Increasing racial and ethnic diversity

In part because of their affordability and public services that are often of better quality than central city neighborhoods, many inner-ring suburbs are becoming increasingly racially diverse. A 2011 Brookings study found that “minorities represent 35 percent of suburban residents, similar to their share of overall U.S. population,” and “more than half of all minority groups in large metro areas, including blacks, now reside in the suburbs” (Frey, 2011).

These suburbs, once predominantly white and racially homogenous, are now becoming some of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country. Orfield describes the growth of these “melting pot suburbs” in a 2012 report:

Still perceived as prosperous white enclaves, suburban communities are now at the cutting edge of racial, ethnic, and even political change in America. Racially diverse suburbs are growing faster than their predominantly white counterparts. Diverse suburban neighborhoods now outnumber those in their central cities by more than two to one. 44 percent of suburban residents in the 50 largest U.S. metropolitan areas live in racially integrated communities, which are defined as places between 20 and 60 percent non-white (M. Orfield & Luce, 2013).
Furthermore, the number of immigrants and foreign-born residents is rapidly increasing in the suburbs. One report, studying immigrant populations in 53 metropolitan areas found that in 2013, 61 percent of immigrants lived in the suburbs. Furthermore, in the majority of these areas, the foreign-born population grew at a faster rate in the suburbs than in the central city (Wilson & Svajlenka, 2001).

Bellevue is no exception, and it, too, is diversifying. A predominantly white community at the time of housing construction, it now has a growing black population. It has also become home to immigrants from many countries such as Bhutan, Nepal, Bosnia, and South Sudan. In Bellevue, the racial composition is 86 percent white, 10 percent black, and 3 percent biracial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Bellevue’s public school district, Northgate, is more racially diverse than the town, with a racial composition of 70 percent white, 14 percent black, 11 percent multi-racial, 3 percent Asian, and 3 percent Hispanic (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2017). This discrepancy between the racial composition of the town and school most likely reflects both the preferences of white parents to send their children to private and charter schools, and also that there is a growing population of school aged black residents while the population of older residents remains predominantly white.

**Resistance to Increasing Diversity**

Despite the promise of increasing diversity in the inner-ring suburbs, not all long-time residents welcome it and hostility toward black and Latino residents especially is well documented in the literature. The negative narratives accompanying increasing racial diversity in inner-ring suburbs and similar places often associate individual non-white residents with the economic decline that the town faces due to broader economic changes. For instance, Hanlon offers the following description of Dundalk, Maryland, outside of Baltimore:

Disinvestment and an aging and outdated housing stock have made Dundalk extremely vulnerable to decline. In the past few decades, there has only been a slight increase in minority populations. However, navigating through this transformation has been a tremendous challenge for Dundalk’s white working-class residents. Despite the fact that the increase in minority populations is relatively small, conservative local politicians and others have fed the perception that Dundalk’s troubles are because of new racial and ethnic neighbors (Neidt, 2006). There is marked unease in Dundalk about the rising rental market and the influx, real or perceived, of Section 8 voucher holders—welfare recipients for whom rent is subsidized. The negative perception of public housing, renters, and Section 8 is layered with racial stereotypes. It is “those people from Baltimore City” that are seen as a major threat to the suburb’s stability. The Dundalk Renaissance Corporation—the suburb’s community development corporation—claims that Dundalk has the highest concentration of Section 8 rentals among Baltimore’s suburbs (Menzer, 2008). Whether Section 8 or not, rental housing has risen in recent decades.
At the same time, homeownership has declined and housing values have dropped. Much of the apprehension about changing demographics and housing tenure reflects a growing recognition among Dundalk residents of the suburb’s increasing vulnerability to further decline (Menzer, 2008). In many respects, it is easier to blame in-migrating minority populations than deal with what feels like an intractable decline in the local economy (Hanlon, 2009).

RESEGREGATION AND INCREASING ECONOMIC DECLINE

Unsurprisingly, these associations often motivate white residents to leave their neighborhoods for outer suburbs, perpetuating the cycle of population and economic decline faced by first suburbs. Though legal segregation measures were banned decades ago, neighborhood segregation remains at high levels. Furthermore, racial and socioeconomic school segregation across metropolitan areas is increasing; currently schools are as segregated as they were in the 1960s

4 (G. Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012; M. Orfield, 2002).

Of course, many white residents do not explicitly associate socioeconomic decline with black and Latino residents; nonetheless research shows that they still prefer to live in neighborhoods with a high level of white residents. Orfield writes that whites and non-whites indicate on surveys that they prefer to live in integrated neighborhoods; however, “an ideal integrated neighborhood for whites has a larger percentage of whites than the ideal neighborhoods of non-whites.” He continues that “at relatively low levels of diversity, even if whites and non-whites are leaving the neighborhood at proportional rates as a result of normal housing turnover, replacement rates are likely to be heavily skewed toward non-white entrants to the neighborhood.” Blacks, too, increasingly prefer to live in majority black neighborhoods, and Sheryll Cashin notes that many find in all-black neighborhoods respite from their lack of acceptance in other neighborhoods (even so-called integrated neighborhoods). In other words, race still matters and factors into assessments of neighborhood desirability (M. Orfield & Luce, 2013).

Furthermore, even in a society in which residents harbored no racial prejudices, Richard T. Ford argues in The Perpetuation of Racially Identified Spaces: An Economic/Structural Analysis that racial resegregation is still the likely outcome of neighborhoods where individual economic capacity is stratified by race. He suggests that because of the wealth disparities between white and black populations, colorblind whites would be more able and likely to move from mixed-race neighborhoods toward the

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4 In their study “E Pluribus... Separation: Deepening Double Segregation for More Students,” Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley find the following: “In spite of the dramatic suburbanization of nonwhite families, 80% of Latino students and 74% of black students attend majority nonwhite schools (50-100% minority), and 43% of Latinos and 38% of blacks attend intensely segregated schools (those with only 0-10% of whites students) across the nation. Fully 15% of black students, and 14% of Latino students, attend “apartheid schools” across the nation, where whites make up 0 to 1% of the enrollment.”
wealthier neighborhoods with better public services. This would result in resegregation and the reemergence of wealthier, mostly white neighborhoods with better public services, and poorer, mostly black and Latino neighborhoods, with worse public services (Ford, 1994).

This trend toward resegregation, whether racially motivated or not, has been and continues to be so common in our country that varying aspects of it have been named: "white flight" describes the movement of white residents from increasingly diverse towns, and the "tipping point" is the proportion of white and non-white residents at which this happens. Some researchers claim that there is a specific racial distribution at which this happens, though others refute this.

Whether or not there is a measurable point at which resegregation happens, the reality is that for decades, white residents in many towns have refused to live for long periods of time with large numbers of black neighbors. Orfield analyzes diverse neighborhoods between 1980 and 2010 to understand patterns of racial transition and finds that only 40 percent of integrated neighborhoods in 1980 remained integrated in 2010, and that 20 to 30 percent of integrated neighborhoods resegregated every decade. He also found that neighborhoods with a non-white population of 23 percent were more likely to become predominantly non-white over the next 25 years than to remain integrated. Furthermore, he found that once neighborhoods become predominantly non-white, they are not likely to reintegrate; in fact 93 percent of neighborhoods that were predominately non-white in 1980 remained that way in 2010 (M. Orfield & Luce, 2013).

Unsurprisingly, schools have similar resegregation patterns, and, in fact, they resegregate at a faster pace than neighborhoods because of the choices of some residents to send their children to private schools. Orfield describes an analysis of demographic data in elementary schools in the 25 largest US regions that indicates that "once the minority share in a community's schools increases to a threshold level (10 to 20 percent), racial transition accelerates until minority percentages reach very high levels (greater than 80 percent)." He adds that "change occurs fastest at levels of 20 to 50 percent and proceeds inexorably until schools are highly segregated" (M. Orfield, 2002)

When communities transition from white to predominantly minority communities, these towns often decline economically. As Orfield notes, "this is not because middle-class blacks and Latinos inherently destabilize a community. Rather, it is because the ranks of middle-class blacks and Latinos in most metropolitan areas are currently too small to maintain a robust middle-class housing market if middle-class whites are not also interested in that market" (M. Orfield, 2002). In addition, the commercial sector's discriminatory avoidance of investment in black and Latino neighborhoods contributes to this decline (Cashin, 2000). The town thus struggles to maintain a healthy tax base and continues to decline economically.

Bellevue, too, is not immune to residents' negative perceptions of non-white residents, which I will describe in more detail in Chapter Three. Racialized narratives are especially prevalent in perceptions of the school, and currently the school serves a population that consists of 30 percent minority students, which is beyond the "threshold level" that Orfield describes above. This suggests the urgent importance of
dealing directly with these negative perceptions in order to resist the resegregation that has occurred in other neighborhoods.

**POTENTIAL OF FIRST SUBURBS**

The threshold at which schools and towns have been found to tip toward rapid resegregation is not inevitable, though many planners act on the assumption that it is. Planning toward beloved community rejects the notion that race is an inevitable barrier to human community, and actively fights to break down barriers between races and nourish the bonds that would allow residents to resist resegregation regardless of the population’s racial composition.

In fact, several scholars see the potential of diverse first suburbs for demonstrating possibilities for addressing racial and class inequities in ways that are more difficult to achieve in the face of the anonymity and increasing unaffordability of the neighboring cities and the lack of racial diversity in the neighboring suburbs. In fact, Orfield notes that “in the new multi-racial America, diverse suburbs now represent the best hope for realizing the dream of equal opportunity.” He continues:

> These integrated communities and neighborhoods offer the best chances to eliminate the racial disparities in economic opportunity that have persisted for decades. They offer the most equal access to good schools and a clear path to living-wage employment for all their residents. They are the places where whites and non-whites have the best relations and the most positive perceptions of one another. They offer the best chances for people of color to participate and succeed in the educational and economic mainstream (M. Orfield & Luce, 2013).

Orfield emphasizes that a long history of discrimination has shaped residential preferences for residents of all races. He writes that “whites and non-whites may feel uncomfortable living with each other because our segregated society has given us little experience of doing so.” Given that inner-ring suburbs offer the opportunity for this experience, Orfield asks us to consider how we use this environment to explore new ways of neighborhood development that might not yet be possible elsewhere.

Xavier de Souza Briggs describes a similar vision in *The Geography of Opportunity: Race and Housing Choice in Metropolitan America*, noting that in inner-ring suburbs, “demographic trends and voting patterns do not fit the stereotype through which political leaders play on the fears of a white, conservative suburban majority.” He continues:

> First suburbs, as we have seen, are increasingly diverse in both race and class terms. Suburbs thus offer greater potential for novel issue framing – changing the way people think about important issues rather than talking about different issues entirely
to tap emergent interests, new coalitions among groups, and policy innovations than the ingrained image of the city-suburban divide suggests.

While this conversation has focused mainly on race divisions, it is possible that inner-ring suburbs have potential to also bridge divides between class and political ideologies, adding more dimensions to the opportunity for this "novel issue framing." In the 2016 Presidential elections, for instance, Clinton won in Bellevue (2,363 votes), but the number of Trump voters was not insignificant (1,331 votes), suggesting the presence of a political diversity that may be useful for exploring new ways of understanding important issues (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 2016). Furthermore, Bellevue sits between the largely Democrat population of the central city and the Republican population of the outer suburbs. Due to Bellevue's small size and interconnectedness, there may be more opportunity there than other places for non-polarized conversation and reframing of politics in a way that moves toward solidarity across race and class.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES OF THE INNER-RING SUBURBS

An increasing amount of research aims to shed light on potential strategies and policies that could address the unique challenges of inner-ring suburbs, though as one Brookings report notes, these suburbs rest in a policy blind spot overshadowed by the central city and outer suburbs. Unlike some areas of the central city, they "are not poor enough to qualify for many federal and state reinvestment programs and not large enough to receive federal and state funds directly." And unlike outer suburbs, "they are ill suited to federal and state programs that focus on building new infrastructure and housing rather than maintaining, preserving and renovating what is already built" (Puentes & Orfield, 2002).

Considering these challenges, many of the scholars referred to in the preceding paragraphs have offered policy recommendations specifically for inner-ring suburbs. Orfield, for instance, makes a case for greater regional cooperation so that first suburbs are recognized and considered in proposed city or suburban changes and are not pitted against the interests of their neighboring localities. Other recommendations include advocating for state and federal direct investment into inner-ring suburbs or regional tax-base sharing programs (Lee & Leigh, 2005; M. Orfield, 2002; Puentes & Orfield, 2002).

While all of these strategies may be a piece of the puzzle for addressing inner-ring suburb challenges, I suggest (and many of the discussed authors indicate) that alone they are inadequate for attaining the visions that Orfield and Briggs describe, and to build economically stable, inclusive communities. As I reviewed the literature on inner-ring suburbs, I noticed the following shortcomings of recommended policies:

I. Some, though they are a-racial in intent, ultimately may have exclusionary and racialized impacts.
II. Others aim to increase opportunities for people of color, but do not prevent white flight and
III. Some rely on advocacy, but need a plan for how to build this base across race and class.
IV. None address the immaterial, emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing of residents.
V. They are mostly economic deficit models; none of them explicitly build upon the assets of inner-ring suburbs.

This list of five critiques is not drawn directly from the literature and may not be comprehensive. However, each critique individually is supported by literature about inner-ring suburbs or planning more generally, and I describe them in the following paragraphs.

May have exclusionary and racialized impacts

Underlying many of the economic development strategies of the inner-ring suburbs is the aim to increase property values and raise local tax revenue as a remedy for financial constraints. Sometimes this is through explicit focus on conversion of rental units to single-family homes, or marketing to attract higher-income families. Another approach recommended in the first suburbs literature is to advocate for fair housing policies so that neighboring suburbs will take more of the “burden” of low-income housing, ensuring that fewer low-income people relocate to the first suburbs (Hanlon, 2010; M. Orfield, 2002).

Though the aims of these projects are understandable given the financial constraints of inner-ring suburbs, they can also make it more difficult for low-income people to live in the neighborhood. Because income is stratified by race, these policies may ultimately have a disproportionately large effect on people of color (National Research Council, 2001; Iceland & Wilkes, 2006). Thus, even if first suburbs are not intentionally exclusionary, to adopt economic development strategies intended to raise property values and local revenue without attending to race ends up reinforcing racist structures.

This problem is not one of the inner-ring suburbs alone; rather, it is a universal flaw in U.S. housing markets and policy and it is unfair to suggest that inner-ring suburbs carry the burden of solving the problems of affordability and structurally embedded classism and racism. Nonetheless, it is important that inner-ring suburbs remain conscious of these challenges as they pursue local economic development. Furthermore, as I will describe later, because of unique characteristics of the first suburbs, these places may be well-positioned to experiment with new community development approaches that resist some of the negative effects of broader market forces.

Do not prevent white flight and resegregation

The inner-ring suburbs literature also emphasizes the need for increasing housing opportunities for people of color, in part through enforcement of anti-discrimination measures that ensure that black and Latino families have an equal chance of living in a certain place as other residents (Briggs, 2005; M. Orfield, 2002). Though discrimination is illegal, research has shown that more subtle discrimination still occurs, such as when real estate agents steer potential black and Latino homebuyers toward certain
neighborhoods where their presence will evoke the least controversy (M. Orfield, 2002).

While anti-discrimination measures should of course be enforced, Briggs emphasizes that many of the strategies recommended to improve the housing choices of lower-income populations are not enough to prevent resegregation in economically vulnerable and diversifying neighborhoods. He writes that "wider and better protected choices, while worthy in and of themselves, will not make the society less segregated if consumers make mostly segregative choices about where to live." In other words, anti-discrimination laws should be enforced out of principal, but we should not assume that they contribute substantially to desegregation (Briggs, 2005).

To summarize, even policies explicitly intended to support minority residents in first suburbs do little to address the dangers of white flight and the long-term resegregation and economic decline. Thus, in many instances, black and Latino residents who moved to these suburbs in search of better opportunities find themselves in the same type of neighborhood they left (M. Orfield & Luce, 2013).

Do not offer nuanced strategies for coalition building

Coalition building within and across first suburbs will be necessary for advocating for policies that shift financing burdens from local governments (and residents) to state governments. For instance, literature recommends that first suburbs together, and with neighboring cities, advocate for fairer financing of schools and other public services, or for living wage policies (Hanlon, 2010; M. Orfield, 2002; Puentes & Orfield, 2002). Such measures would contribute to resisting the educational and social inequities that arise from a system that links service provision to local tax revenue. Furthermore, these policies have the potential to ensure that communities of color have the resources to provide services on par with wealthier and predominantly white communities, even in the event of resegregation due to white flight.

However, these advocacy coalitions will not form effortlessly. In fact, as Briggs describes, cities and inner-ring suburbs are often far from cooperative and frequently compete over resources (Briggs, 2005). Furthermore, there is no guarantee that coalitions will form across race and class. In fact, what is more likely is that coalitions will form between town leaders, reflecting their interests and potentially reinforcing town development strategies that may be unintentionally exclusionary as described above. Many inner-ring suburbs have little infrastructure to develop the civic engagement across race and class needed to ensure that broader coalitions address the variety of interests held within these diversifying places.

Do not address emotional, spiritual, and social needs of residents

In general, inner-ring suburbs strategies ignore the fact that humans are complex emotional, spiritual, and social beings, and that those dimensions of personhood play enormous roles in our experiences of neighborhoods. On the one hand, even anti-discrimination policies do little to address how minorities of first suburbs feel on the main street, on their blocks, or in local businesses. People of color
may face few barriers in their material and physical ability to live in majority-white neighborhoods, but if they feel unwanted or misunderstood, they face immaterial barriers to thriving in that community. Consider again hooks' description of school integration described in Chapter One, in which she writes about attending the newly integrated white high school “where there was mostly contempt for us, a long tradition of hatred.”

In addition to overlooking the immaterial needs of minority residents in diversifying inner-ring suburbs, the proposed policies do little to directly challenge racist perceptions, which erect dangerous and rigid barriers between entire groups of people and close off ways of knowing the world for people on all sides of the barriers. For example, if white residents do not engage in the spiritual work necessary for confronting the dominating aspects of white culture, we can expect little transformative change that goes beyond attempts to assimilate minority groups into the mainstream.

Briggs suggests that diversifying suburbs actively focus on a number of strategies to proactively support and encourage diversity and inclusion. He cites promising efforts of towns that use “affirmative, prodiversity marketing as well as community development (upgrading) strategies to attract a diversity of new residents.” He also notes that “it will take broad support and a host of tailored political messages – some about economic competitiveness and fiscal sanity, others about social justice and the practice of moral community – to make progress on these old divides.” He provides suggestions, shown in Figure 4, of ways in which various community institutions can contribute, and these proposals could certainly be a start to addressing the immaterial needs of diversifying communities (Briggs, 2005).

Ultimately, without emotional, spiritual, and social transformations among residents across race and class, the effects of local policies, legal mandates, and economic development efforts will be unsustainable. If planners do not directly address the immaterial aspects of community life in inner-ring suburbs, they miss an opportunity to reimagine new social orders and ways of being in community with others.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>STAKEHOLDERS</strong></th>
<th><strong>INTERESTS</strong></th>
<th><strong>PRIORITIES</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Recruiting and developing a more racially and ethnically diverse workforce; recruiting and retaining employees in high-cost markets; projecting a socially responsible public image; maintaining positive relations with city hall and other levels of government</td>
<td>Clear business purpose; public image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>Recruiting and developing a more racially and ethnically diverse workforce; delivering “bread-and-butter” benefits to members (strong wages and benefits, good schools, affordable housing and healthcare); choosing socially responsible investments for union pension funds, such as affordable housing and community economic development</td>
<td>Increased membership; tangible benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public school officials</td>
<td>Improving outcomes for disadvantaged students; reducing achievement gaps by race and income; heading off costly litigation; addressing increased racial diversity in enrollments (many suburban communities)</td>
<td>Achievement gaps; cost savings</td>
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<td>and advocates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Creating access to jobs through flexible (multimodal) mobility strategies; reducing costs of new infrastructure; creating positive spillovers and more sustainable development; such as through transit-oriented housing and shopping hubs</td>
<td>Demonstrable public benefit; cost reduction</td>
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<td>transportation agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faith institutions</td>
<td>Practicing religious community through collective action and ministry activities; developing faith-based nonprofits (where appropriate); promoting morality in public and private life, by message and example; choosing socially responsible investments, such as affordable housing and community economic development</td>
<td>For faith-based nonprofit service providers, operational capacity and social impact; for others, increase in membership, community morals, consistency with core ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Market-rate housing</td>
<td>Tapping new markets; innovating to reduce costs, apply new technology, and serve a more diverse customer base; streamlining the development process</td>
<td>Meet market needs; reduce development costs and delays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affordable housing</td>
<td>Creating more product to house more families; creating positive spillover effects through housing and economic development projects; building resilient communities of choice, beyond “bricks and mortar” output</td>
<td>Funds to expand scale; operating capacity to manage complex projects, for example in transit-oriented development or other new areas; reduced development costs and delays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developers</td>
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*Figure 4: Interests and Priorities of Stakeholders in Affordable and Inclusionary Housing*

*Source: Reproduced from Xavier de Souza Briggs, The Geography of Opportunity: Race and Housing Choice in Metropolitan America*
Do not acknowledge and build upon local assets

Finally, many of the proposed first suburbs development strategies assume an economic deficit framework; in other words, they work on the assumption that first suburbs are failing because of their economic vulnerability. These economic struggles are real and should be addressed, but first suburbs also have many unique and positive qualities that policies could acknowledge and incorporate into development strategies.

The Orfield and Briggs quotes noted previously describe some of these positive attributes. For instance, many first suburbs are small and neighborly, and often residents have more opportunities to interact across race and class. In fact, many first suburbs have similar characteristics to communities that have remained stably integrated. Camille Charles calls for more research on these types of communities, and cites research by Ingrid Gould Ellen and Philip Nyden that have analyzed some stably integrated communities. She writes that:

Both studies find that stably integrated communities tend to be economically diverse, including middle-class, college-educated homeowners with professional occupations, as well as low-income families in entry-level, service-sector jobs. This economic diversity tends to reflect the presence of varied housing opportunities, including rental housing constituting at least 25% of housing units. Integrated communities also tend to have attractive physical characteristics (e.g., good location, architecturally interesting homes, and a secure set of neighborhood amenities), places where cross-racial interaction takes place as part of day-to-day life (e.g., grocery stores, schools, parks, or neighborhood festivals), and strong community-based organizations and social institutions committed to maintaining diversity – either directly or indirectly by addressing communitywide, nonracial service issues (largely schools and safety, but also neighborhood preservation) and/or promoting cross-group dialogue (Ellen 2000, Nyden et al. 1998).

Although it will take commitment and imagination, perhaps planners could develop impactful strategies that build upon these assets. In fact, I imagine that many such strategies are being developed and implemented at the local level, through formal and informal community groups and civic events. Where a planner could play a role is in proposing coordinated plans across many groups that illuminate and strategically incorporate the asset-based strategies that residents are currently building.

If planners ignore these assets and do not work to preserve them, they run the risk of implementing development strategies that exacerbate social divides rather than reduce them. For instance, economic development can lead to displacement and further racialized stratification of the rich and poor; resistance to businesses that cater to lower-income residents in the business district may disrupt some of the heterogeneity of jobs and retail that attract many types of people to the main street.
CONCLUSION

As this chapter describes, inner-ring suburbs sit in a vulnerable position and often have more difficulty rebounding from the economic decline of post-industrialization and suburbanization than many outer suburb or central city neighborhoods. This economic vulnerability exacerbates tensions around increasing racial and ethnic diversity, and these tensions obstruct opportunity for building solidarity across race and class that could build a base of residents powerful enough to begin advocating for better economic and social policy.

Nonetheless, inner-ring suburbs have many conditions that may facilitate building beloved community, and many are sites in which planners could begin testing small-scale models of planning with inclusivity and love in mind. Bellevue is one of these places, which I will continue to describe in the following chapter.

Many of the policies recommended to inner-ring suburbs are important but inadequate for building beloved community and maintaining economic stability and racial diversity. Without more attention to the relationships that bind people across difference, they offer planners little guidance for how to prevent white flight and resegregation, or how to attend to the immaterial needs of residents that matter greatly in their experiences of place and home. Furthermore, these policies do little to bring attention to and preserve the existing conditions that facilitate relationship-building in these places, leaving these neighborhoods at risk to development that works to further distance residents across difference, rather than bring them together. This is not to say that many of these policies are not helpful; indeed many may be necessary to build and sustain thriving inner-ring suburbs. Inner-ring suburbs face real financial and economic struggles that planners must address and it is not my intent to diminish the importance of strategies that researchers and practitioners have proposed to resist economic decline or resegregation.

What I aim to convey in this thesis is that relationship-building across race and class does not need to be left to luck, and that planners can step out of their zones of economic development to create spaces, institutions, and systems that facilitate the strengthening of these relationships. In Chapter Four, I describe findings from focus groups with high school students in which we begin to think more concretely about what these planning interventions might look like. These planning strategies will be much-needed complements to the economic development strategies proposed in the literature.
3. THE POTENTIAL FOR RELATIONAL WORK IN BELLEVUE, PA

INTRODUCTION

Love is a concept so prevalent in everyday discourse that it is easy to forget that the capacity to do it is not necessarily natural but developed with practice and attention. It is especially easy to overlook the development of our capacities for public love (which is not necessarily sentimental or affectionate) as our gaze remains on the love of those who are dear to us. The concept of love is both ubiquitous and obscure – on the one hand, love has become rhetorically trite; on the other hand, it is so absent from community-wide interaction across social divides that it is difficult for us to imagine that other types of social arrangement are possible.

This dual nature of the concept of love obscured it from my view for much of my research process. I dismissed the idea of radical public love as a research topic as simultaneously too simple and obvious, and too abstract and impractical to be a focus of planning research.

I began my research focused not on the practical work of building beloved community, but on the connections between schools and the surrounding neighborhood. I wanted to know how the school could
provide more real-life learning opportunities for students by taking advantage of local government, businesses, and the wealth of knowledge held by other residents, and I wanted to know how students could play a role in community revitalization strategies. I conducted interviews with Bellevue leaders and residents, asking them, among other things, about their perceptions of the neighborhood and school.

As I began to hear about Bellevue from many perspectives, overarching narratives emerged regarding beloved characteristics of Bellevue as well as local challenges. I began to see that current planning interventions, such as those discussed in Chapter Two, are alone not adequate for maintaining many of the aspects of Bellevue that residents like and or for addressing its challenges. It seemed that a new vision and approach to planning could help to fill some of the gaps.

In this chapter, I describe findings from my interviews that ultimately led to the formation of the hypotheses discussed in Chapter One. To reiterate, my overarching hypothesis is that explicitly focusing on the aim of building relationship across difference will change how planners strategize and will reorient them to interventions not considered in the literature or common planning discourse. Specifically, I hypothesize that planning for beloved community will reframe how planners view a community’s most valuable assets and its most pressing challenges; illuminate new opportunities for planning intervention; challenge planners to become more vulnerable and open to relationship in their community engagement practices; and change the notion of who can be planner all together.

I developed these hypotheses in response to four major findings that emerged in my interviews. These findings all suggested to me that a relationship-based model of planning may be useful in a place like Bellevue. These findings are:

I. Interviewees expressed a need for reframing success in Bellevue.
II. The social divisions and hierarchies that exist are not being directly and explicitly resisted at a community level.
III. Interviewees shared many different approaches to interacting across social divide, with varying degrees of attention to relationship building.
IV. Youth (and probably other residents) have latent potential to contribute to community-wide efforts to build relationships across difference.

In the following sections, I describe my methodology and the interview content from which I draw my findings.
METHODOLOGY

Interviewees

My original intent was to focus my research on two inner ring suburbs, Bellevue and the neighboring town of McKees Rocks. In the end, I decided to focus primarily on Bellevue in this thesis, but I include findings from interviews in McKees Rocks here because they were critical in helping me to arrive at my current research topic and formulate the hypotheses that drive my research.

I conducted interviews with 26 people across Bellevue and McKees Rocks to better understand the perceptions of these places held by residents, town leaders, and employees of local organizations. 16 interviews were in Bellevue and 10 were in McKees Rocks. These interviews were meant to be exploratory, not comprehensive; an attempt to get a general feeling of the narratives winding through local discourse.

In Bellevue, I found many interviewees through personal connections or recommendations. Some interviewees I reached out to with no reference, such as people from local organizations, businesses, and churches. In terms of profession, I interviewed the mayor, a few teachers, a pastor, a draftsman, several business owners, a council member and head of a local community group, a librarian, someone who
works at a local bank, a psychiatrist, a construction worker, a marketing consultant, and a nursing student. They range in age from their twenties to sixties. The majority of my interviewees in Bellevue are white, two are Bhutanese, and two are black.

In McKees Rocks, I contacted all of the interviewees with no references. I spoke with several people who work at local non-profits, a union leader, a couple of people who go to local churches, a council member, and a local business owner. Seven are white and three are black, and range in age from their mid-twenties to fifties or sixties.

The interviewees expressed a wide variety of viewpoints; nonetheless, there are many gaps in my sample. For example, I do not believe I heard from many, if any, very low-income residents, and I only spoke to a small number of non-white residents. In large part, this reflects the fact that local leadership, in government, community organizations, and non-profits, is predominately white and living on comfortable incomes. I spent some time door knocking at the largest public housing development in McKees Rocks and dropping in on smaller minority-owned local businesses in an attempt to find a more diverse group of interviewees, but with limited success.

Interviews

As noted, I began my research with the intent to understand local perceptions of the school and visions for local education, not to examine relationship and capacity for building beloved community. Thus, my interview questions reflect this original research topic. My loose, semi-structured interviews inquired about interviewees' relationships with the town and school, their perceptions of both and how they have changed over time, ways in which the school currently interact, and aspirations for local education. I spent anywhere from one to two hours with interviewees, delving into their perceptions of Bellevue and McKees Rocks.

As I began to learn more about each place from a variety of perspectives, my research topic began to shift, as I described in the introduction. Had I known my research topic before doing these interviews, I may have asked different questions; nonetheless, the interviews still provided valuable information that allowed me to better understand some of the trends identified in the literature about inner-ring suburbs and that eventually led me to this exploration of why the concept of beloved community should matter to planners.

Analysis

In part, I used my interview data to understand the ways in which Bellevue and McKees Rocks resemble the inner-ring suburbs described in the literature, and to gain a more nuanced picture articulated by residents to complement the broad strokes painted by academia.

I also used the interviews to help me understand how planning could build upon current relationship-building work in these towns as well as address their challenges. When reviewing interviews, I
looked for descriptions of current or potential approaches to local relationship-building, of divides between groups of people, and of descriptions of the ways in which provision of care was disrupted.

I also gathered much wonderful information that I have omitted from this discussion. For instance, interviewees shared great ideas for place-based education and interesting local histories. Though I hope to come back to this information at some point, I leave it out here because it is not immediately relevant to my thesis.

FINDINGS

As I conducted my interviews and attended local events and meetings in Bellevue and McKees Rocks, the following findings emerged:

I. Interviewees expressed a need for reframing success in Bellevue.
II. The social divisions and hierarchies that exist are not being directly and explicitly resisted at a community level.
III. Interviewees shared many different approaches to interacting across social divide, with varying degrees of attention to relationship-building.
IV. Youth (and probably other residents) have latent potential to contribute to community-wide efforts to build relationships across difference.

I discuss these findings in detail in the following sections.

Finding I: Interviewees expressed a need for reframing success in Bellevue.

Interviewees overwhelmingly expressed fondness for and connection to Bellevue and McKees Rocks, and thus expressed frustration that overblown negative perceptions discourage people from moving into and investing in these places. The negative perceptions that they described as hurting their towns mostly revolved around school, local economy, and safety; and many of these perceptions seemed discordant with what residents actually experience in reality. Furthermore, residents seemed to value the relationships in their neighborhood and opportunities to provide care, but note that sometimes these opportunities are disrupted in favor of other institutional goals.

These findings ultimately led me to believe that perhaps the residents and institutions of Bellevue are in some ways very successful in fostering neighborliness and love. However, these relational successes seem to be undervalued, leading to missed opportunities for highlighting these assets. Instead, Bellevue’s value is often assessed by considering only economic vitality or school standardized test scores, which do not do justice to all the town has to offer. Furthermore, overlooking care and relationship as valuable local
assets allows for political and institutional decisions that further disrupt these assets in pursuit of other economic or educational aims.

**Origins of Negative Perceptions**

Residents of Bellevue and McKees Rocks noted that both of their school districts are often viewed negatively, in large part because of low student scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment. In Bellevue, residents also described a loss of trust in the school resulting from the previous superintendent’s decision to cut a large number of teachers as a money saving effort. Class sizes increased, students had less time with teachers, and parents felt that communication about the changes was inadequate and opaque.

As for the local economy, residents noted the downturn of the local business districts, which were once bustling with clothing stores and restaurants and now have trouble attracting and retaining new vendors, especially in McKees Rocks. Many of the businesses that they do retain are firms that cater to a lower-income clientele, such as dollar stores or alternative lending firms that provide needed services but do so in a way that funnels money away from the town and into distant corporate offices.

Interviewees also noted a decline or stagnation of property values over the past few decades, resulting in constrained ability to generate local tax revenue. In Bellevue, residents noted that many of the large single-family homes had been converted to rental units. In McKees Rocks, some interviewees perceived economic decline in parallel to an increase in public housing developments or Section 8 rental units.

Interviewees attributed the economic decline of the towns to several broader regional changes. Several interviewees noted that the towns were hurt when major industries in Pittsburgh closed or became more automated in the 1980s. Interviewees also noted that suburbanization and highway expansion also impacted their neighborhoods. Residents who could afford to do so left Bellevue and McKees Rocks to chase the suburban dream, while large box stores in these suburbs created a tough market for small locally owned businesses.

In terms of safety, some residents noted perceptions of increased discomfort on the streets over the past few years, citing instances of being catcalled while walking to the bus or muggings of elderly walkers. Residents also noted the dark toll the opioid epidemic has taken on their communities over the past few years, claiming too many lives and crushing families and friends.5

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5 In McKees Rocks, 81 people have died from overdoses between 2008 and 2016, making it the zip code with the fourth highest number of overdoses in the county (out of 110 total zip codes). In Bellevue, 56 people have died within that time period, making it the zip code with the fourteenth highest number of overdoses in the county.
DISCONNECT FROM REALITY

Many interviewees, while noting much truth in these perceptions, suggested that they are overblown and unbalanced have negative impacts on Bellevue and McKees Rocks. Perceptions of the school districts – Northgate in Bellevue and Sto-Rox in McKees Rocks – have especially strong impacts on the neighborhoods. For example, many interviewees said that they knew of people who moved away once it was time to send their children to school, a decision that was based on what they had heard about the school rather than much direct experience with it. Other interviewees knew of people who would have been interested in moving to Bellevue had it not been for poor reputation of the school district.

Perceptions of the school might also affect job prospects for students – one interviewee said that a graduation certificate from Sto-Rox is not nearly as attractive to employers as one from North Allegheny (a wealthier district with better rankings).

A woman in McKees Rocks said that, contrary to the dominant narratives, she thinks Sto-Rox is “an awesome school district,” which provided her children with the education that helped them to become successful adults. She speaks with many people who are planning to send their children to charter schools and, while she recognizes that some do have valid reasons for doing so, she strongly encourages them to “do their homework first” and not to merely rely on the stories they hear.

Another woman who lives and works in Bellevue said she meets so many parents with young children who tell her that they are moving away because of the school, and that she always tries to push back on this negative perception. She said:

It’s one of the saddest things to see because I think a lot of people have the perception that you’d be better off, even if it’s a little bit of a struggle financially, in the long run. I’ve always tried to be the biggest cheerleader, especially for the elementary school. I always said, I felt like it was a magical...especially a magical kindergarten experience. If I dreamed up a teacher, I couldn’t have dreamed of a better kindergarten teacher than the one my daughter had.

In Bellevue, one interviewee reflected on the transformation of her personal perception of the school district. Her daughter had been attending a private Catholic school but wanted to transfer to Northgate. The interviewee described being hesitant about sending her daughter there for high school, but did anyway, and her daughter quickly challenged her assumptions of the school. She said:

It was probably in her third week of high school that she said to me, “this school gets a bad rap and it’s really unfair.” She said, “you know, I’ve been in the Catholic school for the last couple years and I have to tell you, I think the teachers here are more talented, work harder. The kids that are in my classes work hard and are interested in learning, and I think this place is not what you thought it was and what a lot of other people thought it was.” So, that was good to hear... but also it woke me up to the fact that...perception and reality aren’t always the same thing.
An interviewee in McKees Rocks expressed frustration about the negative comments current or previous residents post on social media, saying that Facebook is brutal in its ability to spread the town’s bad reputation. She added that the negative perceptions internalized by residents factor strongly in people’s decisions to move out of the neighborhood. She asked, “If everyone who succeeds leaves, what does that do to us?"

In Bellevue, an interviewee said that he has heard people talk about an increase in crime, but said that he has not noticed it himself. Another interviewee noted that because Bellevue is so small, news of crime travels quickly, drawing overblown attention to it even though Bellevue does not have a particularly high crime rate. Similarly, in McKees Rocks, an interviewee who recently started working in the area noted that before becoming familiar with the neighborhood, he had heard stories about violence and drugs. As he has become more familiar with the area, though, he has not seen violence himself and has realized that media attention to crime in McKees Rocks has skewed public perception.

In general, the negative perceptions of the neighborhood are not harmless narratives that stay in people’s heads; on the contrary, they have tangible impacts on the neighborhood and residents. To some extent, they exacerbate current residents’ negative perceptions and hinder their interest in caring for their own hometowns. In addition, these perceptions discourage people with disposable income from voluntarily moving to the neighborhood, an unwelcome phenomenon in economically vulnerable towns that are eager for a higher tax base and more local revenue.

**VALUING RELATIONSHIP**

I noticed that many interviewees expressed the importance of care, social connection, and good relationship in their lives. Some interviewees spoke fondly of the presence of these qualities in Bellevue and McKees Rocks currently; others spoke about the lack of these qualities and yearned for past times when they felt a stronger sense of community.

In Bellevue, it was clear that many people across race and ethnicity find a sense of community, in large part because of its small size, walkability, and friendly and welcoming residents. The mayor described Bellevue as a place with a “hometown feel” where “everyone knows each other.” A Bhutanese interviewee who immigrated to Bellevue from Nepal described the care he received from locals as he settled into a new place. He said that

[Bellevue] is a really friendly community. It has good people around who are really helpful. What I noticed was that [people] were really welcoming to everybody, through the church or by [themselves] as a person. There were other people who always wanted to find immigrants and ask if you need anything, if you need help they were ready to help you, which is a great thing. And also, the good thing for the newcomers is that everything is in walking distance. It is a really nice neighborhood where it is convenient and you can find everything around. People when they
come here might not have good means of transportation... The bus service there is really good. ... It is a very nice neighborhood, and the people there are very good, very welcoming.

An African American pastor in Bellevue noted that there “aren’t too many communities like Bellevue” and that it is a small town and everyone gets along. He added that race relations are pretty good in Bellevue, especially compared to other places. A woman from Bhutan told me that when she arrived in Bellevue everything was different, but they found that religion was one thing that was similar and through a local church they began to meet a lot of people. Another new resident that she was sold on Bellevue when she met her friendly landlords, who live next door and always welcome visits from her young children.

Several interviewees noted that they moved to Bellevue primarily because of its affordability and racial diversity. Several interviewees with children who are not white wanted to find a place where their children could get a decent education and not feel out of place in classrooms of mostly white children. They moved to Bellevue because they thought it was a place where their children would find accepting peers and a close community. One woman described this when I asked her how she ended up in the neighborhood:

I moved here because I was going to start a family, adopt my children. I was adopting internationally and I was living in one of the white-bred, no personality suburbs north of Pittsburgh where people joined for cocktail parties and compared educational pedigrees and you needed to get into your car to get a quart of milk. I didn’t want my children to be raised in that atmosphere, I wanted them to have racial and ethnic and religious and socioeconomic diversity and so I was looking for a neighborhood that provided that and let them walk to school. ... Once I saw [Bellevue], I knew this was the place for us.

Since my initial interviews were about the school and education, I asked people what they think need to learn in schools and many interviewees talked about the importance of learning how to treat people. A pastor said that he is not sure how much students learn this at school, perhaps in psychology classes that are not mandatory for students. He said one of his church’s central focuses is to learn how to love. Interviewees also mentioned that students should learn how to be members of the community, how to serve, and how it feels to help other people. One interviewee said that the school should be “a secular family” in which students learn how to treat and care for each other.

FRUSTRATION WITH DISRUPTION OF CARE

In both Bellevue and McKees Rocks, residents expressed frustration when opportunities to provide care and to build stronger relationships were disrupted or undervalued, often in the name of productivity or financial savviness. Most of the examples I heard were about the local schools, since my
interviews focused largely on this context. For instances, one resident who teaches in the Northgate School District described the fact that many teachers ”work their tails off” to provide care for every student they meet. For instance, she often stays after school so that her students can return for games and extra support. However, the previous superintendent took away this time, replacing care with mandatory ”busywork” that was “not student oriented.” Residents also noted that economies that require both parents to work and do not provide day care support put a lot of strain on teachers who then have to provide some of the care students do not receive at home.

Several residents in Bellevue noted their discouragement when the school did not seriously respond to instances of bullying. One interviewee noted that she and her sister was bullied when they first moved to Bellevue from Nepal, but that the teachers viewed it as “just a little thing.” The interviewee said that in part bullying occurs because some young children do not have enough knowledge to treat people well or because they feel insecure themselves. She suggested that when her sister was bullied, what the school should have done was gather the students and parents and more deeply address the underlying problems that cause a student to hurt another.

One interviewee said that to some extent, the Sto-Rox school structure supports care, but that in other ways a disciplinary mentality obstructs room for love. She said, “The school does have really amazing teachers. They show they care. Not all of them, though. The school should model positive behavior, how to treat people. If I see you (teacher) always losing your cool with people who don’t conform, what does that teach students? I get that it’s hard but I work with kids and I do it. As a parent, I want you to love on my kids like I love on them. You can get love from structure. Do we gotta act like they’re less than because they’re not doing what you want?”

Finding II. The social divisions and hierarchies that exist are not directly and explicitly resisted at a community level.

Overall, diverse groups of people seem to feel welcome in Bellevue and McKees Rocks, but hierarchies of who is most valued and welcome in the towns do exist. These hierarchies are apparent when people associate negative changes in the neighborhood with residents who have particular visible characteristics (e.g. skin color, type of clothing, income level, family structure). Examples of such associations are that black people or poor people are making the schools worse; mentally ill people or people who dress and act a certain way are making the main streets less attractive; people who rent or use Section 8 vouchers do not care about the neighborhood; people on welfare are lazy and taking advantage of the system.

Although many interviewees are aware of and resistant to these social divides, I noticed little concerted action at the community level focused on bridging these divides and dismantling social hierarchies. This finding had perhaps the most impact on my desire to explore planning that directly addresses relationship across divide. So often, planners and other leaders seem resigned to accepting social divides as an insurmountable and pervasive problem. Why, though, in an age where bold
innovation is extolled in every field of planning, do we pessimistically assume planners can have no impact on the relational aspects of community life? Small, tight-knit communities like Bellevue offer planners the opportunity to devise strategies for bridging these divides and prove that dismantling social hierarchies is possible and worth working toward.

**TYPES OF SOCIAL DIVIDES**

I noticed many types of hierarchies in Bellevue and McKees Rocks. Several interviewees commented on the existence of racial hierarchies, noting that often people do not realize when they are perpetuating these hierarchies. In Bellevue, one woman, discussing how people often blame the negative aspects of the school district on certain people in the neighborhood, said, “well, it’s all code for black, isn’t it? Let’s be honest, it’s all code for black.” She said that once she asked someone why Northgate has a bad reputation, and “never heard so many euphemisms for ‘we have black kids’ in my whole life.” She said that these euphemisms take the form of, “people don’t like our ‘culture’” or “well the make-up of our... they hold a mirror up to our students and...”

Similarly, an interviewee in McKees Rocks, commenting on people’s complaints about neighborhood changes, said, “when people talk like this what they’re really talking about is the color of people’s skin, but they don’t realize this.” Another interviewee said that he has heard people talk about the “darkness” moving into Bellevue from the North Side neighborhood of the city, sometimes citing this as a reason they do not want to send their kids to the public school.

Another interviewee said that he does not notice too much of a racial division, citing local events where people mingle well across race. Recently the community held a discussion on race and there was a very good representation of white and black attendees. “It was so nice to see... we need everybody at this table.” He said that he does notice a class divide, though, and that this usually has racialized effects. He said, “I’ve seen more of a money divide myself. Now obviously, obviously, we have to be honest, who has the money? That divide is gonna split you by races.”

The type of housing one lives in also seems to matter in the social hierarchy. As is the case in many places, homeowners seemed to be higher on the hierarchy than renters, and, especially in McKees Rocks, there existed a pervasive narrative that public housing residents and residents who use Section 8 vouchers are less valuable or even detrimental to the community. One interviewee who used to live in public housing noted that the “public housing narrative” is “just the ‘us and them’ crap” and that her housing situation did not prevent her from being a great mother, getting a good job, and giving back to the community.

Another social hierarchy had to do with knowledge; some people were viewed as “smarter” or higher on the knowledge hierarchy than others. For example, several interviewees in Bellevue said that the school’s technical education program (run by the A.W. Beattie Career Center, an off-site partner school) was sometimes stigmatized, with its students viewed as less smart or academically rigorous than other students. One interviewee challenged this perception, pointing out that Beattie students have to have a
lot of technical smarts. Another interviewee emphasized that we have to get rid of the "Beattie vs academic track" mentality.

In McKees Rocks, a woman claimed that it is difficult to break out of viewing oneself as lower in the knowledge hierarchy; to be confident in what she knows when conditioned to believe she knows less. She said that she remembers having to advocate hard for her son to get into the gifted program at the school. “But it’s hard because you’re up against ‘professionals’ who ‘know.’ It’s intimidating. We have to teach parents that they know what’s best for their kids.”

As the saying goes, “knowledge is power;” thus attempts to reduce the value of one’s knowledge is an attempt to reduce their power. One interviewee told me that she thinks education is important because it helps people resist being marginalized, to stand up for themselves and not be taken advantage of. Her perspective was informed in part by a village she knew of in Nepal where very few people had education. People from the city told them that there was something wrong with their land, and the villagers sold it to the them not knowing that they were being lied to. A differential in knowledge, or in how different types of knowledge are valued, further exacerbates social hierarchies.

Interviewees referred often to the knowledge hierarchies created by school testing measures. One interviewee, said that one way the school could take diversity more seriously is to develop better testing approaches. She felt that some of the students, who in fact are very bright, do not have the chance to be challenged and are not achieving at the level that they could, in part because the knowledge they bring is not well measured. She said, for instance, that the Advanced Placement classes are a “little microcosm in itself” and would be more racially diverse with better testing.

Many people also described some division between different age groups— younger people do not respect older people and vice versa. One interviewee in Bellevue said that

there are some members of the...area who see the kids in the secondary school to be a problem, hoodlums, things like that. This is somewhat racially motivated, but it’s also driven by the fact that their only view of those kids is playing with their skateboards or walking the streets... If they saw them doing good things, then—and there is nothing wrong with skateboarding or walking the streets—but if they saw them doing something super positive then they would feel better about them.

One interviewee similarly commented that older people assume younger people walking the streets are up to no good, and questioned this perception. He said, “They’re probably just having fun. I remember being that age and just walking around, that’s what we did, just walk around. ... If everyone just had a more positive attitude it wouldn’t be a problem. Then you’d like to see them walking around.” He pointed out that walkability is often seen as a good town characteristic, and that having people on the streets makes the town feel more alive.
Another interviewee in McKees Rocks also described a rift between younger, often black, people and older, often white, police, and the complexity of misunderstanding between these groups of people. He described an incident recently when he saw local youth running around in the middle of the street and shaking street signs, and a police officer got out of his car and told them to leave. The officer left and the youth went back to what they were doing. He continued, grappling with his mixed feelings about the incident and the cycles of mistrust that perpetuate these divides:

Now, I had mixed feelings about that event. On the one hand, you should have respect for that officer. He asked you to leave, you’re doing something unruly. However, I had to think, why don’t they respect that officer? How much has been ingrained in them about white police officers...and they were all black students, male and female. Nothing got violent, nothing got nasty, but it was an interesting thing to see. ... Because on my end, the police will keep looking at “us,” like oh “them,” they still don’t listen, “they,” and we perpetuate that. And I’m such an advocate of that in my work, making the youth rise above stereotypes... You think, “oh they think I’m gonna be a fool” so I’m gonna be a fool outside. And that’s a horrible mindset but it’s conditioned. It’s a two-pronged battle. It’s about mitigating the way the police look at us but also the way we portray ourselves and the way we look at ourselves. We don’t value our lives so how can we expect the world to when we don’t?”

I noticed other social hierarchies in addition to these: single parent families were associated with moral decline; residents with mental illnesses were sometimes not wanted in cafes; some new business owners were not recognized or welcomed by long-term business owners or politicians; poor people were seen as messy or not as moral as longer-term financially stable residents. One interviewee noted a hierarchy around gender, ascribing the election of Donald Trump in part to the fact that, “A lot of men don’t want a woman over them – we haven’t reached that level in the US yet. We haven’t come to terms with that, but it has to change.”

Implied in many of these narratives is a perception that some people are viewed as less deserving of public services, good homes, and space on the main street. If asked, ‘Whose Bellevue or McKees Rocks is this?’ I imagine many people would likely answer with a description of the people who are in politics or involved in civic groups-- mostly white, often homeowners, with stable incomes and traditional family structures. Indeed, for much of the past century that was the predominant population in these places. Now that this is changing, can we expand our images of whose places these are?

I should add one more component to these hierarchies, and this is a non-human actor – property. Property, and how to increase its worth, is often the topic of personal and political conversations in neighborhoods that have faced a decrease or slow increase in local property values relative to neighboring municipalities. Often very subtly, property rises above other humans in the hierarchy of communal importance. For instance, when people resist nearby public housing for fear that it will reduce
the desirability and profitability of the house they have invested in, this is an implicit admission that property is more important than the basic wellbeing of other humans. Perhaps this is a more nuanced sentiment than I am describing; nonetheless the history of city planning and neighborhood development illuminates the fact that often people fight for their property at the expense of providing basic needs (such as housing) to other people. I did not notice specific allusions to this hierarchy in Bellevue, but I mention it here since this mentality is so pervasive in our society and I imagine the Bellevue community is not entirely immune to its impacts.

LOCUS OF THE PROBLEM

I found that much social division surfaces in Bellevue and McKees Rocks because of people’s tendencies to link town problems with the assumed behavioral characteristics of groups of people rather than with larger scale political or economic decisions. I also observed that the idea of morality in Bellevue and McKees Rocks was often associated with certain sexual behavior, language, acts of respect, or ways of dressing, and that people who did not behave in the desired way were deemed less moral and problematic. People reflected less on the morality of a society that allows for poverty, homelessness, or the various ‘-isms’ and types of oppression, for instance. Susan E. Wright describes these different frames of explaining community problems, writing that individual explanations of poverty locate causes in individual flaws such as inability, low intelligence, low ambition, or immorality, while structural explanations locate causes in “the economically polarized occupational structure that is maintained by uneven changes in technology, cyclical unemployment, a dual economy, uneven geographic spread of industrialization producing pockets of poverty, and concentrated ownership of property” (Wright, 1993).

In acknowledging the agency of humans, one certainly can and must think of morality at both individual and structural levels, and will have some opinion about what this morality looks like. However, giving more weight to individual, often sexual, morality often results in placing blame on individuals who do not meet certain standards while ignoring the larger scale decisions that have put these individuals into a precarious and continuous state of marginality.

COMPLEXITIES OF SOCIAL DIVISIONS

Of course, these narratives around social divisions are complicated. How much certain prejudices influence any one person is variable, and I do not introduce them to claim that they are the prime drivers of most people’s opinions about Bellevue or McKees Rocks. For example, local leaders struggling with lack of local revenue may aspire to attract more single family homeowners and fewer renters not because of racism or classism but because they want more resources with which they can improve local services and schools, or be more creatively proactive in neighborhood planning.

One black resident of McKees Rocks described some of these complexities. For example, while she described the racism often underlying stereotyping of public housing residents, she also noted that “I do get the tax base issue, though. If that’s what the issue is, though, say it.” Later in the conversation she was describing the lack of African American teachers, administrative staff, or school board members in the
Sto-Rox district; in other words, that the school staff and board do not look like the community. She added that "I get that it’s complicated-- maybe they're really hiring their best applicants, maybe they don't have the right pool of applicants." However, she ended with a “but you know...” indicating dissatisfaction with the “best applicants” excuse. Though racial or other prejudices may not drive institutional decisions, the outcomes are often racialized if leaders are not critically attuned to and working to overcome social division.

Furthermore, many interviewees described differences between residents not out of prejudice but out of an empathetic recognition of others’ life experiences. The teachers I spoke with, for instance, described their students with compassion, acknowledging some of the struggles that their students face because of absent parents or transience, but not blaming the students and families themselves for these struggles. In other words, they recognized difference as a way to better understand people, rather than seeing these struggles as a fault of the people themselves.

Though perceptions of our communities may not be primarily driven by prejudiced tendencies, these social hierarchies are so deeply ingrained in mainstream US culture that we often do not recognize the ways in which they do inform our perceptions and actions. Our country was created only because settlers were able to see Native Americans, Africans, and poor whites as less deserving and less human than elite Europeans, and less valuable than land or plantation wealth. Because we have never lived in a world without these narratives at play, it is vital that we articulate them and have a constant eye on how they inform our own decisions.

Finding III. Interviewees shared many different approaches to interacting across social divide, with varying degrees of attention to relationship building.

When interviewees mentioned social divisions in the community, I often asked what could be done to bridge these divides. It seemed that residents were doing much work in both Bellevue and McKees Rocks to reach across social hierarchies, and people had many additional ideas for what was possible.

As I gathered examples of and suggestions for bridging work, I noticed that some examples more than others emphasized the importance of developing opportunities for “meaningful experiences” between different social groups. Along these lines, some people seemed to view interactions across social divides as an equitable negotiation in which both parties are expected to be vulnerable and open to change, while others implied that more marginalized populations should conform to dominant community visions.

How important is the relationship?

When sharing ideas for bridging social divides in Bellevue and McKees Rocks, some interviewees focused on the material or political outcome of a proposed intervention – obtaining material support for
marginalized groups or expanding opportunities for their involvement in local politics or planning activities, for example.

Other people emphasized the relationship-building aspect of interventions, implying the need for spaces in which people can generate deeper understanding across difference. Commenting on the gap between the old and the young, one interviewee commented that “they need to encounter each other in a way that isn’t scary.” He described one simple intervention that he had heard of from a conference speaker years ago, in which residents addressed school problems through developing more opportunities for meaningful experiences between the old and the young rather than with typical disciplinary measures:

He was working with a school system that was having terrible troubles. What he ended up doing was going out to the community and talking to people. And when school let out every day they arranged for all the people to come out of their houses and stand on the sidewalk. That’s all they had to do, just come out of their house and stand. And kids would come down the sidewalks and within a very short time, the crazy stuff that had been happening after school—the vandalism, fights—stopped. Partly just because people were out there watching, you know? And then it got to be that the kids would start to know the older people and the older people would start to know the kids. And they would have treats for them when they got out of school, and the kids would say “hi Grandma.” It really changed things around, and eventually the whole culture of the school changed.

Another interviewee who runs a non-profit arts organization in McKees Rocks said that he and the Sto-Rox video department applied for a small grant to do a project with local high school students in which they would make commercials for local business owners for screening at the local movie theater. He said he thought it was a “slam dunk grant” because of the interaction students would have with local business owners. “Now these students, they would have to go introduce themselves, they’ll have to talk to these business owners, they’ll get to know the business owners.” However, again echoing sentiments about the lack of recognition of this type of relationship-building work, he noted that the grant application for this project was rejected with no explanation of why.

Most likely, both the outcome and relationship-building process of interventions that aim to bridge social divides are important. However, perhaps it is also true that in practice planners and funders undervalue the relationship aspect compared to more tangible outcomes.

WHO CARRIES THE BURDEN OF CHANGE?

Interviewees had varying opinions about who, in a relationship between dominant and marginalized groups, should change or carry the burden of action. For instance, some people shared suggestions for bridging divides that indicated expectations that marginalized groups should change their behavior or prove themselves to their rest of the community by showing their dedication to predefined
social norms. For example, one interviewee aims to begin a youth group for male teenagers through which he hopes to teach them certain manners and ways of dressing. Other interviewees suggested that youth or immigrants, for example, participate more in trash pick-ups and beautification initiatives, in part to visibly demonstrate to the rest of the community that they care about the neighborhood.

Other interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with expecting marginalized groups to conform to preset norms or community visions, even implying that requiring conformity often works in opposition to civic engagement. For example, one interviewee described his frustration with institutions like schools that are supposed to generate civic engagement but instead end up teaching conformity. He said that “students need more time to move around, therapeutic time, time to vent about the day. I wish school could be more flexible so students won’t feel drained.” He added that “teachers tell students to think outside the box, but why is there a box period? Let’s just let kids run with it if they have something they’re interested in. We don’t give youth the freedom to think ... and then they’re just going to be unengaged students.”

One interviewee suggested that this desire for marginalized groups to conform is not always born from deeply held ideologies about appropriate behavior, but often is the result of systems that value productivity over individual growth and creativity. He noted that social institutions have a tendency to be disciplinary – requiring participants to conform to certain social norms that they may not feel comfortable conforming to – and economically focused – pushing people toward economic productivity and ‘market readiness’ at the expense of relationships or self-growth. For instance, talking about schools he noted that “schools are so pressured to abide by mandates-- we’ll get shut down if we don’t reach certain test scores. But what about the arts you produce, what about the ideas you can bring to the community?” Later he added that “on paper, [it’s about] scores scores, crank crank, productivity. Can our school be the most accredited? Can we pull in more money, more foundation support, with our scores? Can we brag? Can we pull in the top students? Can we eliminate other students? Can we deny students because we have these scores at this school?” Instead of this attitude, he asked, “what if we could have discussions with youth about what they love?”

Rather than community leaders insisting that marginalized groups conform to existing community visions, what if leaders embraced different values, behaviors, or ideas in order to learn more about others and expand local vision and culture? Several interviewees suggested that community engagement processes ensure that marginalized groups are able to complicate and expand a fluid community vision. For example, when I asked one woman what she thinks youth could do in McKees Rocks to support the town, she said she would not propose her own ideas. Instead, she described the following process:

I would identify youth leaders through the school... I would start with them and have them envision what they want to know. What about _my_ town? I would have a forum where they would work through this. What is it that I need to know in order for me to help feed the hungry people in this town? And have them talk amongst themselves, have them figure it out. They have some
great ideas. And then also maybe some social issues about how do we address inclusion, how do we address the fact that there’s different colors of kids in our schools, and different abilities, and talk about that. Cause they need to be able to work with all kinds of people... and they need to have strategies for how to work together... so if they collaborate on problem solving about what they want to know here; it’s a start.

Collaboratively creating community visions across social divides will require groups in power trust the intellectual capacity of marginalized groups. One woman who used to be a teacher reflected on how important it is to be conscious of the power one has and focus on using it positively, to contribute to the growth of less powerful groups, in her case, students. Rather than disciplining a child to meet certain behavioral norms, she described a philosophy of encouraging a child to reach excellence. She noted that “it’s disrespectful when we don’t give kids the opportunity to learn about life,” and talked at length about the need to know about the child’s life without being judgmental about things going on in their family, to intentionally develop a “consciousness that each child is unique.” She also discussed the responsibility that comes with having power, saying:

I learned about the power that I had, and it made me uncomfortable. ...I had to be responsible and understand how to use that in working with them. ...I learned that there is always more they can do if you show them they can do it. ...So a lot about teaching is confidence building... Let them discover... create an environment where they can step into learning. So I used to teach reading, but I didn’t really teach reading, I provided experiences for them to learn about sounds and letters and they eventually step into it and assemble in their minds. I didn’t make them do it, I helped them exercise their brains.

A resident of Bellevue noted that it will take intentional effort by various leaders to reorient institutional practices so that people in power see the full and creative potential of marginalized residents, rather than viewing them as detriments to the neighborhood. She recommended that institutions, like the school, take the time to develop broad visions that assume the best of marginalized residents and form the basis of new institutional cultures. Speaking of the local school, she said:

Instead of coming down to the lowest common denominator, they need to set the bar high. And I think it goes back to leadership, and culture, and “this is who we are,” and “this is what we’re gonna be,” and instilling that in these kids, versus, “oh look what we have to work with.” It’s a belief system. It starts from the top down. It’s a belief system that needs to change up there and ultimately get into the students’ belief systems. If the teachers are telling me that – “look how many free lunches we give, look who’s coming to our school” – if they’re thinking that, then that’s how they’re treating those kids. Instead of, “wow, they have so much potential” and “this is who
this school is going to be.” So I think there needs to be a whole revamp of belief systems and culture up there and it needs to start at the top. From the new superintendent, who I’m excited about, to the principals, to the school board....What I would do is start with a retreat with those people and maybe include the Borough and come up with a clear set of values that they’re gonna adhere to, and if they don’t they’re gone. This is what we are, this is who we are, and embodying those values.

Too often people associated with marginalized groups are seen as less intelligent, less capable, people who must be educated, and whose deficits must be corrected. Building beloved community will require the acknowledgement that marginalized groups have valuable knowledge that other groups are lacking. One interviewee noted that “it is important to have a teacher who is inspired by a child.” Her comment challenges us to ask ourselves, how can we seek to be inspired by people we do not normally learn from?

Although many interviewees noted the need to respect people across differences, this did not mean that marginalized groups should be held to low standards; in fact, many suggested that it is disrespectful to not hold people to high standards. The difference between holding people to high standards and encouraging conformity is that the former focuses on the individual and the unique way in which they will grow, and the latter focuses on convincing a person to behave in a way that fits into an abstract ideology. One interviewee, speaking from his own experience as a young black man who grew up in another lower-income neighborhood bordering Pittsburgh, explained that “it’s not fair to let youth believe that just graduating is OK. The message we send when we give free things is that you get free things because you’re poor. We have to demand more from the youth. When you push for excellence they will know that excellence is attainable.”

Of course, the debate between conformity and individual expression is one that has existed since the beginning of society, and the balance most likely lies in the middle. Long-term residents spend much time and energy improving their neighborhood, and their visions should be respected, but they should also be open to complicating and expanding those visions through the contributions of newcomers or people who have not previously been visibly engaged in mainstream civic life. While in reality, the burden of behavior change will fall on both marginalized and mainstream groups; the problem now is that too often this burden falls only on marginalized groups with little acknowledgement that mainstream society is often acting in invisibly oppressive ways.

WHO SHOULD REACH OUT?

Ensuring that connection happens across social divide means that someone has to reach out in the first place. Some residents expressed frustration that less engaged, often lower-income residents, racial minorities, or youth, were not more civically engaged, suggesting that it is these residents who should reach out to take part in building beloved community.
Others suggested that people in more powerful community positions should carry more responsibility for reaching out across these divides. For example, several black interviewees noted that they wished white residents would take more of the responsibility for bridging racial divides, in part by reaching out more to black communities. A black man in Bellevue noted that white and black people need to communicate more, to learn how to treat one another and not be so fearful of one another. When I asked him how this could happen, he said that in part, white people could reach out more. He referred to a local Martin Luther King Day event, noting that there were only a few white residents (including the mayor), despite there being "a whole crew of white people next door who never came over." He described the hard work that will be required from both parties to bridge the race divide:

There's still a wall between races and it takes two to break that wall down, which is hard to do. I don't know. Because we seem now more divided than we were before. Even when President Obama was in office, it was like a kumbaya moment, and then once he got in it was lost. And now that President Trump is in office, there is a division that's going to be hard to mend... I really don't know what it's going to take. We all have to exist in this world together. And we can do more together than we can do separately, apart from one another. It bothers me, and it should bother anyone who really cares about this country, that we can't seem to love people like we should. We keep people at a distance.

Some interviewees highlighted initiatives in which the dominant groups did take it upon themselves to create spaces to support marginalized groups or facilitate interaction across social divides. For instance, a church in Bellevue that is attended by parishioners with mental illnesses created an additional worship service tailored more specifically to their needs. Another community group, in partnership with local churches, regularly provides free meals to anyone in the community. The dinner is not an initiative aimed toward homeless or low-income people, but is open to the whole community to encourage people from all backgrounds to meet as equals over a shared meal. Another interviewee described the local library's efforts to create a supportive space for residents representing a mix of demographics. There are some people who show up daily for internet access or quiet reading time, and if they do not show up the library calls them to ensure that they are OK. She said that for many regulars from local group homes, the library is a safe space where they can be warm. "Everyone embraces each other here," she said.

Much of the practice of reaching out across divide will occur at institutional levels, through practices incorporated into organizational behavior. For example, one woman noted that schools and organizations will need to actively seek more minorities to hire or join their boards. She also noted that local public institutions need to internally create space for "real, true, diversity trainings and conversations," noting that often diversity trainings can be superficial and tokenistic.
While some interviewees noted the difficulty of institutional change as well as the burden that many local institutions in economically vulnerable towns already carry, one interviewee resisted the excuse that change is too difficult or expensive. In particular he challenged the idea that good public education is dependent on having a lot of money, suggesting on the contrary that schools should “get rid of the textbooks, let’s just have some deep conversations.” He suggested that in many cases the difficulty is not one of finances or time but rather getting people in power to have hard conversations that may question or challenge their power, self-image, or the role they play in the community. Reflecting on his own childhood, this interviewee noted “I am pissed that I didn’t learn about racism or gentrification until I was 24.”

Of course, to reach out to support a group of people in the first place requires some acknowledgement that they have been marginalized in some way in our society, and early assumptions always run the risk of blinding a person to another’s uniqueness and individuality. A woman who works at a local non-profit that provides social services noted the fine line of recognizing a person’s history and circumstances while resisting stereotyping. She said that “we’re not thinking about what we think they should be doing, we’re trying to meet families where they are. But we don’t want to make assumptions about them. We have it unfold-- who they are, what they need.”

RELATIONSHIP AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOR INTERACTION ACROSS SOCIAL DIVIDE

As I looked for patterns to characterize various types of engagement across social divides, it seemed to me that what distinguishes more successful approaches of bridging divides is that the person reaching out across the division has deep respect for the others and that they are genuinely open to relationship with them. This is different than charity work and different than “behavior change” interventions. Rather, this resembles the agape love described in Chapter One.

From a relational perspective, a planner’s interaction across social divides become less of a formalized process of “community engagement” and more of a genuine openness to deep connection with people from different walks of life. There is no strong theory for this type of engagement across difference; rather, like in any relationship this type of engagement requires attunement to one’s uniqueness, emotions, variety of needs, and complexity.

“Community engagement” when viewed by planners as a process of showing agape love and forming real relationships becomes personal and individualized, not a generalized process applied to a homogeneous “community.” The process becomes less a tactic to get other groups to conform to community visions, and more of a genuine reaching-out, in which the planner is open to also changing her own perspectives so that all parties can drive collaborative community planning.
Finding IV. Youth (and probably other residents) have latent potential to contribute to community-wide efforts to build relationships across difference.

The final major finding from my interviews that is relevant to this thesis is that many of the interviewees’ comments suggested indirectly that youth may be able to play a unique role in building relationships and bridging divides in Bellevue and McKees Rocks. This is largely a finding that I infer, as no one said it directly, and I offer the basis for my inferences here.

Interviewees in both Bellevue and McKees Rocks commented that, unlike some of the adults, youth do not self-segregate, especially by race. A black woman in McKees Rocks discussed some of the ‘us vs them’ mentality dividing adults by race or housing type, but added that “the kids blend with each other, though, they’re fine. I have both black and white kids coming over to my house.” A resident of Bellevue who is involved in the local school noted that there “kids are diverse and a family. Self-segregation isn’t happening in Northgate like it is elsewhere.” Another interviewee who owns a barber shop in Bellevue contrasted the students who come into his shop with some of his adult customers. While noting that some of his adult customers are upset about drugs and that students, particularly black students, are being bused in, he noted that he does not hear such negativity from his high school aged customers.

As far as I am aware, the youth are not formally engaged in doing work to bridge local divides or build relationships in Bellevue or McKees Rocks. Both towns mentioned the existence of current or previous programs aimed toward youth, noting the varying successes of these programs. Some new initiatives in McKees Rocks seem promising, while others in both towns have fizzled. Some programs seemed to lack the adult leadership needed to sustain it; others seemed to lack enthusiasm and interest from the youth they aimed to reach. All of this information leads me to wonder whether youth, if given more autonomy and creative license, could use their relational skills to lead beloved community planning work in Bellevue and McKees Rocks.

CONCLUSION

It was clear that everyone contributing to planning efforts in Bellevue and McKees Rocks does so out of feelings of love and commitment to the town and its people. It seems that the opportunity exists for these efforts to form the basis of a more formally articulated vision of building beloved community, a place where all people feel a sense of belonging and connection to their neighbors.

I believe that focusing explicitly on this vision at the level of planning, governance, and resident action is not a matter of semantics or immaterial philosophy but would have tangible effects. First, it could help to emphasize and reframe the assets of Bellevue. Whereas currently Bellevue’s reputation is marred by low school district evaluations and a sense of decline compared to how it used to be, committing to the ultimate goal of building a beloved community would shift focus from negative qualities to relational,
often positive qualities. Rather than becoming the town with poor high school test scores, Bellevue would become a unique town in Pittsburgh where people across class and race feel relatively comfortable compared to other places. Rather than becoming the town where the business district “isn’t what it used to be,” residents would recognize that in spite of this, the main streets are more diverse and closer to a beloved community than they were forty years ago. Rather than complaining about the loitering youth, residents would be proud that youth—of all colors, types of dress, and backgrounds—feel comfortable on Bellevue’s streets.

Articulating a vision of building the beloved community should not be mere advertising, though; it will also require a real commitment toward repairing social divisions and resisting social hierarchies. Residents in my interviews noted that indeed these social hierarchies do exist, organized around characteristics such as race, age, mental ability or illness, or type of knowledge one possesses. Planners will need to identify and focus directly on the structural and cultural mechanisms that create and exacerbate these divisions.

Third, the vision of creating the beloved community will help to guide local work that crosses difference. Creating the beloved community will require planners to create opportunities for the development of real relationship across divided community groups; meaningful experiences that go beyond charity and beyond assimilation of newcomers or younger people into the dominant community culture. Relationship is a negotiation between people, developed through conversations, social time, and work that allows all to contribute to and expand the vision of what Bellevue should be. Through this relationship, neighbors will begin to hold each other to excellence out of a place of care for that unique individual, not out of a desire to make them conform.

Fourth, taking seriously the notion of the beloved community will open space for new contributors to local planning efforts. A commitment to love requires a much different skill set than other technical planning skills, and many people who do not excel in school or have a prestigious career may be quite skilled at building beloved community. Small towns like Bellevue often do not have professional urban planners, so tapping into the potential that youth have to contribute to local planning efforts could expand local planning capacity.

Taking this fourth finding seriously, and recognizing the potential for youth to do planning work in Bellevue, I embarked on the second phase of my research and held planning workshops with youth to understand how they would begin building toward beloved community. I describe these conversations in the following chapter.
4. Youth-Led Planning Strategy for Building Beloved Community

Introduction

Having formulated my hypotheses about what planning toward a vision of beloved community could achieve in a place like Bellevue, I wanted to test them in planning workshops. In other words, I wanted to see if planners attending to relationship and love across social divides would identify opportunities for community development action that are different from those proposed in the literature or currently implemented in Bellevue.

The policy recommendations for inner-ring suburbs described in Chapter Two view Bellevue as a place to be developed economically. School decisions to cut staff or improve test scores look at the school community as a place to be developed financially and academically within particular constraints. If we view Bellevue as a place with potential for becoming a beloved community, rather than a place that must be developed economically or academically, how would we shift our analysis and imaginations for what is possible?

I chose to do these planning sessions with youth, because of their potential for contributing to relationship-building work as implied by interviewees in the previous chapter. In these focus groups, I was the facilitator, keeping the conversation focused on a vision of beloved community. I viewed the youth as
the planners, the people with analytical and practical skills and experiences that give them the insight to understand social divisions and hierarchies in Bellevue and the creativity to think about how to dismantle them.

As mentioned in Chapter One, my intent with these conversations was to see how a focus on the beloved community impacts planners’ strategies. In other words, is a focus on beloved community more than semantics; does it have tangible effects on planning practice? Specifically, I wanted to know if it changes how planners see local assets and challenges, the types of planning interventions they consider, their philosophies of community engagement, and the skills and experiences deemed valuable in planning work. I discuss my methodology and findings in this chapter.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Overview**

I met with two focus groups of students – one group of eleven 11th graders and another group of ten 12th graders – at Bellevue’s local high school, Northgate. I met with the twelfth grade group three days in a row, for a total of about four hours of conversation. I met with the 11th graders for two days, and this group was somewhat disrupted due to many students leaving due to various school activities. The majority of my observations are from the 12th grade group, which built stronger rapport with each other and myself and had the time to delve more deeply into some of the topics. Most of the observations I draw from the 11th grade group are from the few people who were able to participate both days.

**Participants**

The participants were chosen by a high school teacher, who aimed to bring together a group that was diverse across race, academic achievement, length of Bellevue residency, and other characteristics. Figures 5 and 6 contain mini-biographies of all of the students, which they wrote to describe themselves (hence some inconsistency in how race is described, for instance).

**Structuring the planning sessions**

I did not talk directly about love and the beloved community in these conversations. Rather, I decided to use the concepts of Othering and social division as entry points for thinking about the beloved community. I view the Other as people deemed by dominant society as different and less than (less valuable, less deserving), and “Othering” as the personal, political, or cultural processes of creating the Other. By reflecting on Othering, we can develop attunement to our own tendencies to distance ourselves from others, and to the ways in which we have also felt Othered and less valuable in certain situations.

To me, the resistance of Othering (what I call de-Othering) is another way of talking about the active expression of love across difference. It is the process of noticing people, acknowledging that they
matter, carefully attending to their needs, and sharing our own selves with them. De-Othering is a relational act, one that requires striving for equity within the relationship and acknowledging its immaterial aspects. I explain more of the theoretical background of Othering in Appendix A.

Discussion guide

Our conversations focused on Othering and De-Othering in Bellevue and covered the topics below. In reality, the conversations were not linear. Students moved the conversation in new directions, I asked follow-up questions to delve deeper into certain comments, and we circled through these topics repeatedly. I used the following structure to guide the discussion:

I. Getting to Know the Group
   A. Introduction: I introduced myself and my research. We also discussed conversation agreements and what it means to consent to participating in this research.
   B. Questions for Students:
      1. Tell me something about yourself.
      2. What is your family history? How did you end up in Bellevue?

II. Analysis: Othering in Bellevue
   A. Introduction: I introduced the concept of Othering.
   B. Questions for Students:
      1. What types of Othering occur in Bellevue?
      2. Why does this Othering occur? What is causing it?
      3. What does this feel like for the person being Othered?
      4. Why do people view them as the Other?
      5. What is something you read, heard, saw (for example, a book, article, video, song, movie, Facebook post) that changed how you feel about someone or a group of people?

III. Visioning: De-Othering in Bellevue
   A. Introduction: I asked them to think creatively about how bridge social divides in Bellevue.
   B. Questions for Students:
      1. Think back to the groups of Others and the social divisions that we mentioned. What would you do to resist Othering of these groups in Bellevue?
      2. Would you and other youth be interested in doing de-Othering work, and why?

My role

I played the role of the facilitator in this conversation, asking questions and contributing few of my own opinions. I did tell the students that they were free to ask me questions, and I answered freely and honestly when they did.
I transcribed and examined each conversation, trying to understand how the students perceived of Bellevue and analyzed current social divides, what planning interventions they suggested directly or what ideas their comments sparked in my own mind, and their expectations for how leaders in positions of power should interact across social divides. I also paid attention to how various students responded, how myself and the group inadvertently fell into Othering tendencies, what divisions people articulated and how this affected the emotional landscape of Bellevue.

In the remainder of the chapter, I present my findings and support them with many long quotes. This is in part so that the voices of the students come across and the reader can internalize a sense of weak theory constructed by the nuances in their comments. These block quotes will also help the reader to evaluate my interpretations and identify connections that I overlooked.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Loves writing and reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Born in the Philippines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female, age 18.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawn</td>
<td>Loves bowling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will be joining the Marines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American male, age 19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeannine</td>
<td>Has played the piano for 10 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loves fashion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Born in Detroit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will be attending Washington State University, and wants to study psychology and theology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black female, age 17.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Interested in student government, physical therapy, and music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lives in Bellevue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employed by [a clothing store].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian female, age 17.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Student Council Vice President; Head of Character Committee, National Honors Society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the school musical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has two chickens, Nugget and Omlette.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Works as a bartender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will study history education and business in college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White male, age 18.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Does cross country, track and field, and cheerleading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes science related classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is a waitress at Eat n’ Park (local restaurant).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will be attending the University of Pittsburgh to study nursing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White female, age 18.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Nepalese female.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>The tech guy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White male.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahimana</td>
<td>Participates in the high school musical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will be attending post-secondary schooling for business and law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American female, age 17.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>Lives in Bellevue and family tree resides in Bellevue/Avalon area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employed by [a local grocery store].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wants to study engineering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American female, age 18.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5: Descriptions of the 12th Grade focus group members.*
### 11th Grade Focus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linda</th>
<th>Tina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interested in neurology.</td>
<td>Likes to draw.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed race (white and black) female, age 16.</td>
<td>White female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loriane</th>
<th>Jarrod</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Originally from Côte D'Ivoire.</td>
<td>Likes to play basketball.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed race (black and white) male, age 16.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kamar</th>
<th>Samiyah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plays football.</td>
<td>Loves medical studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed race (black and white) male.</td>
<td>Muslim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 18.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joel</th>
<th>Alannah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magician.</td>
<td>Plays basketball.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works at a local restaurant.</td>
<td>In the musical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White male.</td>
<td>White female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jenny-Poe</th>
<th>Leena</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plays volleyball and runs track.</td>
<td>In the color guard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loves talking and making food.</td>
<td>White female.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American female, age 16.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Works at a convenience store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White male.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6: Descriptions of the 11th Grade focus group members.*

### FINDINGS

In general, I found that focusing on building a beloved community in Bellevue did have tangible impacts on how the student planners analyzed their town and strategized about planning interventions. The assets and problems they defined are of a different nature than what is discussed in the economic development literature. They illuminated ideas for planning intervention that are more radical than what
planners often focus on, and perhaps even contradictory to some economic development goals. Their discussions of the nuances of community engagement shifts the focus of the engagement from planning outcomes to the quality of a planner’s relationship with other residents, which is different than what is discussed in the community development literature. Finally, planning with a focus on the beloved community highlighted the value of skills and experiences that are often undervalued in educational and career pathways. I discuss these findings in more depth here.

Finding 1. Planning for beloved community reframes how planners view a community’s most valuable assets and its most pressing challenges.

ASSETS: CHARACTERISTICS THAT CULTIVATE BELOVED COMMUNITY

Much of the inner-ring suburbs literature focuses on the economic deficits of these places, but when the students analyzed Bellevue with an eye on beloved community, they spoke mostly from a perspective of great fondness for their hometown. They, like many of the adults in my earlier interviews, spoke highly of the neighborliness of Bellevue, its walkability, its diversity, and the cohesiveness of the school’s student body.

When I asked students where they feel most comfortable in Bellevue, many said their school. Matt said, “We all get together well. It’s just comfortable here because there’s just no worries about what you’re gonna say cause we’ve all established where we are currently. So, if you say something, usually everyone’s gonna understand what you’re saying.” David noted that “we’re so diverse that we all just kind of mesh with each other, no matter what. No matter what clique you’re in, even all of the cliques mesh together too, so this is really just the prime example of diversity in a good sense.” Lynn added that she hates it when she goes to regional student council meetings and hears people speak negatively about the school. As she said, “I hate when people bash on Northgate because I love it here and I really do feel like we have one of the best student bodies and yeah we don’t have as much involvement as we should but people do love our school and people do want to make a difference.” Many of the students emphasized that teachers care about them at Northgate, often citing specific instances or teachers to support this claim.

Several students compared Bellevue and Northgate to other towns and schools, saying that they foster racial diversity better than other places. Jeannine commented that “this is the most diverse school that I’ve ever been to.” Tiffany noted that “I definitely feel comfortable in Bellevue because there definitely are more racist places. And I’ve been walking down the street … and people are open, they are willing to talk….That’s another thing I do like about Bellevue, you can walk down the street and not feel like everyone’s staring at you whether you are white or whether you are black.” Shawn agreed, adding that, “I think that’s the biggest thing. I don’t think I’ve encountered a racist situation, personally. For me being black, like that has never… It’s just weird, you don’t deal with it… Now the cops, police officers, stuff like that...” Later he clarified that he does experience racism here, but much less than in other places, and in more subtle ways.
Nahimana explained that her parents moved to Bellevue, rather than a neighboring suburb that they were considering, because they thought that she would feel more comfortable there:

But when they got together and they had me, my mom wanted to send us to Avonworth (a neighboring school district) originally but because my dad grew up in a time where Avonworth wasn't predominantly black or had a lot of black students, there was only five black kids and he was one of them. And he was like I've experienced a lot of racial issues when I went there, so that's why he sent me to Northgate because he knew that I wouldn't come across as many of those issues as he did when he was growing up. So that's one thing that I can say – our diversity here is so much better than it is in a lot of other places.

All of these comments stood out in stark contrast to the school’s external reputation. People see the school for its low test scores or its relatively high number of low-income students (compared to neighboring suburbs). If it were viewed instead for its potential to cultivate beloved community, it might be a very highly ranked school.

Elizabeth implied that after years of living in Bellevue, it took our conversation on community relationships to shift how she sees Bellevue:

I don’t think I’ve ever even thought about Bellevue or Avalon as anything special really until we started talking about it.... [After our previous conversation], I went home and talked about it to my mom, and she was just like, “woah you’re really ‘I heart Pittsburgh’ today!” ... I just think you don’t think about some of these things until it’s brought up to you, brought forth by someone that’s older, someone that has more wisdom than you, and you’re actually thinking about it, like what can I do to make this place better. Before I’d be like, what do I care, I’m leaving here. We all say, we’re leaving here, we’re leaving here. But I think it’s good to nourish the place you grew up in.... You never really realize until you start talking about it.

Later in the conversation, Elizabeth added that, "Whenever I came, I was like, oh my gosh, this is so nice, I like how we’re talking about our school. It’s making me realize what I like about our community and everything like that, but I wouldn’t have known that before I got here.“ I interpret these comments as some evidence that planning focused on beloved community reframes the successes of towns like Bellevue, a need that was called for in the previous chapter. This reframing is not only important for outsiders and potential new residents, but also for current residents, who need this reframing to notice and nourish the aspects of home that they cherish.
Planners should not only aim to identify community assets, but also understand why they exist, and how they can be nurtured and built upon. In this vein, I asked the students to tell me why Bellevue and Northgate are able to foster the tight-knit community that they described. The students emphasized the town’s small size, noting that it is easy to run into people, do errands on the main street, and walk to friends’ houses after school. They also suggested that Bellevue’s affordability is important for providing homes to a range of people across income level, and that its good public transportation is especially conducive to immigrants and others who arrive without cars or are not able to drive. The following paragraphs discuss some of the other particular conditions that the students suggested foster potential for beloved community in Bellevue.

**Many opportunities for relationship and accountability across difference**

Students said that at Northgate, it is easy to form relationships across difference, and that becoming more accountable to each other makes it easier to resist social pressures to remain distant. For example, Shawn described his commitment to greeting students with special needs during lunch every day. He said:

> Any time I see one of the adaptive (special needs) kids, I make sure I go out of my way to make sure I’m saying hello, and I do it all the time. Like every day for lunch I give each one of them a high five, to just kinda let them know that I’m treating you the same way that everybody else is. But other people look at me and they’re like, Shawn, when you do that it’s amazing and I’m like, do what, like it’s the same as if I gave one of my boys I play football with a high five. It’s the same thing.

When I asked him why it is easier for some people to reach out to these students while other people do not, he responded in part that being around people in a natural and close setting allows one to more clearly see their full humanity rather than merely their differences. In essence, his words resembled Thurman’s descriptions of “meaningful experiences of integration”:

> It’s the way you’re taught. Your parents are supposed to teach you how to react to it. Or if you’re around it when you’re younger, when you grow up you’re kind of used to it. So you don’t see it. Say you had a little brother who was born with it. Then in school naturally you’re going to treat those people the same way you treat your little brother, because he was born with it – any mental health disability, anything of that nature, scoliosis...

The notion that accountability and closeness is important for building the beloved community arose several times in the conversation. For instance, David expressed his feelings of anger when he heard a racist comment and Shawn attributed this anger to the fact that David is close with black people, contrasting this to people who rarely interact with people of other races:
Yeah so now as we grow up, now when we hear it, like David, he took it personally. You could see when he talked about it, he was still pissed off about it. Because that how it feels to him. Because he’s cool with black people all the time. So when he heard it he’s like, get away from me, I don’t want nothing to do with you. ...And I respect you for that, that’s incredible. Cause it’s like, the worst thing is ... the racist white guys in Bellevue have never had an interaction with a black person. It’s like, strictly just because they’re black it’s like they’re creatures, get away from me. It’s like, wow. Like if I don’t like you, it’s something you did to me, that I don’t want to be around you. But it’s just perceived differently, and it’s a shame.

At one point in the conversation, students asked why I was doing this research, and I told them that I had heard racist comments from previous classmates when I was recently visiting Bellevue that I did not hear growing up. I wanted to understand why people changed in this negative way as they got older. Several of the students said they were probably always like that and just never expressed it, and as they get older and can surround themselves with people more like them they become more comfortable saying these things openly. Shawn asked me if my closest friends in high school were black. I told him they were not, and he said:

Shawn: Yeah, cause that just happens. Like it could have been that you just didn’t think anything of it. It’s not like you felt the same type of way he did, but it could have been just like, you never really paid attention because it was never really on your concern.

Leigh: Right, so I just became more conscious of it?

Shawn: Right, more conscious. So when you heard it you’re like wow. Have you always been like that? Cause if you’re sitting there and it’s Elizabeth, she has black friends and she dates a black guy, so if she hears that right now she’ll punch someone.

As Shawn noted with his “she’ll punch someone” comment, close relationship and care across difference motivates people to take action in resisting barriers to beloved community. Several students noted the importance of verbally and visibly standing up against derogatory or racist remarks that ultimately diminish the prospect of beloved community in which all people feel a sense of belonging. For instance, Shawn, with Nahimana’s confirmation, expressed how good it feels to have peers who resist racism and take on some of the burden of confrontation. In this example, they illustrate the space at which defensiveness (of a white student) overlaps with happiness (of a black student); where people with two different experiences of race join together to work toward beloved community:
Shawn: I just think like, me being black, the thing that makes me happy is if something happens and you hear that and a white person takes it personally. Like ‘Why are you even saying that?’ When they get defensive.

Nahimana: Mmm that does feel real good.

In summary, one aspect that helps Bellevue build toward beloved community is that many residents feel accountable to one another across race and other differences, and this accountability inspires allyship and active resistance to racism. It became clear that the students view these friendships and emotional attachments are necessary for building beloved community; intellectual commitment is often not strong enough to actively love across difference when social pressures stand in the way.

Long-term community with open arms to newcomers

Many students attributed Bellevue’s sense of community to the fact that residents have been connected to the town and their neighbors for a long time. Many of the students were born in Bellevue and have known their classmates for years, and many of their families have lived there for generations. At the same time, the students indicated that this community solidarity is not exclusive, and that they are eager to welcome new classmates into their groups.

Linda and Kamar both described the long-term community that exists in Bellevue, suggesting that this type of community is unique compared to both the suburbs and city neighborhoods. Linda said:

We're such a small community and everybody knows everybody.... Like I know my mom has best friends still here and they went to Northgate with her. It’s just everybody knows everybody. No one expects you to be this person... they just accept you. Like at North Hills (neighboring suburb), your mom knows your friend’s mom and that’s it. But my mom knows... you go down the street and she can talk to twelve people.

Kamar then compared the ease of making relationships at Northgate to the difficulty of forming deep bonds at his old school due to student transience resulting from housing instability, incarceration, or unemployment:

When I came up here and I saw how much everyone knew each other from when they were really little, I was just used to people... Like, [at my old school] I probably only knew like two kids in the entire school that I actually grew up around. And when I came up here, I was wishin’ that I, I was wishin’ I had friends how everyone else up here did. Like how they grew up with each other, they were used to it. But every day [at my old school] I would meet somebody new, and I’d be like, “how long are you going to stay here?” And they’d be like, “oh just two years.” Maybe. And then you’d never see them in your life again. But everybody up here, they know
each other. Even after you graduate. They still know each other. And still talk to each other. Like
right now I talk to literally nobody from my old school. Cause everybody went everywhere else.
And some of them probably are in jail. Some of them were just doin’ bad on the street and just
can’t provide themselves with anything.

The strong, long-term community that the students describe is one that in many ways seems to
resist the exclusionary nature of many other tight-knit communities. Rather than feeling threatened when
newcomers enter the social scene, the community of students who have known each other for years
welcome the new students into their midst. This suggests the expression of active, public, agape love, the
work of students who accept others not merely because they like them but because they recognize
newcomers’ inherent value as members of an expanding student community. Kamar and Jarrod described
this when talking about the Nepalese students at Northgate:

Kamar: ...All the Nepalese kids, they came up here. They’re actually pretty cool. They’re really
good at sports, and one of them played on our team, he was like the funniest dude I’ve ever
met in my life. Anywhere else they’d get ... left out. But he’s friends with everybody I know
really. And nobody really cares about it, he’s just a friend, it doesn’t matter.

Leigh: Why does that happen here?

Jarrod: I think it’s just cause like, we’re so open. And when somebody else comes in we invite
them in and make them part of our group. So that they don’t feel out of place here.

Mariah, one of the Nepalese students, confirmed that she likes Bellevue and Northgate. She said that
because there are not as many Nepalese students there as in other schools, they have the opportunity to
mix more with other students and step out of their comfort zones more. Thurman wrote that “community
cannot for long feed on itself, it can only flourish with the coming of others from beyond, their unknown
and undiscovered brothers and sisters” (Thurman, 1971), and to some extent the student body at
Northgate seems to have internalized this maxim.

Increasing feelings of safety

Students also suggested that feeling safe and comfortable are important aspects of building a
beloved community. Safety is of course subjective; for instance, one student noted that police make her
feel safe while others noted that police make them feel unsafe. It became clear that students feel safe with
people whom they trust will protect them in a time of need, and people identify groups they feel
comfortable with based on shared identities or previous experiences. For example, Tiffany and Shawn
suggested that they feel safe in spaces with a significant number of other black people:
Tiffany: If I walk into a place that I kind of feel uncomfortable, I don’t know where I am, I will look for how many of, I guess, “me” – other black people – that are in there. I guess, because like you said, you know your people. If I see Shawn somewhere I’m running to Shawn because I know Shawn, or say something bad happens, like a shooter comes in, I’m gonna run to the black people because I know we’re all gonna protect each other. In some situations you might get called out for that. But I think that I can definitely say that I will look around and count 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, ok cool there’s 7 of us.

Shawn: Yeah, but for me, ever since I been enlisted into the military I’ve definitely learned for me being in the marines, I don’t care...But I used to be like, alright so let me make sure the numbers is right for black people, because it’s like, you feel uncomfortable. I used to feel very uncomfortable walking in Bellevue, more than I did walking through my own hood. Like, where I’m from, I used to be perfectly OK walking there at night with no problem.

After some discussion about this, I asked Shawn: “So Bellevue used to feel unsafe and the numbers weren’t right. Do you feel like it’s getting better?” Shawn suggested that it is getting better as more black students move to the district:

Shawn: When I first came to Northgate, there was me, (student’s name), and (student’s name) — I could legit count there were five black people. Now we a whole gang. There’s a lot of us. I think that’s the thing that really changed. In the school you see from each grade there’s more black people per year. Like to the point where the football team was mostly black. Like the last two, three years. So it’s like, kind of a change, and people don’t like change.

His last line suggests that he is conscious of the differing views of safety in Bellevue. While increasing numbers of black students make him feel more comfortable, he is very aware that not everyone feels that way and preemptively challenged this resistance to change.

**Resistance to Materialism and Class Consciousness**

In both focus groups, there seemed to be consensus about the relatively low level of materialism and class consciousness in Bellevue compared to both the neighboring suburbs and city, and that this condition plays a role in fostering inclusiveness and beloved community. Students noted that often prejudice and division springs from materialism; when people with more money or better clothes feel that they are more important than their peers and neighbors.

For example, Jarrod described his perception of some people from neighboring wealthier suburbs:
Jarrod: Well there's people who are from Sewickley (wealthier suburb) but they live in Bellevue and for some reason they think that because they're from Sewickley, cause they were born and probably raised there, that no matter what they're still better than you no matter where they live. [They'll act like] "I was previously upper class, or still am upper class and just moved somewhere else and you're lower than me..."

They also described people from sports teams in wealthier neighborhoods as getting more upset on social media when beat by Northgate than they would if beat by other wealthier schools. Kamar said, “if you’re lower ... then they just won't treat you like how they would treat someone the same or above them.”

Materialism is not only a suburban problem; Kamar said he encountered it in the city, too, and contrasted that experience to what he experienced when he moved to Bellevue. In fact, in the conversation below, Kamar suggested that it is the strength of Bellevue relationships – that students have known each other since kindergarten – that shields the town from class consciousness, a reflection of the community’s collective tendency to value people over property:

Kamar: I think really you can be yourself anywhere [in Bellevue]. It's not like North Side where you can be in Spring Garden and get judged down there and then go to the basketball courts down by Allegheny General Hospital and everyone's like, yeah you're cool, I don't care what you do down here and then you go from there to down in Manchester, where you get judged again. ...But here, you can walk around and wear whatever you want. I mean, some people going through Bellevue who don't live here will be like, "oh that's weird," but then if they're from here, they're like “oh ok...”

Linda: Cause it's everyday people...

Kamar: They can just be who they want.

Leigh: What do you mean when you say people are judged?

Kamar: Like, the North Side is stereotypical a lot. The North Side wants to refrain from being the West End, the West End, the South Side. North Side has their own style. And if you moved from the South Side and came to the North Side and then you are stuck in your South Side habits, you won't fit in down on the North Side where you get looked down upon. If you're from Bellevue, and like, everybody, well the school is like, mostly, I'd say half the people here have known each other since they were in Kindergarten and all the way up. So they're used to them. ...Here it's like,
oh, you come to school in pajamas every day, that’s nice. She comes to school dressed up every
day, that’s nice, and it’s just like, it’s just its weird own thing, you can do whatever you want.

Linda: Yeah, there are people that wear pajamas every day... I wouldn't but...

Jarrod: There are people that dress up every day...

Leigh: What was it like when you first came in 9th grade?

Kamar: I actually thought everybody here was weird.

Leigh: In what way?

Kamar: Just cause how they were dressing. Like, well, outside of school on the North Side you
wear, you wanna dress to be the best really, like you want True Religion, you want a Louis Vuitton
Belt, you want an MCM bag, you want designer things. And up here, people don’t really care what
they wear. They wear Airforce Ones with sweatpants and a weird knitted sweater and, I was just
like, that's weird, why would you wear that? But now after being up here for so long, you just
adapt. I don’t care what I look like anymore.

Throughout both focus groups, students expressed agreement that much of the Bellevue and
Northgate community has resisted excessive consumerism or the need to be seen as financially well off.
Many of the students seemed to attribute this to some level of class solidarity; others described a general
humility of residents who refrain from thinking that they’re "better than anybody." Linda and Jarrod
describe this in the following discussion:

Linda: Other schools are like, ok so ours is like, we’re middle class, but like North Hills and
Avonworth is like more upper middle class. We’re not lower class, there's a middle middle class,
we're like that. But North Hills is upper middle class... They’re so rude.

Jarrod: ...Here, we don’t feel like we’re better than anybody, so we’re all the same. So it’s easier
when somebody else from halfway around the world (referring to a previous conversation about
immigrants moving to Bellevue) can come here than can go to Avonworth or North Allegheny
(neighboring suburban schools).
In the 12th grade group, the teacher who was in the classroom with us added that he’s never noticed anyone at Northgate get bullied for their level of income, to which Nahimana replied, "Cause we’re all strugglin’ together!"

All of these comments align with the discussion of materialism in Chapter One, and with King’s cautions that materialism is a threat to beloved community. While from an economic development perspective Bellevue may not be thriving, from a beloved community perspective its residents have managed to maintain a balance between the material and immaterial nourishment that fosters some sense of solidarity. Of course, this is not a suggestion that the urgent material needs of many residents should now be ignored; rather it is a challenge for planners to pursue economic development in Bellevue in a way that continues to nurture a community-wide resistance to over-valuing superficial markers of wealth.

Furthermore, the students’ comments urge us to consider a potential oppositionality between relationship and materialism. In the conversations described above, students noted that it is close relationship – “we’re all the same,” “people here have known each other since they were in Kindergarten,” “we’re all strugglin’ together” – that prevents them from overvaluing class or material status. If love is a counterbalance to consumerism, this suggests, in a subtly radical way, that public love and relationship may be a direct antidote to the environmental crises that face us due to over-consumption.

**DEFICITS: DISRUPTION OF THE BELOVED COMMUNITY**

Despite Bellevue’s potential for building toward beloved community, it still has much work to do and students described many groups of people who are disconnected from each other, or marginalized groups who do not have the same respect and access to resources as others in the community. For example, students spoke about divides between races (mostly between white and black residents), police and black youth, students with physical or mental disabilities and the rest of the student body, people with normative behavior and those deemed “weird,” men and women, students with high and low academic achievement, and youth and elderly residents.

Students spoke about race for much of the conversation. The black and biracial students in the group noted that Bellevue is much better than many places that they have lived, but it still has work to do to be truly welcoming to black residents. I will share some of these discussions in the following sections.

The students indicated that the relationship between black youth and the police was complicated. Shawn shared that he used to go running through Bellevue and the neighboring areas and eventually stopped because “every time there would be that Avalon cop, and it just annoyed me. I mean it really... They would stop me because I’m running.” He also said that now if he’s walking in Bellevue he doesn’t worry about the police too much; in fact, “if anything I’m waving at one of them saying what’s up.” Another black student, however, gave him a look and noted that there is a “racist rep” about local police, clarifying that she has had good experiences with them though they can become aggressive. Perhaps these complexities reflect the difficulty of reconciling positive personal interactions with local police, many
of whom are residents themselves and embedded in the community, with the understanding that policing more broadly is a system that disproportionately harms black communities.

Students noted that much work is needed to build community with students with physical and mental disabilities, as well as between students across a spectrum of academic performance. One student described how one high-achieving student treated him as dumb, despite him having much knowledge that is not always valued by current academic measurement systems.

Finally, much discussion was about the divisions and misunderstandings between youth and elderly residents. Students noted their own frustration with feeling misunderstood by elderly residents, while also noting their own tendencies to dismiss or become unnecessarily impatient with their older neighbors.

In the following sections, I discuss the structures and practices that students suggested disrupt beloved community and widen divides between neighbors. I then describe the emotional landscape that lies beneath the surface of these disruptions. These emotions, often negative, indicate that the beloved community has not yet been achieved, even when conditions look fine on the surface.

**Structural disruption**

Students discussed several of the institutional and cultural practices that disrupt potential for the beloved community. Specifically, students discussed media and the “single story,” lost history, struggles in neighboring communities, educational measurement systems, and the prioritization of financial needs over relational needs.

**MEDIA AND THE SINGLE STORY**

When I asked the 12th grade group “Why do we create Others?” their first answer was “society” and then “the way that they view people in the media, this religion are terrorists, and...[trailed off].” Another student elaborated:

It's what's in the news and what pops up on Facebook and on Twitter. When you're seeing the news and you see stuff about ISIS and you're thinking that every Muslim is a terrorist or every Muslim is radical. And that's just how you're accustomed to it. It's up to your parents and it's up to the people you're around to change it.

The 11th grade group said that the Other is created because of our desire to feel more normal. When I asked how our view of normal gets created, the first answer was also “society” with wide agreement. Then a student added that the media contributes a lot to society's idea of normal:

Like we can see on TV, or what you see on social media, and you can go and be like that. And when somebody is not like that, you just see them as, they're weird. They're not like us. And the
entire human population. And that it's just, they're in their own little world. So you just look down on them.

Natalie, who plans to be a journalist, suggested that perhaps media’s implication in disrupting our abilities to relate well to one another can in part be explained by “the danger of a single story.” She described a TedTalk with this name, given by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who speaks of the danger of only hearing one story about a group of people (for example, that Africans are poor) and reducing them to unidimensional caricatures as a result (Adichie, 2009). In fact, Loriane in the 11th grade group described a very similar experience:

I was in chorus class, and a boy came and asked me “am I from France?” And I said, “no I’m from Africa.” And he says, “so you see the monkeys there?” Last time I was watching TV I saw the show Africa but it’s not like African people want people to see Africa. They just show other countries, in the Savannah. Where lions and stuff is. But tourists go there to see animals. But nobody can live there because you cannot see a lion like this, like it would just look at you and say ‘welcome’? No. Because of that, I knew why he asked me that, about seeing the monkey. And I said no, there is some place like downtown, or other places in the US that are the same as Africa. And there is some place like the Savannah where people go to do tourism. So because he didn’t learn about that, that’s why he asked me if I can see monkeys there. And the way he talked, that made me sad, because he didn’t learn about that. So I told him it’s not like this. And now he knows.

Leigh: Why did you say it made you sad?

Loriane: Because the way he asked me was like, people in Africa are savage. So, I didn’t, because he’s less older than me, so I didn’t talk, I just explained to him. If he wants to understand. So, that’s that.

The way to resist the single story is to seek out, share, and learn many of them. Some students mentioned that media also has great potential for dismantling single stories and has been instrumental in exposing them to new narratives, such as more in-depth and personalized portrayals of the Holocaust or slavery. Opportunities to exchange stories and better understand people with perceived differences also help to challenge stereotypes. Natalie used Adichie’s talk as a lens through which to interpret her own experiences of hearing multiple stories, including those shared in our discussions:

Natalie: [Adichie] said that we tend to... what we see is what we get. I see, for example, an old cranky person, and whatever. And single stories are dangerous because you have a set disposition over someone and that diminishes them and dehumanizes them. Like, I didn’t know that old man
used to be a marine (referring to a story Elizabeth shared). I didn’t know what you (Shawn) were going through (referring to Shawn’s time in the hospital, described below), I didn’t know that this girl lost her husband. Even the waitresses that we work with...You have to be understanding with other people. You don’t know what other people are going through. You might hear one thing about them but you don’t know anything else about them. I think that’s one thing, like Lynn said, you have to be comfortable with yourself, know yourself, but you have to know not everyone around you is happy. You have to be aware of that. And I think that’s how you live more harmoniously. If you just kinda don’t take things too seriously and see people as people and not what’s bad about them or what they’re being perceived as.

Expanding our encounters with others, reading and listening to and viewing many stories, help us to “see people as people,” an absolutely necessary skill for residents of the beloved community.

LOST HISTORY

Another factor that the students identified as disrupting beloved community and exacerbating division, and one which relates to the danger of the single story, is the loss of certain histories. Histories of marginalized groups are lost in part due to mass oppression, like slavery, and the disruption of cultures, families, record keeping, and story-telling. These histories continue to fade in part due to more subtle oppression that persists in teachings of history that ignore or dull the experiences of these groups. When I asked students to share their histories and how they ended up in Bellevue, Nahimana pointed out the missing pieces of her own family’s story:

Nahimana: So basically what I can tell you is about my mom and my dad growing up because before that I don’t really have much information about my grandparents or my great-grandparents because, I’m black, and my stuff is actually missing.

In the 11th grade focus group, when students were expressing frustration that school exams only value a certain type of knowledge, I asked them what kind of knowledge they think is not valued in our society. Kamar responded:

Really, knowledge about history. Even back through times like... the reason why there’s still racism is because of ... from back when Columbus came and how he ... just did a whole genocide of Native Americans here. And nobody knows that. Because they just see him as, oh he just sailed the ocean blue and they just see him as discovering America. When really he thought it was Asia or something. And they’ll be like, “huh, I don’t believe you.” And I’ll be like, “go ahead and look it up.” And it’ll be right there and they’ll be like, “I never knew that before.” Well, yeah, I bet you didn’t know that.
This loss of history disrupts beloved community in many ways. When we lose this history we lose with it the inspiring lessons of liberation and agape love of people who fought against dehumanization, to be seen as people. In addition, those who have been instrumental in structuring oppressive laws or institutions are not held accountable in public consciousness, setting a dangerous standard for future generations. And people who do know this history when the majority of society does not are further marginalized and must deal with the isolation born from seeing clearly a pain that many of their neighbors do not recognize.

**Struggles In Neighboring Communities**

Beloved community in Bellevue will not be built in a vacuum, and healing local social divides will require expanding the notion of community to beyond Bellevue borders, and concern for the wellbeing and relationships of residents in neighboring communities. As discussed earlier, many people from the North Side, the Pittsburgh neighborhood bordering Bellevue, move to Bellevue and are not always welcomed by other residents. In part, this is because people equate the North Side with Blackness, poverty, and violence. The students did not accept the underlying assumption of Blackness as a “bad” quality. As for poverty and violence, students indicated that they see these conditions as structural failures that affect and displace people living in the North Side, not as qualities that are linked to individual North Siders that they inherently bring into Bellevue when they arrive.

As Tiffany mentioned, “they’re trying to make the city better so they’re pushing all the, I guess ‘urban’ people out.” David later agreed, referring to her comment. Shawn shared his own story about moving to Bellevue from the North Side when a family member was killed. While Shawn himself did not feel unsafe in the North Side, he said that his mother brought the family to Bellevue for safety reasons, to “get something different for [her] kids.” Shawn added, “It definitely helped. Cause coming here, it was like, quiet. And you didn’t have to worry about looking everywhere, and you didn’t have to care about what you did. I mean, it’s different growing up in the city because like, when you go to a public school [in the North Side] everybody is always in everybody’s business.”

Kamar shared that his reason for moving to Bellevue from the city was a combination of schools and safety:

I think my reason was because of schooling. Because I used to live in the North Side. So really, if I would have, I had the choice either to stay on the North Side or go to the West End and go to Brasheer. And Perry was a bad school and so was Brasheer. And so while we were figuring out which one I wanted to do, I guess, my mom talked to my aunt cause they all went here when they were younger. And they were saying it’s a good school and all that. It’s far away from crime and other things. That’s my reason for being here.
Bellevue residents striving to create beloved community must not only wrestle with their resistance to outsiders, but may also need to extend compassion toward their North Side neighbors and have concern for the struggles the community faces, knowing that the two places are deeply interconnected. For many, this may require looking deep inside ourselves, orienting ourselves to, as Lorde says, the “difference that lives there. See whose face it wears.” It seems that Bellevue residents, rather than disparaging and distancing themselves from the North Side would be well-positioned to collaborate with the city in tackling some of the issues that affect people in both places.

EDUCATIONAL MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS THAT REINFORCE KNOWLEDGE HIERARCHIES

As mentioned earlier, adult residents and students alike noted social divides created by the valuing of some types of knowledge over others, which, in the dominant “knowledge economy” results in certain people being viewed as more socially valuable than others. Obstructing beloved community are the structures that create these stratifications of knowledge, and students spent much time discussing how the current education system reinforces or creates these knowledge hierarchies. Kamar explained that current educational measurements systems undervalue the types of knowledge that he possesses and make him uncertain about his college prospects:

Kamar: Cause I know there was this one kid, he’ll come into my French class and write a physics problem. All of the kids in there, including me, are like, I don’t know how to do that. And he’ll look at you like, “are you stupid or something? You should know how to do this.” And I’m just like, well, I’m just not good at, academically. It’s the same with colleges and the [SATs]. ...If you don’t get a good score on it you can’t go to it. And I’m like, why don’t they just get rid of it. Because maybe some people are really smart, and have straight A’s throughout school, like all their career in high school, but just aren’t good at sitting there and taking the test. And do poor on that no matter how good at a sport you are or how smart you are. They just won’t take you because of one little thing that really doesn’t mean anything to what you’re gonna be while you’re in college. ...You just won’t get accepted because of like, not even your knowledge, just the fact that if you can’t do something that they think is right, then you’re just done. That’s what scares me about college. ...If I do an SAT and I get a bad score on it, I might not be able to go to West Virginia like I want to. ...And 9 times out of 10, I can probably teach you something new, that you didn’t know before. And it doesn’t matter because you don’t like my test score.

He added that the tests are not only ignoring the knowledge he does possess, such as his skills in genetics and history, but are demeaning in that they reinforce to him things he already sees as personal weaknesses. He says, “Personally I’m not good at math and I couldn’t care less about it. So why should I have to take that if I know I’m not good at it and other people know I’m not good at it, but you’re still making me take it as proof that you’re right about it.”
Loriane emphasized one particular knowledge hierarchy, which is the valuing of technical knowledge over the humanities. She rejected this hierarchy, defending the value of the humanities and noting the subjectivity and complexity that can make these subjects difficult for some people:

Loriane: When I was in Africa, there was French Literature and Math. Those are in competition. ...So they say, people who are in Literature, math and science people say you are not as intelligent. [But I say], if you are in French, you have to play with the words. And you have to have high levels of speech in what you’re doing. And if you’re not correct you get a zero. You can go to that teacher and he can give you 10, this one can give you 5, this one can give you 0. The same exercise, different teachers can give you [different marks].

Leigh: In French and Literature?

Loriane: Yeah, so people are thinking that French is easy. But it is really hard if you didn’t pay attention and if you didn’t play with the words. Like Victor Hugo and Jean de La Fontaine, all that stuff you have to... you can’t just memorize many words to use for exercises or homework. ...Also English... math needs English. If there is no English then you can’t understand that because you have to understand the words to describe.

The students agreed with the value of words, and described the power that words have in many contexts. The students expressed this in continued conversations about knowledge that they thought was undervalued in schools, discussing their interest in learning how to debate and argue more effectively:

Linda: I mean arguing. I mean we don’t have debate teams. ... There’s a lot of people who like to argue.

Jordon: We do debates in class but that’s it.

Kamar: And that’s literally what politics is. Whenever, before Trump was president, he was literally arguing with Clinton about why he was a better president or why he would be a better president than her. And then she was arguing back. Even if it’s not the presidency, being a Treasurer or something like that, there’s arguing everywhere. And if you can’t argue ... then what’s the point of even trying to run for it, you might as well just let the other person do it then. Cause they’re just gonna run all over you....Like if we’re at a football game and I get called for a holding penalty but literally I’m on the other side of the field, if my coach can’t argue with the ref about it, then we’re just being cheated out of our way. And the other person gets the chance because they argued
whoever they argued with and then it's just their point goes. So there's really only one side arguing and the second side is just like, I'll just let you do your thing.

Loriane summarized the conversation, recognizing that there are many types of valuable knowledge, leveling the ground upon which beloved community can grow and making space for the talents of all people:

Nobody is smarter than other people. We have all the same knowledge. Maybe if you're not good at math then you're good at something else. And that person who is good in math is not good in what you are good at.

PRIORITIZING FINANCIAL NEEDS OVER RELATIONAL NEEDS

Students also alluded to ways in which school restructuring and staff cuts, driven by budgetary constraints, disrupted systems of care and relationship between students and teachers. In doing this, they illuminated the way in which a focus on money is often at odds with the ability to provide care and build better relationships. Shawn emphasized that the lost care was one of the primary negative impacts of the school budget cuts, and a possible reason for why his older sister may not send her kids to Northgate for school:

Shawn: The school used to be... they cared. ... Then, [my sister's] just saying like, nobody cares. When she would come up here for sporting events, anything, she just, they just didn't seem like they cared.

Leigh: How did she notice that?

Shawn: I don't know, I have no idea. I guess because of me... like when I didn't go to school she'd say, you're not getting in trouble, and she's like, wow. She would be upset and then she would cuss me out or something. But yeah, it just seems like nobody cares. And then when she was looking around she sees, kids do whatever they want and the principal, they don't care. It's just a trickle effect. You bring [the old superintendent] in here and everything goes downhill. He cuts all these teachers and teachers are teaching six, seven classes a year and you can't get help from a teacher because you can't go talk to them. When? One of their prep periods? They only have one. And then during that prep period there's gonna be ten other kids who want to talk to this one teacher for ten minutes. It doesn't happen.

It is not often that planners pause to consider the relational sacrifices that people may have to make to reach local financial or economic benchmarks. Indeed, planning is rife with trade-offs and under
certain economic constraints there is little a planner or community leader can do to value relationship over money. Nonetheless, acknowledging that these tradeoffs are being made and seriously considering whether the disruption of relationships is worth the financial gain may be an important part of building the cultural and political support needed to support various decisions that will bring us closer to beloved community.

Ultimately, all of these insights about how conditions for beloved community are disrupted provide planners with ideas for where to focus planning action. For instance, part of a relational strategy could be to do local history projects, documenting histories of Bellevue residents. At a larger scale, planners could work with schools to redesign academic measurement standards or engage in advocacy to change state assessment exams or college entrance criteria.

**Disruption under the surface**

**EMOTIONS OF BEING MARGINALIZED**

The effects of disruptions to beloved community often go unnoticed to residents who are not overtly affected. Even when it seems that a community is providing for many residents' material needs, evidence of deep and impactful division emerges at emotional and spiritual levels.

Our beloved community conversations provided a space in which students who directly feel the absence of love shared the immaterial aspects of their experiences — the nuances of their feelings, comfort levels, and reactions. These feelings ranged from anger to discomfort to disappointment. For instance, Shawn described how quickly his pride turned to anger when experiencing racism in a local pizza shop:

> Shawn: This guy... was sitting there and I had on my marine shirt and he's like, "You're going to the Marine Corps?" And I was like, "Yes Sir." And I'm proud about it. And he's like, "What are you doing in my thing?" And I'm like, are you kidding me? Seriously get away from me. And my recruiter was with me, and he's like "Why are you disrespecting me?" And [the guy's] like, "See that's how I know the military's changing, when they allow you in there." And my recruiter, he's like a 6'7" black dude... Now we felt like legit honest killing this dude. And he was like, just walk away, and we just walked away. And he had on an Avalon fire hall shirt, so I'm just like, whatever.

Other students indicated the frustration of not being seen for who they really are, illuminating the conscious effort that it takes to resist internalizing these negative perceptions. For instance, when I asked...

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6 I note two examples of the ways in which stereotypes affect students. Here are two more that provide even more nuance:

Elizabeth: Well I have a story about this actually. So I work a [a local restaurant], that's like a main fact of my life. I'm a waitress now, I've been waitressing for about a year or so. So like, you get a lot of one on one conversations with people. And there were these two guys and they were just like, not acting sexist I wanna say, but like, you can get us a water, and flirty and weird, and I was like you're forty don't talk to me. And they're like, what school do you go to, and I was like Northgate, and we were just talking, and I told them I was a cheerleader, I was homecoming queen, and they're like... and they were totally
students what they wished the rest of the community knew about them, Tiffany answered that she wished people knew she was from Bellevue, implying that because she is black people often see her as an outsider:

Tiffany: I wish people knew I was from here....Me and my mom both talk about this. My mom is from Bellevue, she was raised in Bellevue. [Customers at work] will ask me, "are you from here?" And I'm like "yeah, I've lived here my entire life." And I don't know if it's because the change, like how kids, like how they're trying to make the city better so they're pushing all the, I guess "urban" people out....And a lot of people look at me like I'm different, and see that "oh you're not from here because...oh the city's moving all of you guys out here." And it's like no, I've always lived here. I just didn't always go to Northgate. And it's like, I know your kids, we're best friends. They do it to me and my mom all the time.

Shawn, too, shared his experiences with being seen as a stereotype, rather than as the person he knows himself to be. While others see him as loud or lazy, he wishes that he were known instead for his good deeds and the ways he makes changes in the lives of others:

Shawn: [Talking about a time when he helped a kid who was having trouble with other people] ...So that was my glory moment, when I'm like, I'm really making the change. That's what I want to do. I don't want to be known as just a loud person who's always loud and doesn't do anything. I really wanna change somebody's life every day if I can. And that's why I chose the route that I'm choosing.

Students also described various approaches to reacting to and managing discomfort. For
example, describing the experience of being viewed as representatives of an entire race or culture during classroom discussions, students said that they mask their discomfort rather than directly addressing it:

Natalie: Let's say if we were going through a history lesson and the Philippines was brought up they'd just look at me, and... You know, I don't look at you whenever [we learn about] a white person you know?

Nahimana: Ooh black history month is the worst. The absolute worst.

Natalie: And yeah they do it for Asian people and it doesn't bother me and I can honestly say I never have any issue with it. But this other girl in my grade, she's also Asian, and she gets really bothered by that stuff.

Another student: But she also makes jokes about it...

Nahimana: Yeah but that's a coping mechanism for a lot of people.

Me: So you don't like black history month?

Nahimana: See, well I actually love it, but it's irritating at the same time because like, you're embracing your history which we need to do, cause as I said before... a lot of black people don't know where they come from, we don't know our roots. So it's very important to be going over that stuff. But, I don't want to be in a classroom where let's say, [I'm the only black student in the room] and it's black history month and you just naturally feel like everyone's eyes are on you.

The students continued to discuss Black History Month for a bit, and then returned to interpreting the meaning of joking in this context:

Nahimana: I think a lot of people, when they make comments like that [referring to the Asian student's jokes], it's like me making black jokes. That doesn't make it OK for other people to do it. But for me it might just be a coping mechanism.

All of these pieces of conversation illuminate the below-the-surface emotions that indicate that Bellevue still has work to do to ensure that all residents feel welcome there. Any planner working with the beloved community in mind will need to find ways of identifying and attending to these emotions, as indicators of progress toward or regression from this community.
EMOTIONS OF WITHHOLDING LOVE

At the same time, planners will need to attend to the sub-surface emotions that drive people to resist beloved community in their neighborhood. The students spent some time trying to imagine the emotions of people who they felt divided from, explaining that they think people treat others poorly because of personal pain, fear of change, shifting identities, or insecurity about their position and life and the need to assert their importance. For example, Elizabeth shared the following experience that she said helped her to better empathize with older people and understand why they might act negatively toward her sometimes:

I know sometimes when we're working and the older people will get mad about the littlest thing and then you'll be like oh my God these old people are so annoying. Or if you're on the street and you see old people, like a guy, and you're like oh he's crazy, he's yelling at himself. Well whenever I went to my job shadow at the hospital I was shadowing a nurse who works on the neurology floor, so they were all stroke victims and they all had neurological deficits, it was mostly older people. And ... at different points I've been like, old people are annoying.... But when I was talking to some of these patients it really opened my eyes a little bit about why they could be showing these feelings. I know a guy who was getting over a stroke and he was actually getting a lot better, he was gaining full function again of his right or left side. And he was just saying how it was so frustrating, cause all his life, like he was a marine, and he was always a tough guy and he was so rough, and he was the guy to look for when his wife wanted to fix everything, he was always the fix-it guy. And then he said, when these things start to happen to you when you're older, you're so used to being healthy you start to deteriorate from the inside and you just don't know what to do. Because you're so used to living a certain way your whole life and it's frustrating. And I remember he was getting an attitude with a nurse in the morning and when we came back that day he was like, "I'm sorry for being rude earlier, it's just so frustrating and it's hard to deal with these things." ...And it really made me sad, to look at people and think, you used to be a whole person, just how we are every day, living our lives, doing whatever we want. And then as you get older certain things will affect you, like break you down. What I realized was when older people are like... When we're like "oh they're being crazy or oh they're being rude or they're just annoying," maybe it's just because they're experiencing something new. When I had that experience, I was like, maybe sometimes I need to be more tolerant of the fact that, just because someone's older doesn't mean that they're not going through changes, too. They're still experiencing new things happening in their lives.

Students in the 11th grade group similarly discussed the unseen histories that they imagine have a deep effect on older people, especially older people whom the students felt do not respect youth:
Linda: They've been through history. I mean, we've been through history too but their history's been...

Kamar: World wars...

Linda: Wars and stuff like that. Ours is just like, well there's a war right now but...

Kamar: Like, “oh my school had a bomb threat and so now I guess it gives me the right to be mean to everybody”...but meanwhile, the older person was probably in the war that they were in. It's not the fact that they're just trying to be mean to you, it's just the fact that that's just how they got set in their ways. Defending themselves all the time...Like, the Holocaust, like if you're wondering why a Holocaust victim is so mean, cause probably they don't trust the human race any more. Cause how on earth would you be able to be human and try to exterminate part of the human race because they don't have the blue eyes and blonde hair. ... So they went through all this stuff, so they feel like they have to defend themselves.... And the other side gets agitated and then argues back and it's just one big problem. And hopefully it doesn't lead to anything worse. But 9 times out of 10 it does. And the young person's in jail or the older person's being criticized by the public for scorning a young kid.

Linda: I just feel like, we haven't been though a lot of stuff. Like, what have we been through?

Jarrod: Nothing, really.

Linda: What we... Ok, I get that we haven't been through a lot, we haven't been through a war. I know my grandfather was, he didn't want to go to war but he was drafted because of his age and his ability. So he came back and he didn't want to put up with people's stuff. Because of everything he's been through. Like if you went through war, why would you want to go through someone being disrespectful to you?

Several students emphasized that sometimes fear of change gets in the way of building the beloved community. Residents who have lived in the neighborhood for a long time have trouble accepting people with certain characteristics (often related to race, family structure, or class, for example) in their community; resisting them rather than welcoming them and building the community with them. For example, Jeannine described how fear of change can exacerbate racism, adding that at some point people just need to decide to accept these changes.
Jeannine: I don’t think it’s sometimes even a race thing. I think it’s just sometimes a thing with the old people, that’s just how they grew up, [living in a racially mixed neighborhood] wasn’t a thing.

Lynn: Yeah if you’re stuck in your ways it’s hard to get out. Change is the hardest thing.

Jeannine: Yeah, cause they grew up in a time where blacks and whites were separate and the thing is, you’ve gotta realize, like you might be older, and like I said I think a lot of people have closed minds, but you’ve also gotta think that, the world is changing, look who’s our president, everything is changing...

Nahimana: Look who was our president...

Jeannine: You either have to accept it or you’re gonna sink. So I mean, it really means, it just depends on how you are as a person. Just accept it or don’t.

Another reason for one might withhold love or resist beloved community may be insecurity, or a need to establish a place of high status in the public eye rather than assume humility. In a discussion about the police, for instance, Tiffany described her interpretations of why they sometimes act too aggressively, suggesting that their aggression arises out of a need to feel more important. She said:

I’ve had good experiences with Bellevue cops, but I’ve noticed that sometimes they can become, um, aggressive, and I’m not gonna speak for them but it’s like they believe that Bellevue’s more than what it is. Like, they’ll treat it like it’s New York City like it’s really intense, but I do not leave Bellevue. Not saying they’re bad people, but I feel like they exaggerate.”

Students also reflected on their own resistance to creating community with certain people. For instance, one student described how distancing oneself from a group of people can create feelings of superiority or power:

Brian: [Discussing “weirdness”] It's just, doing abnormal things that we're kind of looking down upon. Like, that is really weird, why would you do that? And we're putting her in this position of Other, and sort of below us at that rate.

Leigh: Why do we create these categories of Other?

Student: Cause... we think if somebody doesn't look like us, we think it's like... it's not...
Student: It will make you feel more normal, like, oh I'm not like that.

Student: Oh yeah.

Student: Almost like setting standards so you can imagine yourself to be the standard or above it. So you wanna put things below you. So you cannot be down there.

Student: Yeah, you don't wanna... be part of.

These insights into why people withhold love for their neighbors are vital for making progress in healing community divisions in first suburbs and elsewhere. In discussing the black feminist love-politics alluded to in Chapter One, Nash describes Jordan as insisting "on analyzing both how the powerful 'treat so-called minority members of the body politic' and how political communities can organize around unlocking the connections between subjects.” She writes that "Jordan argues that the labor of unlocking the 'sacred possibility' among us comes from examining our own engagement with power, and locating ways to remove ourselves from its seductive hold.” Ultimate, Nash suggests that “the public sphere can be a site of redressing the ‘spirit-murder’ of racism and sexism” that affect the spirits of those who see the world through racist or sexist lenses.

Overall, the conversation emphasized the fact that many important aspects of community life are not visible on the surface, especially to planners and leaders in positions of power. By focusing on what it would take to build beloved community, the conversation encouraged students to go below the surface, illuminating ways in which planners can be more attentive to the immaterial aspects of planning.

Finding II. Planning for beloved community illuminates new, often more radical opportunities for planning intervention.

In the beloved community, care and love will replace discipline and rigidity, and this vision was reflected in several of the students’ comments. The student planning conversation focused on building beloved community did not overlook typical planning concerns—as mentioned, the students emphasized the importance of affordability, good transit, and walkability in creating the conditions necessary for sustaining a diverse and inclusive community. Students also talked about the need for a stronger local economy and business district. Clearly economic development is important for building the beloved community.

These typical planning concerns occupied a small portion of the conversation, though, compared to other concerns that students vocalized. As discussed previously, students spent much time discussing the intangible emotion that emerges when they encounter racism, sexism. or other prejudices, suggesting to planners that whatever strategies we create will have to seriously confront the ongoing dehumanization of many people in our communities, a confrontation that must go beyond the material
provision or redistribution of goods.

Resisting dehumanization will require deep care, and perhaps refusal of superficial redistribution that does little to restore one’s humanity in the community. Resisting dehumanization will require planners to engage in a different type of negotiation—one that does not see the acceptability of affordable housing merely in terms of a threshold of units in a mixed use development, but in terms of whether the proposal creates the opportunity for long-term personal and cultural development of the people who live in those affordable units.

Beloved community will also not be confined to the borders we have constructed to keep some people in and others out. Students pointed this out during our conversation, noting that the school wants to attract some groups of people but not others. For example, at one point in the conversation when the students were describing positive attributes of Bellevue and Northgate, I asked them why outsiders did not see this; why many people had a negative perception of the town and school that led them to move away. Shawn immediately responded:

See I disagree. More people will want to bring their kids in but because Northgate’s so small and they don’t let outsiders come... You see a lot of people coming here for a couple months and then they have to leave because the school finds out they don’t actually live here. But those are the people who come to school every day because the school they go to in the city is so bad and they’re getting bullied and they’re getting picked on and the education is just horrific, whereas in Northgate...(trails off)

When Shawn said this, I realized that the people I was talking about, the people who most often came up in interviews described in Chapter Three as wanting to leave because of negative perceptions of the school, were the people I more closely identify with: families with comfortable incomes, long-term Bellevue homeowners, more likely to be white, with more highly educated parents. The people Shawn described were people whose situation he could understand from his own experience, the people who are often not as welcomed in Bellevue, the people whose place of residency in the city bars them from achieving a sense of belonging in Northgate. From the point of view of Shawn, it makes no sense to bar one set of people from better education almost within reach, while actively trying to attract a different group of people.

Students planning for the beloved community also posed the challenge that we must rethink our disciplinary institutions, such as policing. Immense formalized, government-funded effort is invested into monitoring for misbehavior while few resources are directed toward serious and active love at the community level. At several points in the conversation, Shawn alluded to a vision in which the institution of policing is transformed into an institution of love and care. He used the word “police” as a verb twice in the conversation, and each time he redefined it from being penalizing and disciplinary to being caring and relationship-building. The first time he used the word was during a conversation about the need to
speak up about racist remarks. He said, “If you police that and you say something, I feel like it makes a huge difference.” The second time he used the word in a discussion about how people learn to reach out and get to know others, without seeing perceived differences as a barrier. He said that elementary school is where students should be focusing on learning this, but that students should not stop focusing on reaching out to people once they reach high school. He continued, “When you come up here [to high school], you still have to police it the same way you did in middle school. It’s just you have to talk to them in a different type of way.” In these two brief instances, Shawn proposes a new vision for safety: policing (or other) institutions that pro-actively aim to reduce isolation and community fracturing; policing based on the assumption that people need care, not discipline.

In addition, the conversations about structural disruption of beloved community described above illuminated opportunities for intervention that are not necessarily on the radar of planners. For instance, the students highlighted the need for planners to care about stories and histories. To respond to lost histories, planners could organize local history projects in which residents do research and conduct interviews to illuminate some of the town’s lost history, especially the histories of minority residents. Planners could also create media interventions that challenge the single story, or financial interventions that allow for more care rather than less, or educational advocacy that calls for elimination or drastic revision of the standardized testing that values some types of knowledge over others and as a result stratifies schools and students.

Planners with an eye on the beloved community should build upon the community’s assets as well. For instance, in addition to trying to maintain affordability and good transit that allows for a diversity of residents, what could planners to do ensure that Bellevue continues to resist class consciousness and materialism, something it seems to do well compared to neighboring city and suburban neighborhoods? How could it provide more opportunities for residents to develop relationship and accountability across race and class? These types of interventions are outside of the realm of typical planning, and in fact may sometimes be at odds with typical economic development goals. Planners have given little attention to resisting materialism, and as homes get bigger, TVs keep people indoors, and “keeping up with the Jones’s” causes envy among neighbors, what have we really gained? If planners take seriously the notion of beloved community, they will need to be creating strategies for resisting consumerism even as they aim to increase material resources available to residents.

Finding III. Planning for beloved community challenges planners to become more vulnerable and open to relationship in their community engagement practices.

As discussed in Chapter One, the literature on community engagement often places emphasis on the planner’s ability to intellectually connect with residents through deliberation, perhaps with some emotional connection to particular ideologies, politics, or visions. The students did emphasize the importance of listening and deliberation across social differences, but they also suggested that genuine
relationship between community leaders and more marginalized residents is also necessary. This relationship must go beyond material or intellectual transaction, and into a space of emotional connectedness and vulnerability.

When we began to discuss ways of connecting across difference, students emphasized the importance of ensuring that residents have a chance to hear each other’s voices and motivations, and that this will chip away at stereotypes and prejudices. For instance, many students referred to the conversation we had as facilitating a deeper understanding of one another, and suggested that these types of conversations be held more frequently in the community. Shawn, for example, noted that he feels comfortable in places where he can be heard, in part because this gives him the time to prove who he is to people who might judge him at first glance:

I’m legit comfortable anywhere I’m able to talk. Which is almost anywhere. Because I’m such a nice person and such a respectful person that if I’m able to talk, and somebody’s gonna listen, I know that I’m gonna put a smile on someone’s face. And it’s like the people who hate me are the people who think they can control me and that’s the dumbest mistake you can ever do. Cause I will never do anything unless I want to. Like I don’t drink, I don’t smoke. Like if I go to a party I won’t drink or smoke. Because I don’t need to. And if someone’s gonna tell me to smoke I’m like, get away from me. So anywhere I’m able to talk, I feel comfortable.

In one conversation about differences in how older and younger people wear clothing, and how older people get upset when they see young people sagging their pants or wearing their hats indoors, Kamar suggested that opportunities to explore these differences would be helpful:

Kamar: So the younger people don’t understand why they’re telling them to do that, and the older people get mad and they conflict with each other still. Young people see older people like, hey, why don’t you have your pants sagging? Why aren’t you wearing this Gucci t-shirt? Or why is your hat off in the building?... So they don’t really understand it. And the older people do. Even if it’s not what the older people believe in, it’s just right to do. So why not do it.

Leigh: How would you bridge those groups of people, if they don’t even understand why the other one’s upset?

Kamar: Try to, even like how we’re sitting in this circle... You could have two older people on the other side and have younger people on the other side and just have them talk about it. So they could understand why.
Shawn, too, noted the importance of having opportunities to better understand "why," the motivations behind people’s behaviors. He said that too often teachers dismiss students who do not behave as they desire, rather than trying to understand them more deeply. He, too, pointed out the need for people to ask "why":

[There are] kids who might not seem like they're a leader in class, but they're not in trouble, but they're not doing good, so why? There was a kid last year in our 8th period...The teacher would ask him, “do you feel like working today?” “Nooo... Not today.” And she’s like, “Oh, do you want to read this?” “No... not today.” And it’s like, do we ever wonder why?

The proposed intervention may be simple – creating spaces for engagement – but students emphasized that the quality of this engagement is vital. They wanted the engagement to be deep, a step toward authentic relationship rather than a service exchange or spatial interaction that does not lead to emotional or spiritual interaction. For example, Tiffany and Nahimana explain that there is a difference between being in the same room and actually spending time getting to know someone:

Tiffany: Yeah, like in a soup kitchen, you’re giving them something but you’re not exactly interacting with them. So there’s a difference between giving a person food and sitting down and talking with them while they eat.

Nahimana: So in this situation you're giving all of us a voice, whereas, we can feel like I can tell this woman exactly how I feel and she's not gonna judge me, she's gonna use it to try to make things better. I feel like as a community we need to start listening to others and not just judging them by their age, like OK they don't know anything. Like back to the old and the young thing, sometimes older people won't listen to us and they think oh we don't know anything, we're a different generation. But then as kids, sometimes we don't listen to them because we're like, oh they're old they have no clue what they're talking about. I feel like, events are cool and that's important but there's also that gap. Whereas we're not interacting, we're not listening, we're not embracing what they have to say. Bringing the community closer together so we won't have that separation.

Students noted that these opportunities for building deeper relationship are rare, and that many typical community engagement events are too brief or too unidirectional. For instance, students commented on the difference between open council meetings and deeper engagement, suggesting that local opportunities for residents to engage with decision-makers fall short if residents do not feel listened to or confident that their words will lead toward action:
Natalie: This is kinda stupid, but have you ever watched Parks and Rec, and they have these community council meetings and maybe if you put that out to the public and said what do you have a problem with, and I have a problem with kids in my backyard or my church isn't getting any funds and then you really listen and make something happen. And what she just said, something to talk about, to see how you feel and how something could be greater than what it was before.

Leigh: Well actually Bellevue's Council does have open meetings that the public can attend...

Shawn: But, it's like, you really don't feel like the kids will be heard, that's why I don't even... Cause what's the point?

Student: They just give you that look...

Shawn: You're just going around the older community who, they have their set standards so as kids, what can you say?

In fact, Lynn continued by suggesting that it is the presence of deeper relationship between people that actually leads to lasting personal and community change. In the absence of this relationship, community leaders will make the decisions that they want to make regardless of the input of others.

Lynn: I think that, just when [the old superintendent] was... when they were cutting teachers and all of the parents went to the school board and said, “don’t cut these teachers,” they still cut them. Cause there wasn’t any personal interaction between them. There has to be a connection between people or they won’t listen. Because if a person doesn’t want to change, or even if the community doesn’t want to change, it won’t change. There has to be that want or desire to think different.

This comment questions more deeply the nature of the planner’s relationship with other residents. It suggests that the planner’s role must go beyond listener and synthesizer to connector and relator if the planner is to be able to truly understand and care about residents’ wishes. In Lynn’s conception, the planner is not merely a processor of information, but one who is vulnerable to emotional connection other residents. This in some sense topples the hierarchy of planner and resident, reshuffling them together into a mix of caring neighbors with various roles who together are trying to achieve better community.

One of the clearest examples of positive engagement across difference was Shawn’s description of interacting with a boy with autism. Shawn described how he “didn’t see anything wrong with him,” just
played with him like he would with anyone else, and this deep acceptance of the boy allowed them to connect on a level that many others have trouble reaching:

Shawn: I think the biggest... I get emotional every time I talk about this. I work at K-mart and it was around Christmas time, and I was ... on my 30 minute break. And as I'm walking to the back there was this kid with a light saber and he threw one at me. And we were going at it. I was sitting there attacking him...I was a child, I felt challenged, so I'm like, “Me and you gonna fight!” And so after that his mom walks up to me and she was like, “That's so nice of you.” And I was like, “Ma'am, what?” And she was like, “Do you not know? He's autistic....he's not personable, he doesn't talk to anybody, what did you say to him?” I was like, “I literally didn't say anything.” And she was like, “He's never opened up like that.” I spent my entire break playing with this kid and I didn't even think anything of it. She's like, “We need more people like you.” And I'm just like, “Ma'am, that was just me being a kid.” I didn't see that he was autistic, didn't see anything wrong with him. I just seen the light saber coming at me and I'm like, this kid's about to get it!

Ultimately, the students' comments challenge planners to move from a community engagement mentality to a genuine desire for relationship across difference. Community engagement is not a series of isolated events, in which planners gather information, but may require a deeper commitment to place and people, a desire to see the place grow and to contribute to this growth in collaboration with all types of residents. Shawn noted that this will indeed require us to step out of our comfort zones:

Shawn: People need to get out of their comfort zone.

Leigh: What does that mean in practice, get out of their comfort zone?

Shawn: So, it's natural, like you're gonna be there for your friends. If anything happens with your close friends, you're gonna always be there. But not... like if you hear something that happened in school you might just push it off because you might not be close to that person. You might just be like, “oh I heard this” and then you just move on from it. Getting out of your comfort zone is like, checking up on something. Like there was a girl who had surgery, and she always walks with a knee brace on .... I personally reached out to her and was like, “oh how're you doing?” Me and her aren't close but it's just like, just seeing that, you know how it is being in the hospital. So it's like getting out of my comfort zone of like, I don't know this person personally but I can at least just see how she's doing. That's probably what I mean. Just doing something not normal for you. Like, opening up, like if I ask somebody, “how's everything going.” it's not really gonna affect my day for thirty minutes or so.
Perhaps that is agape love in a nutshell. Shawn distinguished this active public love from philia and the love of close friends. Whereas it is natural to be there for friends, agape love requires stepping out of our comfort zones, reaching out to unfamiliar people, "checking up," "doing something not normal for you," and ultimately "opening up." It is about seeing people, refusing to just "move on," and acknowledging their inherent value.

Of course, for a planner, Shawn's charge to step out of our comfort zones blurs the line between work and personal life. It may ultimately put more pressure on professional planners to put in the work, even outside of our jobs, necessary for developing deeper senses of care and relationship that are beyond our typical social circles. Allowing love for people and place to enter our careers is always dangerous—it means that work does not fit neatly between the hours of nine to five and it creates attachment that exposes us to the risk of pain. That said, allowing deep relationship to replace the notion of community engagement may open up opportunities for planners who, in deep relation with their communities, can contribute to more transformative change; change that, in the absence of love, may not otherwise be possible.

Finding IV: Planning for beloved community challenges traditional notions of who can be planner.

My final major finding from holding planning workshops focused on bridging social divides is that these conversations upended dominant notions of who can do community planning. Our educational and career pathways produce planners who have been able to navigate academic norms and obtain and display the knowledge that these norms prescribe; which often does not include the knowledge that many people deem valuable (as discussed in several of Kamar's comments above). I do not mean to denigrate the good qualities of this academic and career system—indeed, higher education and the opportunity to learn from experienced theoreticians and practitioners is a blessing to many of us and produces well-prepared planners. Nonetheless, in its current state, it leaves many behind, and in doing so excludes from professional society many skills and experiences that will be necessary for building the beloved community.

The students demonstrated many capacities that would prove beneficial in building beloved community. They demonstrated their capacity for empathy, expressed nuanced understanding of relationships across difference, were comfortable discussing these differences, and articulated explicit commitment to bridging community divisions. As noted above, Shawn shared his ongoing commitment to forming relationships with students with special needs. White students vocalized their desire to support black friends, as Elizabeth explains below:

Elizabeth: I think that, and I don't at all want to sound like wrong when I say this, but I think, as a white woman, the only thing that you can do... Obviously I'm not black, I've not experienced racism. I have friends that are black and a boyfriend that's black... but I don't think anyone will
ever be able to fully understand, or I don't think I'll ever be able to fully empathize with you. But I think that as a support system... all you can do is support people. And try to be as supportive as you can, and be there for other people in the cause and understand that they have their own things that they're going through and I can never fully sit here and say, yeah I've experienced racism too.

Lynn: ...Yeah, we can't say we've experienced racism before. I mean I might have been bullied before but that's different than racism, there's just different levels to it.

Elizabeth: Yeah, I just think you need to understand at some point that I've not been through what any of you've been through, I'm not gonna be through any of the things you're gonna experience or you have experienced or your parents have experienced. And that's ok, I'm not going to be able to change my own history and I'm proud of who I am and I love who I am, but that doesn't mean that I can go around throwing around the n word. But I think it's important to support each other.

Commitment to love and relationship is not always valued in a world of individual competitiveness. Even those who do value it often underestimate its importance, or underestimate other people's commitment to it. For example, the students described their recent nomination of a student with special needs for the Homecoming Court, indicating their ability to value many social qualities in this high school measure of "popularity." In this case, though, the students said that teachers assumed that her nomination was a joke and removed her name from the list of nominees.

The students noted that they are not often asked for their opinions about how to make Bellevue and the school better, but suggested that they would rise to the occasion if given some creativity and autonomy in neighborhood planning. For instance, when the conversation was ending on one of the days, Jeannine noted:

Student: I say we stay...

Student: Yeah we're into this now...

Jeannine: We never get to have this discussion, to get it off of our chest.

Leigh: Jeannine, why do you say that? That it's a good discussion to get it off of your chest?

Jeannine: I didn't really have anything I needed to get off my chest, but with topics like these... we only usually talk about them amongst each other. We don't really have a chance to have
somebody come here and be like, how do you feel about your school, how do you feel about the administration, how do you feel about the teachers. We always just talk about that amongst ourselves. But, I think it’s good to just get it all out there.

At the very end of the conversation, as I was thanking the students and wrapping up, Shawn resisted this closure, interjecting and challenging the group to turn our discussion into action. In response to his comment, the students started to think about how to organize their peers for community-building work:

Shawn: Like this has me thinking. Like this group. Of us. I feel like, we, if we would have done this at the beginning of the year, I feel like all of us would have been more... Like we would have tried to do more.

Student: Yeah like now I’m questioning...

Shawn: As I sitting here, I’m like, alright, so what am I gonna do when she leaves. Like, what can I do to change. But the answer is, nothing. Because I can’t. We graduate in less than two months. So it’s like, nothing really can be done. So if [the teacher who convened the students] were to have this at the beginning of the year, talk about, invite people for pizza, and have a sit down, and really ask, what’s wrong with Northgate. What can we improve? Even if he does it for seniors only, and he’s like, what can we improve, this year. And try to ...

Elizabeth: We can start with the younger generation...

Shawn: Right, well yeah, start with the senior class then do a...

S: Maybe sophomores...

Shawn: Right, even if you do five students from each class, and get them all together and be like, how do you feel about the school, how do you feel like the school. Cause each class is gonna give you a different answer. And be like, ok, well what can we all do to fix it. And it’s like, I will totally be down for it. And I’m pretty sure all of you guys... but now it’s like, we’re too late.

Shawn also emphasized that students contributing to school or neighborhood planning should include more of those who do not fit the typical academic mold. He said:
Shawn: And for me... All of you guys are good, got good grades, good... I'm like the oddball of you guys. So you have to have that diversity. I feel like we still are missing... like, it shouldn't be another National Honors Society or another student council. It should be like, kids who aren't...

Elizabeth: Anybody...

Shawn: Yeah, like kids who aren't, oh yeah, they're very good in school. But like, me. I'm respectable, I'm a good person, I don't get into trouble, I'm not in the office every day. So, you gotta have kids like that. Kids who might not seem like, oh they're a leader in class, but they're not in trouble, but they're not doing good, so why?

In fact, the conversation also made it clear that the students who have much experience with being left out of community, or marginalized from resources and acceptance in some way, are especially adept at noticing barriers to beloved community and committing to resisting these barriers in daily life. Shawn, for example, who throughout the conversation identified as being marginalized along multiple dimensions (primarily race, academic performance, and affiliation with the North Side) spoke often of his commitment to actively building beloved community, in large part because his own experiences of being looked down upon have heightened his awareness of the need to do so:

For me, I didn't need to read about it, I lived it. After 2015 when I got sick and I left school, dropping out, I took a reality check. I was in the hospital for two weeks. And I'll never forget, there was nobody who came. Besides like my mom and my sister. And there was like another person that came. But besides that nobody from Northgate had checked up on me. And I took that real personally. Because like when you think everyone's your friend, you're cool, and then when you're gone, it's just like uh whatever. They don't care.

...Then I decided to come back to school. And I think that was the most difficult. Because I knew that I would have to repeat my junior year, I would be 20 years old when I graduated. So it's like, dealing with that mental gap and like, how do you deal with being the oldest person and still being able to do it.

Later in the conversation, he added context about the difficulty of coming back to school: “You'd always hear teachers joke, like oh he's still here. And I take it personally. Yeah you know I'm still here. Congratulations, you get a joke out of it, that makes you big. It really annoyed me.”

Shawn continued, describing how it was these experiences that led to his own commitment to building beloved community by standing up for students being bullied, students with special needs, or people who look lonely, instances that he alluded to throughout the conversation. He said:
Everybody perceived me as oh this guy is just done. They wrote me off and it’s like, I’m still fighting. And nothing is going to stop me from reaching my goal. And that’s why I wouldn’t count anybody off. Because I’ve been through it, where everybody writes you off, where everybody thinks you’re just gonna stay the same person, nobody’s gonna care about you. So I’m not gonna be that person. No matter what, I got everybody’s back.

“No matter what, I got everybody’s back.” Can planners commit to that in our own work? Can we commit to stepping out of our comfort zones and into the possibility of having communal relationships that we never thought possible? Can we commit to planning spaces, interventions, and large-scale strategies that make it easier for individuals to get all, not just some, of their neighbors’ backs? Doing this might require courage, study, self-reflection, and the fostering of our own relational skills, and it most certainly will require steadfast gaze on the goal of beloved community.

As the discussions with students exhibited, people well suited to do this type of planning might not necessarily be those who are typically affirmed by our current academic institutions. In fact, the people most prepared to build beloved community may be those who have the experiences and knowledge that allow them to see clearly the gaps in community to which the rest of us are not as well attuned. Of course, many organizations, such as community organizing groups, know this, and seek employees with these skills or have dropped stringent academic requirements for jobs. Nonetheless, much of the burden of change must lie on our education system, starting with elementary school. As the interviewee noted in Chapter Three, school measurement systems reward only very narrowly defined types of intelligence, and in doing so hinder the growth and nurturing of some of the people who offer the most promise for contributing to building our beloved communities.

Observations on the facilitation guide

The several hours of analysis and planning with students uncovered insights and potential points of intervention not often discussed in the planning literature, or at least in the literature on the inner-ring suburbs. I attribute this to our steady and consistent focus on imagining how to generate social unity in Bellevue. The conversation focused on human relationship and connection, not on economic prosperity, academic achievement, or other such measures of success in today’s world. While the latter aims certainly have their place in the planning profession, they can blind us to, or even exacerbate, deeper spiritual and emotional ruptures that indicate a distortion of human relationship and community.

I do not think that the conversation would have been as rich if it were an open-ended conversation about what students like and dislike about Bellevue. The explicit focus of the conversation on relationship primed the group to view the goal as beloved community, allowing for what I believe was a more productive conversation with all of the students focused on one collective vision.
As discussed, I used the concept of Othering as a way to encourage students to identify the divisions in their communities. When these Others were identified, students then delved deeper into the emotions of being Othered and Othering, pondered the structural causes of Othering, and finally began to explore what active resistance to Othering would look like in Bellevue.

As I noted, resistance to Othering is merely one way of describing an aspect of active love. I chose to stay away from the word love in our discussions, because of the way in which the word is simultaneously loaded and diluted. It has too much meaning and too little meaning at the same time, and I wanted to keep our conversation focused on communal, not romantic, love, and on the action of love, not the reactive (though no less important) feeling of love. I would be interested, however, to try explicitly talking about love in future planning conversations; perhaps there was no need for me to use a different concept.

Critics of the concept of Othering note that it can diminish the harsh realities of racism and other oppression. This may be true, and in fact, only some of the students repeated the term Other in their descriptions; other students did not incorporate it into their language at all. Nonetheless, I think that Othering was effective in our conversation for seeding the concept of the absence of love between groups, and for identifying relationships to which much attention must be given. Students talked openly and frequently about racism, indicating that the use of Othering did not diminish their willingness to discuss it or the urgency of addressing it.

Furthermore, by introducing a general concept of dehumanization, rather than one specific form of oppression (such as racism), students were able to refer to their experiences of both resisting Othering as Other, and resisting Othering as the dominant group. For instance, black students spoke often of their experiences resisting racism, and they also spoke of their experiences resisting bullying. Thus, it seemed that the concept of Othering allowed students to see threads of similar struggle between groups, and relate to these struggles both as Other and ally.

Students were also able to access multiple dimensions of their own “Otherness.” For instance, students spoke about types of knowledge that they felt were marginalized, and, from my perspective, these conversations did not arise out of discussions of race, but rather when I asked students to reflect on varying dimensions of themselves that they felt were not respected or not welcomed in various settings.

Though the concept of Othering worked as an entry point in our conversations, it might not be useful in all settings. Thus, the responsibility lies on the facilitator to develop context-specific ways of talking about beloved community and human relationship that will focus conversation on community and collective actions of love and resisting dehumanization.
5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In large part, this thesis assumes an audience of planners and others in positions of relative power in their communities, and asks what planning might look like if they reciprocated the offering of agape love that the black South Carolina Convention attendees offered in 1865. This will be a serious commitment, one that will require much from planners, community leaders, and other residents. My research offers a small glimpse of how initial planning phases could begin to take this commitment seriously by directly focusing planning conversation on building beloved community and resisting the social divides that move us away from its realization.

My interviews with residents and the focus groups with high school students illuminated that in places like Bellevue a focus on strengthening relationship across social divides such as race or class can tangibly change how planners develop plans, opening possibilities for new interventions and challenging them to relate more directly and vulnerably with community residents. A focus on beloved community is not merely pleasant rhetoric, but, if taken seriously, will require planners to reach into realms not often considered in planning practice. This final chapter summarizes and expands upon the findings from my research and offers some recommendations for Bellevue as well as the planning profession at large.


**DISCUSSION**

Reframing success and preserving community assets

As Elizabeth mentioned, “I think it’s good to nourish the place you grew up in.... You never really realize until you start talking about it.” Civic engagement and contribution to community arises from a love of place, and recognizing our own love of place might take conversation and reframing. Certainly, my own affection for Bellevue grew and changed quite significantly through the interviews, focus groups, and analysis of this research.

A focus on resident relationships, especially relationships across race, class, mental ability, academic achievement, and other characteristics can help planners to reframe success in a way that is more likely illuminate the strengths of many communities. This is especially important in inner-ring suburbs like Bellevue that often struggle against negative reputations arising from economic vulnerability or low school performance, but that also have fostered many of the conditions that make it easy to build relationships across difference. Expressing explicit intent to build beloved community in the school and community will provide opportunities to highlight the cross-race and class relationship-building that these places are facilitating well.

Furthermore, highlighting the conditions that make places good at building relationships across difference will allow planners to attend to and preserve these conditions, rather than overlook them in the face of other planning aims. For instance, consolidation of local schools and other social services, while perhaps financially sound actions, may disrupt the conditions that foster the students’ tight knit community and ability to integrate new students into their groups. The focus group students described their school as a unique place compared to neighboring city or suburban schools; in part, its small size and the walkability of the neighborhood allow them to form community in and out of school in a way that they could not in other districts. Disruptions of this community for financial or other reasons should be considered with great care and concern for its potential to hinder beloved community aims.

In addition, by emphasizing and providing imagery to describe beloved community, planners can encourage some long-term residents to envision new ideas of community that depart from “the good old days” when community was relatively homogeneous and reorient them to new types of inclusive and loving communities. As Lorde and other black feminists have suggested, this will require much introspection and self-change; as Shawn suggested, it will require residents to step out of their ideological, physical, and social comfort zones. This process of change will not be easy, but by providing creative plans for new possibilities, planners can play a valuable role in inspiring this change. Ultimately, they can play a role in demonstrating that these changes are nothing to fear, but rather are exciting opportunities to practice love across social division.
Intervention to bridge divides

Of course, planning for beloved community must be more than words and better marketing—planners and residents must actively dismantle social hierarchies by reexamining and changing formal and informal practices from individual to institutional levels. As the focus groups with students illustrated, planning with beloved community in mind will orient planners to community-level interventions that make spaces for deeper connection, understanding, and attachment between people in oft-divided social groups. These interventions will begin to lay the groundwork for resisting the patterns of white flight and resegregation that plague so many inner-ring suburbs. They will also begin to address the immaterial needs of residents, focusing on building comfortable and safe communities for minority residents and on deconstructing fear and encouraging compassion from longer-term residents who are resistant to lower-income or racial minority newcomers.

These interventions are in some regard simple; as Kamar and others suggested, sometimes mere conversation is needed, a chance for residents to understand why other residents behave as they do. On the other hand, in many regards these interventions are not at all simple and will require high-quality facilitation, an environment in which different people feel comfortable and able to speak, and outreach that will attract diverse and interested participants. Regardless, these interventions are not insignificant; as Thurman noted, “if such unifying experiences can be multiplied over an extended time, they will be able to restructure the fabric of the social context.”

In part, these opportunities can create experiences that will help residents to question their assumptions about other people, and to develop the intellectual muscles that we all need to confront our own biases. For example, in Chapter Three, one interviewee suggested that though communities aim to be “walkable” with lively main streets, residents tend to prefer some walkers over others. Some residents may dislike seeing youth walking too much on the streets, and this perspective in many cases is likely motivated by racial biases or assumptions of behavioral norms. Residents who commit to building beloved community can train themselves to notice these distancing feelings, actively resist them, and then reach out for authentic relationship before expecting others to conform to their expectations. As Lorde describes, residents of beloved community will need to “[name] that fear, and actively [labor] to topple it.” Or, as Jordon suggests, we will need to “gain and gain and gain in strength so that I may without fear be able and willing to love and respect” people who are different than us.

Reaching into unfamiliar or uncomfortable realms

Planning for beloved community may also require planners to reach into realms that are unfamiliar to the planning profession. For example, the focus groups suggested that Bellevue students can build close relationships across race and easily accept newcomers in part because of the low levels of materialism and class consciousness among these students relative to the neighboring city and suburb. This is consistent with the philosophies of many civil rights leaders, who rejected consumerism and
assimilation into white material culture and taught that this materialism would not foster beloved community.

If this is the case, what would it mean for planners to care about resisting consumer culture? What new types of strategies would planners need to develop to ensure that economic development does not ruin one of the major conditions that allows people to relate across difference?

Similarly, we might ask planners to also consider other odd planning tasks, such as developing local histories and stories. On the one hand, this will begin to address the concern that some residents have lost their history through slavery or other oppression, as Nahimana described. Local history projects can also create opportunities for people like Kamar to share knowledge that is often undervalued, a start to toppling knowledge hierarchies. Planners can play a role in creating spaces in which marginalized groups can build the Truth Power described in the Freedom School curriculum, opening other residents’ eyes to look beyond the single story and into their deep humanity. In addition, engaging in local history projects can expose residents to inspiring stories of freedom that are not always taught in schools (but that may be passed down in family story-telling), sparking imagination around the utopias of black feminists and others who have had to struggle to articulate visions of freedom in places where they are not free.

Planning for beloved community will require that planners be brave in their attempts to push back against institutions and systems that, in their current form, ultimately may obstruct opportunities for creating strong relationships across difference. For example, the students I spoke with challenged Bellevue leaders to seriously consider rethinking local policing practices, or redefining school district boundaries that exclude students who seek a better education but are denied it due to their place of residency.

**Love as a challenge to the constraints of realism**

The ideas to reject borders and restructure policing sprung out of conversations of beloved community, making it clear that actions often deemed too radical or unrealistic are often those that arise out of intense consideration of love and human relationship. The challenge to rethink policing or exclusionary practices is not born from particular anti-establishment ideologies, but rather from taking seriously the radical teachings of philosophers, social and religious leaders, and others who do not let current social norms and legal rules obscure their dearest values.

I would argue, too, that our “realistic” or “practical” planning interventions are limited in their ability to effect transformative social change. Realism does not always stand up for the poor and disenfranchised, realism is not what seeded international civil rights movements or the most influential religions and spiritual movements. David Roediger, discussing the general strike of enslaved people that led to emancipation, wrote that slaves, deemed property, were valued at $82 billion in today’s currency, and “equal to the combined value of all capital invested in manufacturing, railroads, and banks, as well as all currency in circulation and all federal expenditures” (Roediger, 2014). To take away that amount of
wealth from property owners is nearly inconceivable, an immense economic upheaval, and certainly unrealistic. We are much indebted to the people who refused to let practicalities limit their dreams.

A new identity for planners

Planning for beloved community in many ways will upset the identity of the planner. As planning professionals, we are rarely asked to love our neighbors, to reach out to other residents as members of our own beloved community. Planning for beloved community will be different, and will require openness to the possibility of relationship with residents from different backgrounds and different educations, a commitment to practicing agape love with no expectations that these residents change, and a willingness to be personally transformed as we are in other relationships. Ultimately, this demands from planners a level of vulnerability not often required from community leaders and “professionals.”

Students in the focus groups suggested that this relationship between planners and other residents is necessary if planners are to make equitable decisions. As Lynn said, “there has to be a connection between people or they won’t listen,” suggesting that planners, like anyone, listen most to those with whom they are in relationship. In part this may be because knowing someone gives us the context and understanding necessary for interpreting their words and hearing their meaning. It may also be because, whether we intend to or not, our decisions are in large part affected by those to whom we feel accountable. Lynn suggested that it is this emotional bond that sparks a desire to think differently; other students noted the importance of being in close relationship with students of other races or mental ability to generate the discipline and desire to speak up for marginalized group.

Furthermore, it became clear that it is relationship, not discipline or an expectation of conformity, that poses the greatest likelihood of success for generating civic engagement. As one interviewee said, if “we don’t give youth the freedom to think ... then they’re just going to be unengaged students.” And as Shawn said, “the people who hate me are the people who think they can control me,” whereas if “somebody’s gonna listen, I know that I’m gonna put a smile on someone’s face.” Thus love becomes not only powerful in generating creative plans, but also as a driver of active democracy.

Thus, planning for beloved community requires planners to engage in relationships with various groups of residents across social divides to widen our realms of accountability, so that we, too, will be able to say as Shawn did, “no matter what, I got everybody’s back.” This planner-resident relationship goes beyond deliberation or diplomacy and calls for planners to look at community engagement as a process of authentic relationship building that necessarily generates emotional attachment. Of course, the social capacity of an individual planner is limited, but illuminating the need for this emotional work in the planning profession will better ensure that this work is well-distributed among practitioners and integrated into planning processes.

Drawing attention to the importance of relational work in planning will serve to some extent to redefine the qualifications of planners. The students I spoke with were quite adept at beginning to imagine strategy for building beloved community, suggesting that they could play a role in local planning,
especially in small towns like Bellevue with little formal planning capacity. Furthermore, the conversations showed that students who identified with being excluded from mainstream community in some way were very skilled at analyzing the quality of local relationships and actively resisting social divide. Though their skills may not be valued in current educational and career pathways, it seems that there are many ways in which they could contribute to the planning field.

Love as the soil for new futures

For Audre Lorde (as interpreted by Nash), love is the work that orients us toward “a future that is not yet here but is unfolding.” In practicing agape love, people with vastly different experiences can join together to create new visions for community and social relations. Love, and the resistance of “all that divides and separates,” is what Elizabeth is motivated to practice through accountability, friendship, and the anger it sparks, or what Shawn is able to practice from a place of understanding, empathy, and a sense of brotherliness. The commitment to love is where they join and build from common ground.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The major recommendation I urge planners to consider is a reorientation of their practice and planning aims toward beloved community; a somewhat abstract recommendation but one that I argue will have tangible impact. Here I present several recommendations to make this more concrete, first recommendations for Bellevue and then for the planning field at large.

Recommendations for Bellevue

Residents attuned to building relationship across some of the social divides that exist in Bellevue will generate many creative strategies. However, I did glean insights from my research from which I can draw some recommendations for beloved community planning in Bellevue.

In many places, including Bellevue, I believe that youth would be well suited to lead relational work. As discussed in Chapter Four, the youth leading this work should not be “just another National Honors Society.” In fact, students who do not fit into the academic structure of public schools, who are very perceptive of social divides and creative about how to resist them, and who are emotionally fueled to create more just communities, may be best suited for thought leadership in this realm. It is important to note that nearly all of the students in my focus groups currently have paying jobs that consume much of their spare time; perhaps if paid planning work were available some of them would be interested in pursuing that as their local job.

A group of youth committed to building beloved community in Bellevue could develop many local interventions; I have listed some that came to my mind over the course of this research in Figure 7, many of which I have alluded to elsewhere throughout this thesis. For instance, these youth could develop facilitation skills and run their own beloved community conversations or develop programs that involve
residents who do not often have the opportunity to interact in a meaningful way. Youth could plan events that actively welcome newcomers to Bellevue, making intentional effort to reach out to and welcome youth from the North Side or mentally ill residents, for instance. The students could also begin to think about politics on a larger scale by getting involved in education advocacy that addresses some of the measurement and financing systems that exacerbate social hierarchies. They might also get involved in local politics, perhaps evaluating the impact of local decisions on relationships across difference.

Youth and other residents could also lead community visioning processes that encourage residents to move beyond nostalgia for the good old days and toward an eagerness for learning how to build communities we never previously imagined. This visioning process would ask, as Nash does, “how a radical ethic of care...can form the basis of a public." As many of the students noted, changes are scary at first, but visioning processes can help to quell that fear and replace negative images with positive ones. Ultimately, residents will have to allow themselves to become vulnerable to new relationships and cultures, and when this happens residents may start to experience a type of love across social divides that has been so absent from our society. With that new love in existence at mass scale, what might become possible?

Indeed, the challenges of many small communities like Bellevue are at the mercy of larger structural forces and it may be unfair to put the burden of radical change on these places. Again, though, I suggest that orienting local action toward these more radical, love- and relationship-based changes will ultimately not be a burden on these towns but will attune them to more creative possibilities that may better address challenges they face.

Bellevue is a small place, and not likely to be majorly instrumental in catalyzing the massive political, economic, and cultural upheavals necessary for creating the national and global conditions for sustained and widespread beloved community. Nonetheless, it is a place that is in prime position for experimenting with community-building in a way that many other places cannot. Furthermore, these small-scale and care-laden efforts to create new ways of being in communion with our neighbors are far from insignificant, but can provide much needed inspiration and proof that new social arrangements can be nourished and built even in the midst of much social division and chaos at national and global scales.
Figure 7: Recommendations for activities (potentially to be developed and led by youth) to begin the intentional work of building beloved community across social divides in Bellevue.

**Recommendations for the planning field**

Committing to the vision of beloved community will have to be a widespread action across multiple levels of the planning and community development fields. One committed person in a community—one mayor, planner, or city council member, for instance—could not proceed easily without the support of peers and resulting institutional changes, especially since this vision may require deviation from traditional planning strategy. Committing to this vision is also something that can be done informally or outside of government and community development organizations, such as in churches, activist organizations, student groups, artists collectives, or local business districts.

To some extent, committing to the vision of beloved community will require a leap of faith; at the very least it will require social pressure and organizational change. I believe there are several specific ways in which planning professionals and students can contribute to building this movement toward beloved community, making it easier for the field to identify the value of taking love seriously.

I. **Hold Beloved Community Planning Workshops Sessions at Local Levels**

Planners could begin to elicit ideas for interventions to achieve equitable, beloved communities by holding local workshops that resemble the focus groups I conducted with high school students. While many interventions will be context specific, I imagine that consistent themes will emerge that can inform
large-scale intervention across localities. Furthermore, these spaces could evolve into places for more meaningful interaction between residents across social divides.

II. DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR RESISTING MATERIALISM AND CONSUMERISM

I imagine that one of the themes that emerges as consistent across localities is the need to resist materialism and consumer culture. Developing practical strategies to resist materialism will be a new challenge for a planning field often concerned with how to better distribute material resources across communities and residents.

Planning that facilitates relationship may itself be one approach to resisting materialism. As several students described, it is their sense of togetherness, close-knit community, and the humility of “everyday people,” that create the conditions in which they feel little desire for brand-name clothing or expensive things. If love fills a void otherwise bandaged with consumption, perhaps it has a central role to play in combating the environmental degradation and climate change that have yet to be adequately addressed by technology or policy.

III. ATTEND TO THE IMMATERIAL REALM TO FIND THE SPACE OF YEARNING

bell hooks wrote of “yearning” as an emotion that “opens up the possibility of common ground where all these differences might meet and engage one another.” June Jordan imagines a “public rooted in affiliation and a shared set of feelings.” To build toward beloved community, planners will need to be attuned the emotions of the public, helping communities to articulate and attend to what they yearn for and supporting people’s journeys across wide divides to a shared sense of feeling.

Thus planners might embark on a journey to understand what Nash describes as “affective politics,” which “describe how bodies are organized around intensities, longings, desires, temporalities, repulsions, curiosities, fatigues, optimism, and how these affects produce political movements (or sometimes inertias).” As the students I spoke with noted, some of the prejudices and actions that foster divide might arise from personal pain, fear of change, shifting identities, or insecurity. What must be done to find and elevate the yearning within these emotions to encourage people to travel to an emotional state from which they can begin to imagine beloved community? And what can planners do to respond to the sometimes invisible anger, discomfort, and pain of those on the receiving end of these prejudices, and to be inspired by their strength, perceptiveness, and commitment to building beloved community?

IV. ILLUMINATE THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF PLANNING PRACTICES ON RELATIONSHIP ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Planners could help make the case for beloved community planning by evaluating policies and interventions to illuminate how these practices might facilitate or disrupt relationships across race and class. At the very least, this may encourage planners and policy makers to consider the potential effects of their work on an aspect of community not often formally highlighted. Similar work would be beneficial
outside of planning fields as well; for example, relationship could be used as guidance in designing education policy, classroom technology, curricula, or teaching technique.

V. USE FICTION, FILM, OR OTHER MEDIA TO CREATE ALTERNATIVE FUTURES DEPICTING BELOVED COMMUNITY

Part of the difficulty of convincing community planning leaders that focusing on beloved community will have worthwhile and tangible outcomes is that we are limited in our abilities to imagine what truly welcoming and inclusive communities look and feel like. Our deep immersion in current social hierarchies makes it difficult to imagine new social orders that are radically inclusive and loving. Those who do feel included in mainstream society are often unaware of the jarring pain of social hierarchies, and many people think that these hierarchies are a ‘natural’ state of society and that investing valuable resources in fighting against them will be fruitless. Even among people who do feel marginalized in their community, I have noticed that there are often many people who take their condition as a given, with little hope of change.

Planners who hope to focus on beloved community and relationship across divide will need help sparking the creativity necessary for allowing us to see beyond current limitations. We will need more examples, real or fictional, of communities that practice love at the public scale. For example, take the case of Geel, Belgium, where residents welcome mentally ill people into their community and homes with open arms. This approach is a striking contrast to the much more common community practice of protesting the local establishment of new mental health clinics. Elevating cases like Geel or proposing short stories or visual images of people in relationships that rarely occur in many societies would jolt us into new ways of picturing our neighborhoods. Such media would be especially useful in convincing other planners, community leaders, and residents to support investment in relational planning strategies.

VI. MOVE LIBERATORY HISTORIES TO THE FOREFRONT OF PLANNING EDUCATION

To develop the capacity to imagine beloved community and practical tactics for achieving it, planners will need to learn from histories of people who have sacrificed energy, resources, and often their own lives aiming for this community. Planning education often focuses on technical physical planners or social scientists, but the people who have been planning for beloved community are not always in those fields. They are the liberation theologians, the black civil rights leaders, the love-politics feminists, the organizers and activists who focus on resisting dehumanization and healing the deep wounds that our social divides inflict on our communities.

Though I have only touched the surface when it comes to reading the histories alluded to in the introduction of this thesis, these leaders have reshaped my own personal orientation toward planning. And when I am told that a focus on beloved community is unrealistic or unproductive for the planning profession, reading their stories and philosophies reinforces to me over and over again that, on the contrary, these visions have great power for creating a new reality.
CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to provide a small contribution to generating evidence that a focus on beloved community will have unique impact on the planning profession and will illuminate strategies that differ from and fill gaps in current practice. Committing to this vision will require much from planners—a commitment to understanding our own biases and deepest values, a vulnerability to relationships outside of our comfort zones, and the courage to propose radical interventions that seem naïve or unrealistic.

Is it worth this effort? Howard Thurman, helping us imagine what we might achieve if we put in this work of love, writes that when community boundaries give way to “unknown and undiscovered brothers,” the “wisest among them will say”:

What we have sought we have found, our own sense of identity. We have established a center out of which at last we can function and relate to other men. We have committed to heart and to nervous system a feeling of belonging and our spirits are no longer isolated and afraid (Thurman, 1971).

Whether in Bellevue or the great world metropolises, that is a feeling worth planning for.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A: “OTHERING” AS AN ENTRY POINT FOR DISCUSSING ACTIVE LOVE

The concept of active, public love can be abstract, or conflated with familial or romantic love; thus I searched for a more focused concept for introducing the idea of neighborly love across social divides. I looked for a simple concept that forces us to think deeply about the nature of relationships, using our own experiences and perceptions to reflect on the differential value that is afforded to various groups. Such a concept would require planners to think about social hierarchies, as well as to position themselves within various relationships, rather than detachedly and abstractly making judgements about what is “good relationship.”

Furthermore, I wanted a concept that allows planners to consider many types of relationships, not just relationships between races, or relationships between residents with various incomes, thus resisting a static concept of relationship that reduces individuals to singular group identities. History shows us that a myopic focus on lifting up single groups can lead to intra-group marginalization. Feminism and racial justice alone do not address the problem of white women or black men attempting to silence black women, for instance.

Throughout the course of reading, interviewing, and spending time in Bellevue and McKees Rocks, I found myself returning to the concept of Othering as useful for evaluating relationship. Several interviewees spoke about “us versus them” divides, and the notion of the Other seemed to aptly capture this relational distance between people. Here I provide an overview of the concept of Othering and discuss its use in practice in the field of nursing as a model for how it might be used in planning practice.

“Othering” in Theory

THE OTHER

The concept of the Other has a long history in philosophy, psychology, and critical and cultural studies, and is a foundational concept for understanding relationships. As far back as the early 1800s, Hegel wrote about the construction of the Other as necessary for understanding oneself; in other words, we define our own attributes in contrast to differing characteristics of other people (Berenson, 1982).

By definition, the concept of Other exists because of the human tendency to group people, often by readily apparent identifiers such as gender, race, physical or mental ability, or sexuality. Humans are natural categorizers; engaging in life and making decisions would be nearly impossible without using groups as shortcuts for trying to better understand people and events. Often recognition of various identity groups provides some baseline assumptions that often help us to engage with and better understand people who we perceive as different from us in some way. For example, recognition of someone’s race as different from our own allows us to better appreciate differences in how perspectives
and experiences have been shaped by differential treatment of racial groups throughout history.

 Acknowledgement of differences between groups of people becomes dangerous when they become the basis of subordination. Here I use the word Other to mean someone (or some group) deemed different and less than (less valuable, less human, less dignified, less deserving) than the more powerful group. In the diversifying inner-ring suburbs, the Other is often the single mother family, the public housing resident, the African American, the mentally ill, or the drug user, for instance. The Other is defined in opposition to more powerful, mainstream groups. Often these groups are male, or white, or heterosexual, for example.

 Often we do not recognize the ways in which we create Others. A good example of this arose at a recent public meeting I attended, which convened town leaders across the Pittsburgh metropolitan region. The attendees were discussing what to do about the opioid epidemic that is affecting many of their neighbors. One attendee, clearly concerned and wanting to convey the weight of the situation, emphasized that “it's not just the drug addicts; last year we resuscitated a lawyer who's been addicted for thirty years.” By definition, the lawyer was indeed a drug addict; however, his or her education and position in society granted him inclusion into mainstream culture, while the stereotypical and imagined drug addict has non-normative behavior or qualities that position him as Other. This also begs the question of how much Otherness matters in the amount of attention received from public officials—if the opioid epidemic was indeed affecting “just the drug addicts,” would it still generate the same level of concern?

 OTHERING

 I use the term “Othering” to refer to the process of creating the Other, whether this is a personal psychological process reflecting how one person views another, or political and cultural practices and structures that separate people into groups and oppress some of these groups. John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian define Othering as “a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities” (Powell, 2016).

 Powell and Menendian propose that Othering is a helpful lens for understanding social division, for reasons similar to those I described in the introduction to this chapter. They write that “'Othering' is a broadly inclusive conceptual framework that captures expressions of prejudice and behaviors such as nativism and tribalism, but it is also a term that points toward deeper processes at work, only some of which are captured by those terms.” In addition, they write that: 

 “Othering" is a term that not only encompasses the many expressions of prejudice on the basis of group identities, but we argue that it provides a clarifying frame that reveals a set of common processes and conditions that propagate group-based inequality and marginality. Although particular expressions of othering, such as racism or ethnocentrism, are often well recognized and
richly studied, this broader phenomenon is inadequately recognized as such.

They emphasize that Othering tendencies are not a natural, but rather seeded and reinforced by social stratification often explicitly embedded in policies by leaders who fear the growing power of the Other. Powell and Menendian write that “today, the most common mechanism for institutionalizing group-based differences is policies or laws that restrict access to communal resources by out-groups, and thereby hoards those resources for in-groups” (Powell, 2016)

De-Othering as a Tool for Practice

I use the term “de-Othering” to mean active resistance to Othering; ultimately I think of it also as a type of active, neighborly love. While Othering is a fundamental and deeply explored theoretical concept across many academic disciplines, it has not often been explicitly proposed as a tool to guide practice in various fields. In other words, though resistance to Othering is often an implied ethical imperative, I found few examples of its use as a practical measurement of relationship in practice.

One example I did find was in the nursing literature and was proposed by Mary K. Canales, who developed a framework for resisting Othering through interviews with Latina nursing faculty. Othering is a useful concept in nursing, since nurses interact frequently with Othered communities in their work, and thus must combat their own Othering tendencies daily. In order to view their patients as equal, dignified humans, they must work to resist their personal internalization of a medical hierarchy that deems patients less knowledgeable than medical professionals, or social hierarchies that deem obese patients less responsible than others, or any number of other hierarchies constructed around race, age, religion, etc. Thus, nurses must forge a practical method of resistance to Othering that will guide them in their profession.

In a paper published in 2000, Canales articulates the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of Othering, suggests that Othering and de-Othering are central dimensions of the lives and practice of Latina nurses, and contends that it is a responsibility of nurses to attend to and resist Othering (Canales, 2000). Like Powell and Menendian, she emphasizes that Othering is not merely an interpersonal process, but a cycle of the organization, disorganization, and reorganization of a society that “creates and maintains the identities of those defined as Other.” Canales writes that “Nurses cannot focus solely on the individual client or student; they must be engaged with and committed toward effecting change at multiple levels and with multiple groups.” She offers her exploration of the concept of Othering as “an attempt to provide nurses with guidance for attending to the broader social conditions that create and

7 Canales uses the word “Othering” differently than I do. She writes about both Exclusionary and Inclusionary Othering; the former being Othering in the negative sense as I use it, and the latter being a way to deepen relationship through recognition and understanding of differences between people. For simplicity (and at the risk of over-simplicity) I will continue to use Othering to describe Canales’ notion of Exclusionary Othering and de-Othering to describe her notion of Inclusionary Othering.
Canales contends that the first step toward resisting Othering in nursing practice is to "[learn] about Othering and what it means to be Othered" (perhaps through study and reading), to be able to acknowledge personal Othering tendencies as well as to develop empathetic responses that acknowledge the Other’s experiences. Secondly, she recommends that nurses directly engage with Othered communities outside of the nurse-patient relationship. She writes that this engagement changes the relationship between nurse and Other “from ‘doing for’ to ‘being with.’”

Canales contends that a vital strategy for engaging with the Other and readying oneself for transformative relationships is that of role-taking and “world-traveling,” imagining the world from other perspectives. Part of this world-traveling includes seeing oneself from the Other’s eyes; for instance, a nurse imagining how she is perceived by her patient.

Through study of Othering and direct engagement with Othered communities, Canales suggests that nurses will be able to better build alliances for social activism to address the structural conditions of Othering. Instrumental to building these alliances will be viewing difference not as a seed of conflict but as a “tool of creativity.”

In 2010, Canales published a follow-up paper analyzing the use of Othering in the nursing literature (Canales, 2010). Her impetus for returning to the topic was to reinforce the need for an understanding of Othering to guide nursing practice. Citing a string of reports from the Institute of Medicine, Canales notes that little progress has been made in deeply addressing health disparities in the United States over the past decade, and that these “continuing health disparities have often been linked to conditions that separate “us” from “them”: rich and poor, white and black, native and immigrant.” She continues, “With these relationships in mind, it is worthwhile to visit the concept of othering...”

In her review, Canales found that while much literature has added to “expanded conceptualizations” of Othering (or Exclusionary Othering as she calls it), she could find little evidence that nurses have made much progress on actively de-Othering at the structural level (or engaging in Inclusive Othering). This concerns her, as she describes in the following paragraph:

The focus on exclusion could also suggest that nurses may be unable or ill-prepared to tackle the very difficult work necessary to connect across differences. By maintaining one’s focus on difference, the gaze remains steadfast on the Other, particularly the cultural Other: what practices the Other needs to change, what the Other needs to learn, what the Other meant. It is much easier to point out what is different between us and them than to step outside one’s comfort zone and reveal one’s own vulnerabilities; to shift the gaze inward and examine one’s own role in creating and maintaining boundaries that divide and exclude.

In the next paragraph, she offers another concern, and I quote her again at length due to its importance as a caution to planners:

123
Or, is it that the nursing profession itself continues to be fraught with racism and other forms of discriminatory practices that nurses, engaged in the important work of critically analyzing nursing and nursing practice, have become so enmeshed in the “critique” that they have been unable to move past the “exclusion?” A critical lens is essential for identifying exclusionary processes within nursing, and healthcare systems in general, while at the same time, it is also essential that avenues for including the Other are explored. Without attending to inclusionary othering (or de-Othering) and various forms of engagement with the Other, progress toward understanding differences will be slow and inclusion will remain elusive, only a theory and never a reality.

In light of these concerns, she notes that understanding the Other takes long term commitment from nurses; a commitment to step out of their comfort zones and engage with Othered groups, as well as intentional attempts to better understand the world through the Other’s perspectives. Reiterating the importance of understanding what one looks like through the lens of the Other, Canales writes, “Through self-reflection, critical readings and dialogues, and local engagement across established borders, nurses can begin to connect from the position of understanding themselves as Other to another.” Later she expands that this engagement requires “self-reflection that is grounded in an understanding of the histories, experiences, dreams, and goals of each other.”

Ultimately, Canales maintains that Othering is a highly useful concept for resisting structural injustices and inequalities between groups, in part because of the way the concept refocuses our attention to the relationship between people, not necessarily on the injustice itself. She cites Jacquelyn Y. Taylor, who said that “that we can be profoundly committed to social justice, transformation, and research; yet, without the work of self-discovery, easily slip into ways of thinking (and being) that may prove counter to meaningful understanding of self and others.”

Conclusion

In addition to the theoretical nuances that Canales explores, she also offers planners wisdom regarding the use of Othering to guide practice. First, her writings suggest that self-reflection, critical studies, and world-traveling should be incorporated into the professional practice of those whose work has impacts on Othered groups. Second, she notes that it is vital for professionals with power to engage and be in relation with Othered groups if they are to contribute positively to de-Othering change. For planners, perhaps this is a charge that we step out of our comfort zones in our personal life as well as build institutional structures that allow our work to be shaped by people who identify with Othered groups. Third, she asks us to move beyond academic critique of current systems, to strategic de-Othering in the real world. And finally, through Taylor’s quote, she encourages us to maintain focus on relationship so as to not be diverted toward seemingly positive goals that under their sheep’s clothing are wolves.