Community as Metaphor: Dialectical Tensions of a Racially Diverse Organization

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Community as Metaphor:

Dialectical Tensions of a Racially Diverse Organization

by

J. Jacob Jenkins

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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Table of Contents

List of Tables iv

List of Figures v

Abstract vii

Introduction 1

Chapter 1: Review of Literature 5
  Institutional Theory 5
  Institutional Legitimacy 9
  Community 13
    Community as physical space 15
    Community as disembodied concept 17
    Community as communicative process 19
  Community of Practice 21
  Social Construction of Race 23
  Sensemaking 25
  Organizational Metaphor 27
    Machine metaphor 29
    Organism metaphor 30
    Brain metaphor 30
    Culture metaphor 31
    Political metaphor 32
    Prison metaphor 33
    Transformation metaphor 34
    Domination metaphor 35
  Metaphoric Understanding 36
  Tension-Centered Approach 38
  Dialectical Theory 39
  Research Questions 41

Chapter 2: Research Context 42
  Historical Context 45
  Contemporary Context 49
    Evangelical view of organizational purpose 52
    Fundamentalist view of organizational purpose 53
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Research Methodology</td>
<td>66-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Understandings of Community</td>
<td>93-113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Limitations of Metaphor</td>
<td>114-127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Management of Tensions</td>
<td>128-143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Theoretical and Practical Implications</td>
<td>144-150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1.1:  *Church Attendance by Generation*  
Table 2.1:  *Taxonomy of Contemporary Church Purpose*  
Table 2.2:  *Comparative Percentages of Race/Ethnicity*  
Table 3.1:  *Research Procedures & Participants*  
Table 5.1:  *Racial composition of band members*
List of Figures

Figure 1.1. The model of community of practice. 22
Figure 1.2. The role of metaphor. 37
Figure 2.1. Common Point Community Church. 57
Figure 2.2. Sanctuary Pre-Renovation. 60
Figure 2.3. Sanctuary During Renovation. 60
Figure 2.4. Sanctuary Post-Renovation. 61
Figure 3.1. “Service” etched onto guitar. 73
Figure 3.2. “Acceptance” transposed onto travel mug. 73
Figure 3.3. “Love” inscribed onto cross. 74
Figure 3.4. Sample photos supplied by congregational members. 75
Figure 3.5. Final self-portrait of Common Point Community Church. 76
Figure 4.1. Herd of sheep. 94
Figure 4.2. Tree of unity. 96
Figure 4.3. Starfox instruction booklet: front & back cover. 99
Figure 4.4. Depiction of diverse congregants. 100
Figure 4.5. Clay effigy of Buddha embracing the world. 101
Figure 4.6. Community as “genuine,” “sincere,” & “authentic.” 104
Figure 4.7. Deep-listening. 105
Figure 4.8. Community at a local animal shelter. 105
Figure 4.9. Community at a local carwash.

Figure 4.10. Community at a local shopping mall.

Figure 4.11. The model of community of practice with study results.

Figure 5.1. Promotional materials featuring stereotypical phenotypes.

Figure 7.1. Blog header for Common Point “Voices”

Figure A.1. Seating arrangement by race/ethnicity.
Abstract

In recent years, a sense of community has declined throughout the United States. Common Point Community Church has responded to this trend by prioritizing “community” as an organizational metaphor. The present study explores how this metaphor is co-constructed through the communication practices of current organizational leaders and members. I begin this process, first, by positioning the study within existing literature on institutional theory, institutional legitimacy, community, community of practice, social construction of race, sensemaking, organizational metaphor, tension-centered approach, and dialectic theory. Building upon more than three years of ethnographic field work, I then outline the study’s context and methodology. Next, I discuss (a) specific ways in which “community” is understood by the organization’s racially diverse leaders and members, (b) potential limitations that result from this metaphor, and (c) ways in which dialectical tensions are managed in order to maintain the organizational metaphor of community. I then offer three theoretical implications – collectively referred to as the diversity paradox – as well as three practical implications: (a) Common Point “Voices,” (b) Congregational Videos, and (c) Creative Arts Team. I conclude by reflecting on the research process itself.
Introduction

[We must] entertain each other in brotherly affection, we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of other’s necessities…we must delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labour and suffer together, always having before our eyes…our Community as members of the same Body. (Winthrop, 1971, p. 42)

A sense of community continues to decline in the United States. This trend is especially evident among younger generations (Putnam, 2000), whether measured by civic participation (Salamon, 2002), political involvement (Aarts & Semetko, 2003), or religious affiliation (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). In fact, membership in nearly every civic organization has diminished in recent years (Putnam, 1995, 2000; see also Blanchard & Matthews, 2006; Cramer, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Parker, 1998; Scott & Godbey, 1994). Voter turnout for federal elections has dropped nearly twenty-five percent since 1960 (Putnam, 2000), and church attendance has been in steady decline since 1950 (Twenge, 2006). As a result, 77 percent of baby boomers believe the nation is worse off because of “less involvement in community activities” (Putnam, 2000, p. 25). More than 80 percent of Americans think there should be a greater focus on community (Penn, 1999), 72 percent report not knowing their neighbors well, and 66 percent have never worked with others to resolve community problems (Patterson & Kim, 1994).
Sarason (1974) refers to this reality as “the most destructive dynamic in the lives of people in our society” (p. 247). Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton went as far as to characterize our present need for community as “the sleeping sickness of the soul” (Quindlen, 1993, p. 17; see also Adelman & Frey, 1997; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985/2008; Jason, 1997; Meyrowitz, 1985).

Common Point Community Church[^1] – an intercultural congregation located in Tampa Bay’s urban corridor – has responded to this trend by promoting the organizational metaphor of “community.” Since its inception, Common Point has striven to both “reflect and impact the specific realities of [its] surrounding community” (field notes, March 10, 2010). This is an especially significant ambition, since Common Point’s neighborhood reflects the projected demographics of America by year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Consequently, Common Point’s website describes the organization as “a multi-ethnic community…transforming the world through Jesus Christ” (Common Ground, 2012c, par. 3, emphasis added).

During the course of this study, a majority of sermon topics addressed the need for organizational community. Common Point’s congregational members were consistently encouraged to join small groups (referred to as “Community Groups”), and to attend organizational events aimed at relationship building (weekly men’s breakfasts, women’s luncheons, etc.) During this study, Common Point also built a community garden to benefit Tampa’s Homeless Café and maintained its partnership with a local elementary school by offering free tutorial services and by hosting Fall Fest: a free community event with food, carnival games, children’s rides, etc. Additional community

[^1]: The organizational name is a pseudonym, as are all names used in this study.
building efforts included Common Point Runs, a running club that offered clean drinking water to developing countries; Backpack Attack, a program that provided free school supplies to local elementary students; We Cannot Wait, an initiative to feed, clothe, and shelter homeless citizens in the neighborhood; Movie Night Out, a monthly film screening in one of several public parks; Angel Food Ministries, a service that offered discounted groceries to those in need; and Common Point Academy, a local effort to develop the artistic aptitude of elementary students.

An organizational emphasis on community, however, still does not answer the question of what community is or how it is co-constructed through the communicative processes and practices of a racially diverse organization. For that reason, this study explores particular ways in which the community metaphor is constituted by/among Common Point’s leaders and members.

I begin this process, first, by positioning the study within current literature on institutional theory, institutional legitimacy, community, community of practice, social construction of race, sensemaking, organizational metaphor, tension-centered approach, and dialectic theory. Building upon more than three years of ethnographic field work, I then outline the study’s context and methodology. Next, I discuss (a) specific ways in which “community” is understood by the organization’s racially diverse leaders and members, (b) potential limitations that result from this metaphor, and (c) ways in which dialectical tensions are managed in order to maintain the organizational metaphor of community. I then offer three theoretical implications – collectively referred to as the diversity paradox – as well as three practical implications for other intercultural milieu:
(a) Common Point “Voices,” (b) Congregational Videos, and (c) Creative Arts Team. I conclude by reflecting on the research process itself.

Although the primary focus of this study is a faith-based organization, I believe its analyses and discussion apply to a variety of contexts, both religious and secular, both within and beyond academe, as leaders across America work to build community within increasingly diversified milieu. This belief is, in fact, what first drew me to the study of community, and what compelled me to work alongside Common Point Community Church. As such, the present study offers a unique case study that collates the three interrelated factors of community, racial diversity, and religious institutions. By gaining insight into how community is forged, cultivated, and sustained, perhaps we as communication scholars can help others to do the same. By revealing the specific ways that racially diverse organizational members manage tensions and limitations, perhaps we can apply that knowledge to other intercultural contexts as well. By working within/alongside a faith-based organization, perhaps we can help to develop religion’s full potential as a positive change agent in our world today.
Chapter 1:  
Review of Literature

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory, which emphasizes the relationship between organizations and their environments, first emerged in the 19th century, as economic scholars debated the proper role of scientific method (Scott, 2008). Early institutional economics were soon supplanted by neoclassical theory; however, the debate continued among sociologists and political scientists well into the 20th century (see Bill & Hardgrave, 1981; Burgess, 1902; Willoughby, 1904). Institutional theory permeated the specific field of organizational studies during the mid-1970s (Scott, 2008). In many ways, this development served to augment systems theory (see Bateson, 1972/2000; 2005; Capra, 1997; Meadows, 2008) by “insisting on the importance of the wider context or environment as it constrains, shapes, penetrates, and renews the organization” (p. x; see also Katz & Kahn, 1966; Scott & Davis, 2007). By focusing on the organizing norms, schemas, and structures that shape social behavior, institutional theory aimed to address several societal questions: the relationship between institutions and the rise of organizations, the relationship between freedom and control, interests and behavior, cultural beliefs and organizational operation, and so on (Scott, 2008).

Since its initial development, scholars have theorized institutional theory in a variety of ways. Spencer (1876, 1896, 1910) first defined institutions as a series of
specialized subsystems or “organs.” Sumner (1906) also viewed institutions as a structural system, while emphasizing the importance of a unified concept, doctrine, or interest. Meanwhile, Cooley (1902/1956) was one of the first scholars to take a communicative turn with his view of institutional theory. Anticipating Giddens’ (1986) duality of structure, Cooley (1902/1956) viewed the (re)constitution of social institutions as both a cause and result of human behavior: “The individual is always cause as well as effect of the institution” (p. 314). Institutions can never be separated from human interaction (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). Rather, institutional “rules, norms, and meanings arise in interaction, and they are preserved and modified by human behavior” (Scott, 2008, p. 49). They are “‘brought to life’ in actual human conduct” (Berger & Luckman, 1967, p. 75). In this sense, institutional theory is not so much a state of being as it is a process of being.

Selznick (1948, 1949, 1957) was particular interested in this (often unintended) progression by which certain organizations become institutions over time. He writes:

Institutionalization is a process. It is something that happens to an organization over time, reflecting the organization’s own distinctive history, the people who have been in it, the groups it embodies and the vested interests they have created, and the way it has adapted to its environment . . . “to institutionalize” is to infuse with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand. (1957, p. 16-17, italics original)

Infused values often result in a larger stakeholder base and greater participant fidelity. Specific values also help to create a unique organizational identity and the need for organizational leaders to defend those values (Scott, 2008). Furthermore, the infused
values that characterize most institutions make them highly resistant to change (Jepperson, 1991; Scott, 2008), with a propensity for spanning cultural and generational boundaries (Zucker, 1977).

Each of these attributes is especially emblematic of religious institutions. Religious and faith-based organizations are characterized by infused moral and ethical values, resulting in a devoted – if not zealous (Digby, 1996; Tania Murray, 2002) – stakeholder base (Catton, 1957; Currin & Moschovis, 2004; Froese & Bader, 2007; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2011). In addition, religious organizations often rely upon charismatic leadership, thereby creating a unique organizational identity (Dewaay, 2006; Ellingson, 2007; Florian, 2004; Goh, 2008; Jackelen, 2005; Loveland & Wheeler, 2003). Finally, traditional religious organizations have shown to hold predominantly conservative values, making them highly resistant to change (Beatty, Hull, & Arikawa, 2007; Belcher, Fandetti, & Cole, 2004).

Each of these attributes of institutional theory also coalesce into what Scott (2008) describes as an omnibus conception: “Institutions are comprised of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life” (p. 48). Scott elaborates by writing, “In this conception, institutions are multifaceted, durable social structures made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources” (p. 48). Additional conceptualizations of institutions have been offered by Talcott Parsons, Herbert Simon, and Arthur Stinchcombe, to name but a few. Parsons (1960a) divided the concept of institution into three separate gradations: technical, managerial, and institutional. The technical aspect of institutional theory addresses production activities, the managerial aspect addresses
coordination activities, and the institutional aspect addresses the circular relationship between societal and organizational norms (Scott, 2008; see also Thompson, 1967).

Simon (1945) characterized institutions as a means for bounding and promoting rational behavior. Due in part to reduced choice, established routine, and shared values, Simon believed that organizational members are able to achieve more rational behavior: “The rational individual is, and must be, an organized and institutional individual” (p. 111). In contrast to Simon’s view, Stinchcombe (1968) offered a more critical view of institution theory. Specifically, Stinchombe defined institutions as structures “in which powerful people are committed to some value or interest” (p. 107). Finally, Scott (2008) characterizes institutions as both restrictive and empowering:

Institutions impose restrictions by defining legal, moral, and cultural boundaries, setting off legitimate from illegitimate activities. However, it is essential to recognize that institutions also support and empower activities and actors. Institutions provide guidelines and resources for taking action as well as prohibitions and constraints on action. (p. 50)

Scott defines the restrictive nature of institutions as the regulative pillar of institutional theory. The second and third pillars, as defined by Scott, are normative and cultural-cognitive. The normative pillar emphasizes “normative rules that introduce a prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life” (p. 54). The normative pillar is comprised of two parts: values and norms. Values describe that which society perceives as preferred and/or desirable; norms describe the process by which those values are pursued. The third, cultural-cognitive pillar of institutions deals with societal framing and sensemaking: “The shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and
the frames through which meaning is made” (p. 57). Each of these pillars – regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive – has direct implications for institutional legitimacy, which is discussed in the following section.

**Institutional Legitimacy**

Perceived legitimacy is vital to the continued existence of any institution. While institutions help to define appropriate social behavior, their legitimacy simultaneously depends upon the ability to reflect prevailing societal norms of a particular time and geographical area. This reality is especially evident among religious and governmental institutions, which depend upon people voluntarily abiding by institutional laws, values, and regulations (Easton, 1965, 1975; Scherer & Curry, 2010; Tyler, 1990). Easton (1965) describes such legitimacy as a “reservoir of good will,” which is accrued between institutions and their communities. This reservoir not only helps the institution to gain public compliance, but also insulates it from public scrutiny following a crisis or unpopular decision (Scherer & Curry, 2010; see also Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007).

Easton (1965, 1975) goes on to identify three potential sources of institutional legitimacy: structural, ideological, and personal. *Structural legitimacy* derives from an institute’s ability to operate within the structural norms and values of contemporary society. *Ideological legitimacy* derives from the philosophical devotion of an institute’s constituents, and *personal legitimacy* derives from the positive, personal effect an institute has upon its members.

Parsons (1934) further defines the process of institutional legitimization as the “objective dimension” of institutionalization: “A system of norms defining what the relations of individuals ought to be” (p. 327). According to Parsons (1934, 1960b), the
normative structures within society not only legitimize organizations but also legitimize their technical patterns of operation. Consequently, institutional legitimacy varies depending on the worth society places upon an organization’s espoused values (Parsons, 1953). As Scott (2008) writes, “Organizations serving more highly esteemed values are thought to be more legitimate and are expected to receive a disproportionate share of societal resources” (p. 24).

Notions of institutional legitimacy are central to the present discussion, as the legitimacy of many institutes has been called into recent question (e.g., medical, educational, and religious). Each of these institutions has been challenged to legitimize their organizational norms and values, thus, legitimizing their very existence (Conteh, 2010; Gilley, 2008; Lowrey & Erzikova, 2010). Medical institutions, for example, have been challenged by governmental and special interest groups due to rising medical costs and increased cancer and obesity rates within developed countries (Center for Disease, 2011; Laurier, 2003; World Health, 2003). This concern is also visible in contemporary popular culture, as evidenced by the bestselling works of Michael Pollan (2007) and Eric Schlosser (2005), and such films as Sicko (Moore & O’Hara, 2007) and Food Inc. (Kenner & Pearlstein, 2008). Similarly, educational institutions within the United States have been disparaged for rising costs and students’ lack of preparedness in math and science (Glod, 2007; Holland, 2009). This concern is equally visible within contemporary popular culture, as evidenced by Waiting for “Superman” (Chilcott & Guggenheim, 2010) and The Lottery (Ashman, Bartels, Lanuti, Lawler, & Sackle, 2010).

In recent years, the legitimacy of many religious institutions has also been questioned. This reality is especially true among Generations X, Y, and Z (Rosenberg,
2012), as evidenced by declining attendance and affiliation. Of Americans born before 1946, over 50% attend church on a weekly basis; however, church attendance drops consistently with each age bracket (Table 1.1). Of Americans born between 1946 and 1964, 41% attend church on a weekly basis. Of Americans born between 1965 and 1976 this is true of only 34%, and of Americans born between 1977 and 1994 the number drops to a meager 29% (Rainer, 2001). As a result, church attendance in the year 2050 is predicted to be almost half of what it was in 1990 (Barnes & Lowry, 2006), with 85% of current churches either plateaued or declining (Barna, 1999).

Table 1.1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Birth (Generation)</th>
<th>Attendance Rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Before 1946 (Builders)</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946 to 1964 (Boomers)</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965 to 1976 (Busters)</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 to 1994 (Bridgers)</td>
<td>29%</td>
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One response to religion’s decline in institutional legitimacy has been the liberation theology movement. Liberation theology emerged in the 1950’s among Roman Catholics in Latin America (Petrella, 2005). Interpreted by some as a return to the early Christian movement (Gutierrez, 2003; Pope Paul VI, 1967), liberation theology focuses on social, political, and economic injustice (Berryman, 1987; Brown, 1993; Cone, 1997; Floyd-Thomas & Pinn, 2010; Gutierrez, 1988; Petrella, 2006; Rowland, 2007). As an early leader in the liberation theology movement, Gustavo Gutierrez first disseminated the maxim: “Preferential option for the poor.” His diction emphasizes the need for
Christians to “assist the poor from their own resources” (Code of Canon Law, n.d., para. 21). Berryman (1987) further articulates liberation theology as an interpretation of Christian faith out of the suffering, struggle, and hope of the poor, a critique of society and the ideologies sustaining it, and a critique of the activity of the church and of Christians from the angle of the poor. Other influential leaders of liberation theology included Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and Juan Luis Segundo (Berryman, 1987; Gutierrez, 1988; Sigmund, 1992).

The emergence of liberation theology has been attributed to numerous causes, including modernism, postmodernism, and secular nationalism (Haynes, 1994; Marty & Appleby, 1991). According to Sahliyeh (1990), modernism has resulted in “a widespread feeling of dislocation, alienation and disorientation resulting from the process of modernization and from the rapid disappearance of habitual lifestyles and traditions” (p. 9). Meanwhile, postmodernism has created an epistemologically pluralistic view of culture and society, resulting in the acceptance of multiple and even conflicting truths (Addis, 2005; Aronowitz & DiFazio, 1994; Barnet & Cavanah, 1994; Lyotard, 1984; Rifkin, 1995). The rise of postmodernism has also created a distrust toward authority figures, especially religious authority (Best & Kellner, 1991; Lyon, 2000). Canagarajah (2004) comments on the deconstructive qualities of postmodernism by writing:

Postmodern thinking treats identities and communities as constructed, fluid, and hybrid, challenging the previously objective and bounded definitions . . . The increasing multilingualism, cultural pluralism, and vernacularization of English raise questions about the dichotomous ways in which language policies have been formulated. (p. 141)
Finally, the rise of liberation theology has been attributed to secular nationalism. Secular nationalism is said to have suffered from a “loss of faith,” resulting in a “crisis of legitimacy” among its citizens (Juergensmeyer, 1993). The effects of each of these potential causes – modernism, postmodernism, and secular nationalism – is especially evident within developing countries, where religious traditions and cultural norms are deeply interrelated (Fox, 1999; Haynes, 1994).

Regardless of the reason for its emergence, liberation theology has become a significant voice within contemporary Christianity. In addition, it has given rise to additional liberation movements, including feminist theology (Rowland, 2007) and black liberation theology (Cone, 2010), among others. Liberation theology also became a guiding principle for Common Point Community Church, the specific context of this communication study. Consequently, Common Point sought to engage the economic and educational disparity of its surrounding neighborhood (Percept Group, 2007) by promoting the organizational metaphor of “community.” Such a priority, however, raises the obvious question of what community is.

Community

Humans long for community. We share an inherent desire for personal interaction and belonging (Jason, 1997). As Peck (1987) writes: “There can be no vulnerability without risk; there can be no community without vulnerability; there can be no peace, and ultimately no life, without community” (p. 233). Kanter (1972) further describes community as the state “in which humankind’s deepest yearnings, noblest dreams, and highest aspirations come to fulfillment, where all physical, social, and spiritual forces work together, in harmony, to permit the attainment of everything people
find necessary and desirable” (p. 1). It should be of no surprise, then, that a sense of community has been shown to positively influence quality of life and life expectancy (Davidson & Cotter, 1989; Graff et al., 2007), as well as mental and physical health (Luks, 1992; Minkler, Wallerstein, & Wilson, 2008).

The inherent, human desire for community was also reflected in the discourses of Common Point Community Church. Common Point not only adopted “community” as its organizational metaphor, but also promoted the concept of community via church literature, sermon topics, organizational events, and outreach efforts. During a recent service in which church leaders discussed goals for the coming year, Common Point’s pastor commented, “We are all growing in our faith. But we can only do that in community…We are made for fellowship, for intimacy. We are made for community” (field notes, January 29, 2012, emphasis added).

Despite community’s import, few people can clearly articulate the meaning of the term (Adelman & Frey, 1997; Peck, 1987). “Community” derives from the Latin loanword communitas, a product of cum and munus – cum meaning “together,” munus meaning “gift” (Esposito, 1998; Goodman & Goodman, 1947/1990). Such an antiquated definition, however, rarely results in contemporary understanding. Meanwhile, scientific definitions of community as “organisms inhabiting a common environment and interacting with one another” (Australian Academy of Science, 2006) simply do not communicate the full range of human interactions and relationships that are necessary to constitute genuine community (see Butchart, 2010). For that reason, this section outlines three prevailing views of community present within current literature: (a) community as
physical space, (b) community as a disembodied concept, and (c) community as communicative process.

**Community as physical space.** The conventional view of community is often defined by physical space, with respect to place and proximity: towns, neighborhoods, and arrondissements (Adelman & Frey, 1997; Jason, 1997). Young (2003) writes, “In ordinary speech for most people in the U.S., the term community refers to people with whom I identify in a locale” (p. 244). With this understanding in mind, Oldenburg (1999) identifies three specific types of location that are necessary for community to occur: the home, the office, and the gathering place. A number of establishments serve the role of gathering place – or *third place* – prompting Oldenburg to delineate them as the “heart of a community.” Such establishments include the English pub, the French café, and the American coffee shop.

In recent years, it has become commonplace for local businesses to adopt Oldenburg’s (1999) notion of the third place. Typically taking the form of diners, bookstores, and/or coffee shops, these businesses emphasize opportunities for socialization. Oversized chairs and open spaces invite customers to loiter, with no expectation of purchase (Halpern, 2002; Jovel, 2008). Several nonprofit organizations have also formed around the concept of third place. One such example is the Project for Public Spaces (PPS). PPS was founded by Fred Kent in 1975. In the spirit of William Whyte’s *Street Life Project* (see Whyte, 2009), PPS engages local participants who would not otherwise contribute to a community betterment effort. PPS works with these participants to identify places that are vital to daily, community life. The organization then strives to “create great streets that really draw out the life of the communities they’re
meant to serve” (Byles, 2008, par. 6). Through the use of mental speed bumps and gentle congestion, examples of “great streets” include bicycle boulevards, play lanes, and the woonerf – streets that erase the boundaries between road and sidewalk so that vehicles and pedestrians share equal authority. Each of these efforts attempt to capitalize on an area’s present potential in order to cultivate a greater sense of community.

Despite PPS’ recent efforts, the view of community as physical space has diminished significantly since the Industrial Revolution. Millions of people migrated to urban areas during the 19th century; long-established bonds with local lands, family, and traditions began to entropy. Urbanization’s emphasis on formal organizational and relational structures further weakened the spatial view of community, which was spurred by natural and spontaneous human interaction (McLaughlin & Davidson, 1985; Morgan, 1942; Stein, 1960). As Jason (1997) writes, “Modern societies have greater individual freedom, but the cost has been a decline in human connectedness, community spirit, and neighborliness” (p. xvi; see also McLaughlin & Davidson, 1985). The Industrial Revolution affected Americans’ view of self as well. People increasingly defined their role and value within society by their ability to produce and purchase consumer goods:

In the 1940s and 1950s, society became dedicated to an ever-rising standard of living. This justified the industrial role but slowly replaced the traditional sense of community…There was little time for intimate moments with family and friends. In this new society, high levels of alienation and isolation were common, and the local community ceased to be a place that mattered. Life transitions began to be minimized, and their rituals were commercialized or performed
perfunctorily by impersonal and social agencies, schools, or religious officiaries.

(p. 20)

Each of these shifts in the way community is understood, formed, and maintained has led, in part, to the view of community as a disembodied concept.

**Community as a disembodied concept.** Beyond physical distinction alone, many scholars view community as a disembodied concept: a shared set of values, interests, attitudes, and/or emotional responses (Adelman & Frey, 1997; Cohen, 1985; Jason, 1997; Putnam, 2000). This conception of community has become especially salient in modern society with the advent of virtual and mobile communities (see Ling, 2008; Rheingold, 1995). Through the use of cellular phones and social networking services (e.g., chat rooms, message boards, virtual worlds), it is now possible for communities to operate beyond the spatial and geographical limitations that bound previous generations (Hafner, 2001; Hof, Browder, & Elstrom, 1997; Kim, 2000). These communities rely instead upon shared interests, values, and the emotive ties that develop within and among a particular people group. McMillan and Chavez (1986) expand on this understanding by outlining four specific characteristics of community: membership, influence, integration of needs, and shared emotional connection. Kanter (1972) further articulates the emotional characteristic of community:

*The search for community is also a quest for direction and purpose in a collective anchoring of the individual life. Investment of self in community, acceptance of its authority and willingness to support its values, is dependent in part on the extent to which group life can offer identity, personal meaning, and the*
opportunity to grow in terms of standards and guiding principles that the member feels are expressive of his own inner being. (p. 73)

Referred to as the “psychological sense of community,” Sarason (1974) goes as far as to claim such a realization should be the primary goal in each of our lives (see also Chavis & Pretty, 1999; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1986). Peck (1987) echoes a similar sentiment, arguing that the formation of true community must be a conscious and deliberate effort.

In addition to virtual communities, examples of a community built around shared values, interests, attitudes, or emotional responses include professional communities, ethnic communities, faith communities, and political communities, to name but a few. Tonnies (1887/1988) characterizes such communities as *gemeinschaft*, a condition in which individuals are more devoted to the welfare of the larger population than their own self interest. Motivated in part by a “unity of will” (p. 22), gemeinschaft is characterized by collective mores and often entails an ascribed status. In contrast, Tonnies’ notion of *gesellschaft* describes an association in which individuals are more interested in her/his own self interest over that of the larger population. Common examples of gessellschaft include for-profit and corporate contexts, where employee turnover is commonplace. Tonnies argues, however, that no community is ever purely gemeinschaft or gesellschaft, but rather a combination of each.

Bishop, Chertok, and Jason (1997) offer a similar, two-tiered view of community. The first tier, referred to as Mission, involves the active pursuit of a common goal. The Mission tier is (re)affirmed through logos, slogans, mission statements, and other promotional materials. The second tier, referred to as Reciprocal Responsibility, refers to
“the perception that there are acknowledged members of an ongoing group who are mutually responsible to each other” (Jason, 1997, p. 73). In addition to seeking a common goal, with Reciprocal Responsibility community members perceive themselves and others as valuable resources. For this reason, members also feel that they can offer or receive help from others, if the need arises (see Field, 2008; Halpern, 2004; Lin, 2002; Putnam, 2000).

**Community as communicative process.** Finally, within the field of communication, community is typically viewed as the constitution and reconstitution of communicative practices (Adelman & Frey, 1997; Hunter, 1974; James, 1997; Moore & Myerhoff, 1975; Wenger, 2004). In the words of Rothenbuhler (1991), “Communication and community grow in each other’s shadows; the possibilities of the one are structured by the possibilities of the other” (p. 76). As a result, community is seen as more than mere internal and/or emotive processes, but rather the external and/or demonstrative (inter)actions that those processes entail: social rules, communal norms, patterns of speech, etc. (Jeffres, Dobos, & Sweeney, 1987). Tinder (1995) writes, “Community, it may be said, is that which is realized in the activity of communication” (p. 68). Communication is, therefore, “the essential, defining feature – the medium – of community” (Adelman & Frey, 1997, p. 5):

Community is a social construction, grounded in the symbolic meanings and communicative practices of individuals, that fosters meaningful interdependence in social aggregates . . . Communication, therefore, is not just a variable contained within a community; community itself is best regarded as a phenomenon that emerges from communication. (p. 5)
Several scholars have sought to explain the process of community building via communicative processes. McLaughlin and Davidson (1985), for example, offer specific guidelines for building a successful community. According to their research, a shared vision, purpose, and set of common practices are essential. Members must also seek to build solid relationships, and there must be a good process for resolving conflict when disagreement occurs. Similarly, Cottrell (1976) outlines seven characteristics that are necessary for building community: enhanced commitment, clarity of vision, opportunities to communicate needs and opinions, conflict procedures, open channels of communication, decision making processes, and the management of relationships within larger societal contexts. Meanwhile, Peck (1987) proposes four distinct stages of community building. In stage one (*pseudo-community*), people offer a façade of kindness. They are generally polite and amicable to one another in order to avoid disagreement. In stage two (*chaos*), community members attempt to convert others, resulting in the first signs of struggle and disagreement. In stage three (*emptiness*), people begin to alter their communicative boundary structures. They remove any preexisting expectations, prejudices, and ideologies, thus, allowing for a deeper level of relationship to form. In the final stage (*community*), people experience a shared sense of tranquility, as community members feel safe enough to reveal personal joys and vulnerabilities.

The centrality of communication in the community building process makes it an especially salient topic for organizational communication scholars. Patterns of communication help to establish and standardize values, priorities, and expectations within communal contexts. Communication is also the process by which communities
induct new members, select new leaders, etc. It characterizes the socialization process wherein new members learn communal rules and norms (Clausen, 1968; Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2010; see also Gibson & Papa, 2000; Jablin, 1985; 1987).

**Community of Practice**

Wenger’s (1998) model of community of practice builds upon this third, communicative view of community (see also Wenger 2004; Wenger & Snyder, 2000; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). His model outlines three distinct dimensions through which community is communicatively constituted: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. *Mutual engagement* is defined by Wenger as shared action that works to sustain the community. This dimension is exemplified through engaged diversity, social complexity, and community maintenance (p. 73). By working together, community members “connect meaningfully… to the contributions and knowledge of others’” (p. 76). Wenger specifically mentions that these community members need not be in agreement. Rather, “what makes engagement in practice possible and productive is as much a matter of diversity as it is a matter of homogeneity” (p. 75). This particular feature, as outlined by Wenger, makes the model of community of practice especially relevant to the study of an intercultural organization.

*Joint enterprise* is the second dimension of the model of community of practice, defined by negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, and local response (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). Within this dimension, community members define and identify their collective goal or endeavor in the very process of pursuing it. This communal negotiation is a “response to [the community members’] situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their
control” (p. 77). As a result, cultural diversity – even disagreement – is viewed as a creative process and “a productive part of the enterprise” (p. 82). Again, this detail makes the model of community of practice especially relevant to the present study.

The final dimension of the model of community of practice is shared repertoire. Wenger defines shared repertoire as shared narratives, vocabularies, and routine actions that are shared by and among community members, created through the course of interaction over time. Wenger is quick to point out, however, that shared repertoire is a dynamic phenomenon. Not unlike structuration theory (see Giddens, 1986), community members are inherently bound by the personal repertoires they bring to the group, as well as those repertoires shared by the community; however, community members are simultaneously creating and reinforcing new repertoires (Somekh & Pearson, 2002). Joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire each work together to produce the model of community of practice (Figure 1.1).

![Figure 1.1. The model of community of practice (adapted from Wenger, 1998, p. 73).](image)

The three prevailing views of community – (a) community as physical space, (b) community as disembodied concept, and (c) community as communicative practice – are further complexified by/within the intercultural milieu of Common Point Community
Church. As compared to national trends, Common Point represents a unique and racially diverse congregation (Chavez, 1999). The church is also situated within a unique and racially diverse area of Tampa Bay (Percept Group, 2007). Each of these realities – as further discussed in the following chapter – has potential to create additional opportunities for community; however, each of these realities also has potential to create additional tensions, barriers, and limitations. For that reason, it is also vital to situate this study within current literature on the social construction of race, sensemaking, organizational metaphor, tension-centered approach, and dialectic theory. The subsequent sections discuss each of these concepts in turn.

**Social Construction of Race**

The concept of race has a long and disputed history, but continues to serve as a powerful ideological and institutional marker. As Allen (2007) argues, race merits theoretical and practical attention from scholars because it is “an enduring, contested phenomenon with important implications for communication studies and for transforming society” (p. 259). It wields significant influence in the construction of identities, power relations, and resource distribution (Allen, 2007; Giroux, 2003; Nkomo, 1992; Proudford & Nkomo, 2006). Wilkinson (1995) writes: “Race remains a principal determinant of social organization, affecting every aspect of employment, educational opportunity, health, and justice” (p. 168).

Despite the importance of race in contemporary society (Allen, 2004; Orbe & Harris, 2001), mainstream communication scholarship tends to ignore racial matters, or to treat race as “an ahistorical, essential, and depoliticized aspect of identity” (Allen, 2007, p. 260; see also Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). Such approaches overlook the power
dynamics, material consequences, and discrimination associated with race and racism (Allen, 2006, 2007; Flores & Moon, 2002). Within this climate, Allen (2007) challenges communication scholars to engage race matters through the development and utilization of social theory.

One promising theoretical perspective for communication scholars studying race is social constructionism (Allen, 2005, 2006, 2007; Gergen, 2009; Proudford & Nkomo, 2006; see also Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Social constructionism asserts that meaning arises from social systems, and that human beings obtain knowledge about the world through larger societal discourses. These discourses are typically based in dominant social, political, and historical systems (Allen, 2005). Social constructionism also highlights the constitutive nature of language in the production of social reality (Gergen, 2009).

Social constructionists reject essentialist claims that position race as natural or inevitable (Allen, 2005, 2007), and acknowledge that race exists for social reasons—rather than biological (Proudford & Nkomo, 2006). Race is a socially constructed concept through which human beings actively categorize individuals based on phenotypical markers: physiological features of skin color, hair texture, body type, and facial features. (Allen, 2011; Proudford & Nkomo, 2006). As a result, race is also seen as a “central cue for perceptions about others: temperament, sexuality, intelligence, athletic ability, aesthetic preferences, and so on are presumed to be fixed and discernible from the palpable mark of race” (Omi & Winant, 1993, p. 60). Such categorization creates racial inequality where particular racial norms (usually white), linguistic codes, and communication styles are privileged over others (Allen, 2007). This privileging often
leads to the silencing, mistreatment, or even systematic abuse of minority members, as revealed by Meares et al.’s (2004) examination of a culturally diverse workplace (see also Bailey, 2000; Loury, 2003; Orbe & Drummond, 2009).

Racial inequality and the privileging of white racial norms are present within many religious organizations as well (Chavez, 1999; Emerson & Smith, 2000). This reality is especially evident among Christian congregations, as compared to competing faiths (Emerson, 2011). As a result, recent scholarship has begun to explore many of the tension(s) between racial ideology and religious beliefs/practices (Edgell & Tranby, 2007; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008). These studies have examined the influence of religiocultural identity upon racial inequality (Edgell & Tranby, 2007; Hinojosa & Park, 2004), congregational segregation (Edwards, 2008), and diverse worship styles and preferences (Edwards, 2009).

In the present study, I continue this dialogue surrounding race and religion. I use a social constructionist perspective to examine how leaders and members of an intercultural congregation co-construct their understandings of community via routine social practices and interactions. Throughout this process, I take a critical stance to examine power dynamics within the organization (Allen, 2004; Mumby, 2000) and to connect sensemaking micropractices with larger societal discourses about race, whiteness, and white normativity (Allen, 2007; Meares et al., 2004; Tomlinson, 2010).

**Sensemaking**

Sensemaking is a central and unavoidable facet of the organizing process. Organizations subsist in highly uncertain environments. Such uncertainty results in a range of interpretations by/among differing organizational members. Thus, sensemaking
seeks to make retrospective meaning of past-present occurrences via equivocality reduction. It emphasizes the way in which people work to understand themselves, others, and their immediate reality in a rational manner (Weick, 1979, 1993, 1995). Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) further describe sensemaking in the following way:

Sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cures and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances. (p. 409)

Pondy, Frost, Morgan, and Dandridge (1983) also comment on the rational and retrospective nature of sensemaking by writing, “Individuals [create and sustain] images of a wider reality, in part to rationalize what they are doing. They realize their reality, by reading into their situation patterns of significant meaning” (p. 24).

Weick (1979) divides the sensemaking process into three stages: enactment, selection, and retention. *Enactment* refers to the creation of organizational reality through shared practices and norms. Once an organization’s environment is enacted, members then *select* a desired explanation for that environment from the multitude of possible rationalizations. Finally, the *retention* stage refers to the act of preserving present explanations of reality for future use.

Due to its fluid and ongoing nature, the sensemaking process itself is also a construct. Organizational members make sense of reality based upon past-present stimuli. In turn, they construe present-future reality based upon past sensemaking processes (Weick, 1993). For this reason, explorations of sensemaking often seek to define an organization’s “story.” In doing so, communication scholars focus upon
transitory events and brief, seemingly insignificant occurrences: “Organizational life comes just as much from the subtle, the small, the relational, the oral, the particular, and the momentary as it does from the conspicuous, the large, the substantive, the written, the general, and the sustained” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410). One additional avenue for exploring the sensemaking process is through the use and role of organizational metaphor – a growing interest within organizational research (Grant & Oswick, 1996; Putnam & Boys, 2006). Such an exploration offers specific entry and data points for communication scholars, as s/he seeks to explore the potential benefits and limitations of word imagery within a given context.

**Organizational Metaphor**

Traditionally, metaphor is understood as a literary and rhetorical figure of speech or trope. A metaphor draws comparison between two distinct concepts – the *source* and *target* domains (Lakoff, 1992; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Oswick, Keenoy, & Grant, 2002; Quinn, 2005). Metaphor uses a tangible or material object (source domain) to explicate a less tangible or material thought (target domain): “She’s all states, and all princes, I” (Donne, 1896, p. 7). As such, metaphor has become a standard schema of the English language, categorized into one of three archetypes: allegory, catachresis, and parable (Geary, 2011).

Lakoff (1992), however, challenges this longstanding assumption about the use and nature of metaphor, suggesting cognitive implications beyond linguistics alone (see also Cunliffe, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Morgan, 2006; Oswick et al., 2002; Oswick & Grant, 1996; Smith & Eisenberg, 1987; Reddy, 1992). Lakoff explains:
The classical theory turns out to be false. The generalizations governing poetic metaphorical expressions are not in language, but in thought…The locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another. (p. 1)

Morgan (2006) echoes this sentiment by writing:

Metaphor is often regarded just as a device for embellishing discourse, but its significance is much greater than this. The use of metaphor implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing that pervade how we understand our world generally. (p. 4, emphasis original)

In this sense, metaphor is not limited to syntax alone, but is “primarily conceptual, conventional, and part of the ordinary system of thought” (Lakoff, 1992, p. 2). Metaphor is not only a way of speaking, of drawing comparisons for prosaic or illustrative purposes; it is also a way of thought, of framing and understanding the world around us: “As soon as one gets away from concrete physical experience and starts talking about abstractions or emotions, metaphorical understanding is the norm” (p. 3). Metaphor connects different spheres of human experience and understanding. It guides our perceptions and expands our comprehension of the world in which we live. It makes the complex simple and aids our conception of reality (Cornelissen, Oswick, Christensen, & Phillips, 2008; Kendall & Kendall, 1993; Oswick & Grant, 1996). Tsoukas (1991) elaborates on this understanding by writing, “[Metaphors] do not simply describe an external reality; they also help constitute that reality and prescribe how it out to be viewed…and a mode of behaviour” (p. 570).
The implications of this reality are especially salient within organizational settings. As Smith and Eisenberg (1987) write, “Metaphors are important in organizing because they aid members in the interpretation of events; they allow cues from one context (e.g., the family) to be applied to the understanding of another (e.g., the organization)” (p. 369). Meanwhile, Oswick et al. (2002) refer to metaphor as the “master trope” of organizational theory, and Morgan (2006) contends that “all theories of organization and management are based on implicit images or metaphors” (p. 4).

Morgan goes on to outline eight root metaphors that define – and are defined by – our understandings of organizational communication: (a) machine, (b) organism, (c) brain, (d) culture, (e) political system, (f) psychic prison, (g) flux and transformation, and (h) instrument of domination. The present study contributes to this body of literature by theorizing the additional, organizational metaphor of “community” within an intercultural context. It is important, however, first to outline each of Morgan’s metaphors in more detail.

**Machine metaphor.** Morgan (2006) characterizes the machine metaphor as an inherent byproduct of the modern era:

Organizational life is often routinized with the precision demanded of clockwork. People are frequently expected to arrive at work at a given time, perform a predetermined set of activities, rest at appointed hours, and then resume their tasks until work is over…many popular theories and taken-for-granted ideas about organization support this thinking. (p. 12, 13)

The organization as machine metaphor is task and goal orientated. It is steeped in classical management theory (see Smith, 1898; Weber, 1947, 1958a, 1958b; Fayol, 1949;
Urwick, 1956) and scientific management (see Taylor, 1913, 1947). Often referred to as “Taylorism,” scientific management seeks to increase productivity by replacing skilled craftspeople with unskilled *automatons* (Morgan, 2006). As a result, the machine metaphor emphasizes rationality and efficiency at all costs (see also Burns & Stalker, 1961).

**Organism metaphor.** In contrast to the machine metaphor, the organism metaphor recognizes the importance of intra- and interorganizational relationships. This metaphor emphasizes the larger environment in which organizations exist, as well as the inevitable presence of subsystems within organizational structures. Although still focused on organizational productivity, the organism metaphor also values different approaches to management, depending upon the goal or situation in which one is operating. Established by Tom Burns and G. M. Stalker during the 1950’s, each of these understandings are collectively referred to as *contingency theory*; thus, the organism metaphor is more akin to an amoeba than a machine, allowing for multiple and even contradictory “species” (Morgan, 2006).

**Brain metaphor.** Derived from Norbert Wiener’s study of modern cybernetics, the brains metaphor emphasizes the way in which organizations change, self-adapt, and “learn.” Cybernetics relies upon *negative feedback*: recursive loops of self-regulating error detection. As Morgan (2006) explains:

> When we pick up an object from a table we typically assume that our hand, guided by our eye, moves directly toward the object. Cybernetics suggests not. This action occurs through a process of error elimination, whereby deviations between hand and object are reduced *at each and every stage of the process, so*
that in the end no error remains. We pick up the object by avoiding not picking it up. (p. 82, emphasis original)

In accordance with cybernetic principles, organizations must be able to sense their environment, detect deviations from their operating norms, and correct their own behavior accordingly. Although this process may be characterized as “learning,” in order to fully embody the brains metaphor, an organization must ultimately learn how to learn. Developed by Chris Argyris and Donald Schon, and characterized by the process of double-loop learning, this reality is represented in “learning organizations” (Morgan, 2006; see also Agor, 1989; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Ashby, 1952; Schon, 1983)

Learning organizations not only question how best to achieve operating norms (single-loop learning), but also question the relevance and application of existing norms (double-loop learning). As a result, they challenge groupthink and organizational boundaries in order to detect variations in their environment, and to challenge current organizational practices (Senge, 2006). In short, learning organizations “evolve designs that allow them to…avoid getting trapped in single-loop processes, especially those created by traditional management control systems and the defensive routines of organizational members” (Morgan, 2006, p. 87). In order for such an environment to exist, organizations must encourage risk taking and acknowledge the highly volatile nature of modern society. Learning organizations also recognize the inevitability of error and view mistakes as opportunity for self improvement.

**Culture metaphor.** The culture metaphor refers to specific systems of knowledge and day-to-day rituals that serve to construct and maintain shared meaning
within organizational contexts (see Ashkanasy, Wilderom, & Peterson, 2000). Morgan (2006) writes:

In talking about culture we are really talking about a process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways. These patterns of understanding help us to cope with the situation being encountered and also provide a basis for making our own behavior sensible and meaningful. (p. 134)

As a result, the culture metaphor highlights the symbolic significance within seemingly mundane aspects of organizational life, from the time and location of meetings to the color and arrangement of furniture. The culture metaphor also reveals ways in which organizational leaders and members actively co-create organizational life: “They can no longer hide behind formal structures and roles or excuse themselves for having unfortunate personality traits. From a cultural standpoint, the impact on shared meaning is all-important” (p. 143).

**Political metaphor.** The political metaphor focuses on processes by which differing perspectives resolve conflict via negotiation, cooperation, and compromise. This metaphor recognizes that disagreement occurs when interests diverge, and that conflict is an inevitable aspect of organizational life. The political metaphor is also attune to issues of power and authority: formal authority, control of scarce resources, control of technology, etc. (Morgan, 2006, p. 167). Six common types of political order found within contemporary organizations are autocracy, bureaucracy, technocracy, codetermination, representative democracy, and direct democracy. With autocracy, a single individual or group of individuals retain absolute power over the organization.
Bureaucracy relies on the written word or “rule of law” to exercise power. Technocracy, meanwhile, uses knowledge and expert power to manage and organize others. With codetermination, opposing interest groups unite in the spirit of mutual gain. Finally, with representative democracy, elected representatives act on the behalf of the electorate, while direct democracy grants equal rights and authority to all individuals.

**Prison metaphor.** Morgan (2006) uses Plato’s allegory of the cave (see Plato, 1941) to explain how organizations often limit their own understanding through social constructions of reality, thus, personifying the prison metaphor. Morgan outlines two primary reasons for this occurrence, including the way organizational members become “trapped by favored ways of thinking:”

Strong corporate cultures can become pathological. Powerful visions of the future can lead to blind spots. Ways of seeing become ways of not seeing. All the forces that help people and their organizations create the shared systems of meaning that allow them to negotiate the world in an orderly way, can become constraints that prevent them from acting in other ways. (p. 209)

As a result, favored ways of thinking often lead to entrapments that “confine individuals within socially constructed worlds and prevent the emergence of other worlds” (p. 211).

Organizations can also become psychic prisons due to unconscious thought processes. In the spirit of psychoanalysis (see Freud, 1953), Morgan (2006) argues that organizational members often make subconscious decisions based on repressed sexuality (p. 212), patriarchy (p. 218), and even the fear of death (p. 219), among other reasons. Our awareness of these impulses and the way we choose to deal with them has a direct affect upon organizational life. Although this study focused on “community” as
organizational metaphor, Morgan’s prison image offers several implications, as organizational members inadvertently embraced a one-sided and self-disciplining view of community.

**Transformation metaphor.** Drawing upon Greek philosophers and modern physicists, Morgan (2006) outlines the transformation metaphor by painting a mental image of swirling water: “While possessing relatively constant form, [the whirlpool of water] has no existence other than in the movement of the river” (p. 242). In this sense, organizations are to be understood as a constant state of flux, defined only by their processes of action and change. One explanation for this reality is the concept of autopoiesis (see Maturana & Varela, 1980). Derived from the Greek words *auto* and *poiesis* – auto meaning “self” and poiesis meaning “creation” – autopoiesis refers to the inherent desire for self-replication and self-organization. Maturana and Varela write:

An autopoietic machine is a machine organized (defined as a unity) as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components which:

(i) through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them; and (ii) constitute it (the machine) as a concrete unity in space in which they (the components) exist by specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network. (p. 78)

According to this understanding, it is the process of self-replication that forms stable patterns. Thus, the very process of reproduction is what differentiates a system as being a system: “The space defined by an autopoietic system is self-contained and cannot be described by using dimensions that define another space” (p. 89).
A second explanation for the transformation metaphor is the dialectical tension felt between opposing forces. Drawing upon the Taoist philosophy of yin and yang, Morgan (2006) notes that reversion is inevitable: “Whenever a situation develops extreme qualities it invariably turns around and assumes opposite qualities” (p 273). This cycle of change results in an organizational structure that is best defined by the transformation metaphor.

**Domination metaphor.** The final metaphor outlined by Morgan (2006) is that of domination. Fueled by work related injuries, CEO salaries, and the exploitation of foreign land and laborers, modern organizations are increasingly seen as tools of ascendancy, wielded in the self-interest of a privileged few. It can also be argued that an element of ascendancy exists within all modern organizations, as evidenced by the asymmetrical power relations among members and employees (p. 293).

Weber (1947; 1958a; 1958b) outlines three specific ways domination can occur, referred to collectively as the tripartite classification of authority: charismatic authority, traditional authority, and rational-legal authority. Charismatic authority derives from the strengths and abilities of a specific leader. The leader’s power does not come from an established custom but rather from the confidence that followers have in her/him. Traditional authority derives from social traditions and customs. Often used to perpetuate inequality between ruling and subordinate classes, this type of authority can be used to block the formation of rational-legal authority. Finally, rational-legal authority derives from elected or legal office. Power is found in the office rather than the individual; once an individual leaves or is removed from office, s/he loses the power of
that office. When exploited, each of these forms of domination can result in workaholism, and mental and social stress among employees (Morgan, 2006).

**Metaphoric Understanding**

Having reviewed each of Morgan’s (2006) metaphors, it is significant to note that his list overlooks the specific metaphor of “community.” This is true despite community’s prominent role within/among contemporary organizational settings (Block, 2008; Brown, 2002; Honeycutt, 2008; Lindberg & Olofsson, 2010). A review of Morgan’s list also serves to highlight the inherent way metaphor emphasizes certain perspective(s) while de-emphasizing others. Organizational metaphor can offer understanding to organizational members and theorists alike; however, metaphor can equally serve to mask certain insights, understandings, and taken for granted assumptions. By focusing on the “optimum overlap” between two objects in comparison (Figure 1.2), organizations often deemphasize the dissimilarities that are also and inevitably present (Davidson, 1978; Morgan, 2006; Ortony, 1992; Oswick et al., 2002; Oswick & Grant, 1996). With few exceptions (see Clark & Salaman, 1996), such inclusive comparisons can blind one to alternative interpretations of a given organizational and/or situational context.

Morgan (2006) comments on this reality by writing, “One of the interesting aspects of metaphor is that it always produces this kind of one-sided insight. In highlighting certain interpretations it tends to force others into a background role” (p. 4). He continues: “Metaphor is inherently paradoxical. It can create powerful insights that also become distortions, as the way of seeing created through metaphor becomes a way of *not* seeing” (p. 5, emphasis original). Just as no theory will ever offer a perfect
understanding of the world around us, no metaphor will ever offer a complete understanding of an organization’s culture: “A metaphor, no matter how ‘revealing,’ cannot help but alert us to some features and draw our attention away from others” (Oswick & Grant, 1996, p. 9). As a result, metaphors often reinforce existing power structures and taken for granted assumptions, leading to orthodox and limited understanding (Cornelissen, Oswick, Christensen, & Phillips, 2008; Eisenberg, Goodall, & Tretheway, 2010; Linstead, 1993; Oswick & Grant, 1996; Putnam & Boys, 2006; Tsoukas, 1991).

Figure 1.2. The role of metaphor.

The paradoxical nature of metaphor is especially relevant when expectations of reality differ from its current state, as in the case of personal failure (Payne, 1989), natural disaster (Weick, 1993), or organizational crisis (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007). Metaphor’s paradoxical nature is also significant when an organization is comprised of highly diverse perspectives, competing to define/frame an organization’s current cultural climate, as in the case of this study’s intercultural context. For each of these reasons, the present study theorizes “community” within the racially diverse
congregation of Common Point Community Church in order to reveal how differing interpretations of this metaphor are understood and managed.

**Tension-Centered Approach**

In order to examine how the diverse leaders and members of Common Point Community Church make sense of the community metaphor, this study also draws upon the tension-centered approach to organizational communication. Traditional approaches to organizational scholarship assume that organizations and organizational members are rational entities that pursue clear, unidirectional goals in an orderly manner (Ashcraft & Tretheway, 2004). In recent years, organizational communication scholars have increasingly challenged this sentiment by emphasizing the “dilemmatic character of organizing” (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004, p. 81; see also Eisenberg, 1984; Eisenberg & Witten, 1987). These scholars have actively explored the paradoxes, contradictions, and ironies (i.e., irrationality) that characterize contemporary organizational life. Smith and Eisenberg (1987) write, “Interpretations [of events] are not monolithic, but rather multiple world-views can and do exist within a single organization” (p. 368). As a result, the tension-centered approach is based upon two premises: irrationality is a normal condition of the everyday experiences of organizational life, and these tensions become relevant in organizational life as individuals experience and attempt to manage them through communication (Mickel & Dallimore, 2009; Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004).

Tretheway and Ashcraft (2004) argue that the tension-centered approach provides a richer understanding of organizational practice and is necessary for organizational theory building. Despite the promise of this approach, however, few empirical studies have explored “how actual organization members experience the variety of organizational
tensions that have been theorized as part of their everyday lives” (Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004, p. 82; for exceptions see Harter, 2004; Hatch, 1997; Martin, 2004; Tracy, 2004; Westenholz, 1993). As a result, Tretheway and Ashcraft (2004) call for additional research that explores how tensions manifest themselves in organizational contexts, how members typically respond, and how to effectively deal with these tensions. The present study meets each of these needs by contributing empirical evidence of how members within an intercultural organization experienced and managed tensions through micro, everyday interactions.

**Dialectical Theory**

Finally, this study uses dialectical theory to examine the tensions experienced in organizational life (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Putnam, Jahn, and Baker (2011) note that diversity studies (i.e., research that focus on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and disability) often conceptualize difference as a movement away from the focal point. They argue that this conceptualization leads to designations of majority, minority, and underrepresentation, while hiding/ignoring political, historical, and contextual reasons for differences. Putnam et al. (2011) advocate a move away from such approaches and propose a dialectical approach to studying difference.

Dialectical theory centers on the simultaneous push-pull that emanates between contradictory impulses (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Within the communication discipline, this theory has been predominantly situated within the study of interpersonal relationships (Baxter, 2011); however, in recent years dialectical theory has been used to examine both small group communication (e.g., Kramer, Benoit, Dixon,
& Benoit-Bryan, 2007) and organizational communication (e.g., Barge, et al., 2008; Jian, 2007; Norton & Sadler, 2006; Seo, et al., 2009; Tracy 2004). As Putnam et al. (2011) note, “These studies reveal that dialectic tensions pervade all aspects of organizational life…cross organizational units and boundaries, form sites of cultural struggles, and enact processes of change” (p. 37; see also Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004).

Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of dialectics argues that human relationships are constituted at the confluence of a “contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies” (p. 272). Within this dialogic view of dialectics, the tension between opposites is a process of managing social forces rather than problems in need of a solution. Drawing upon this notion, Putnam et al. (2011) argue that dialectical theory is particularly suited to study how markers of difference create tensions within organizational settings. This theory is also suitable for studying how individuals manage these tensions in ways that are constraining and/or enabling. Putnam et al. summarize the merits of this perspective in the following way:

Overall, in dialectics, difference surfaces in multiple ways, namely, as the social construction of opposites, as a medium in the interplay among tensions, and as a product that results from coping with, acting on, or moving forward amid the tensions. As a product, differences can be denied or ignored (selection), recognized but split in specialized ways (source splitting), alternated between opposites (separation), diluted or merged (integration), transformed or recast (transcendence), and embraced and preserved (connection). (p. 40)

Consistent with this argument, I draw upon dialectical theory in this study to highlight how difference emerges within Common Point Community Church as both a medium and
product of managing dialectical tensions. I also examine how members of the organization negotiate identities by drawing upon organizational and social discourses.

In addition, the present study contributes to the expanding communication literature on race (Allen, 2007) while providing an empirical study of how organizational members engage with and attempt to manage the tensions inherent in organizational life. It also addresses two specific needs in dialectical research, as identified by Baxter (2011). First, I move beyond dialectics research that stops after the mere identification of competing discourses. In this study, I address the need for communication research that reveals the specific ways in which “discourses textually play off with and against one another” (Baxter, 2011, p. 169). Second, I incorporate multiple research methods into my study. Baxter (2011) notes that dialectics research is dominated by retrospective and/or self-report research methods. Such an approach “gives us talk about relationships rather than relationships in talk” (p. 122). In contrast, I draw upon a variety of qualitative research methods, spanning more than thirty-six months, in order to answer this study’s three research questions.

**Research Questions**

*RQ1:* How is “community” understood by the racially diverse leaders and members of Common Point Community Church?

*RQ2:* What potential limitations result from the community metaphor?

*RQ3:* How are dialectical tensions managed in order to maintain the organizational metaphor of community?
Chapter 2:

Research Context

Religious and faith-based organizations have the potential to address many of the social problems in America today: racial/ethnic inequality, economic disparity, domestic violence, and environmental destruction, to name but a few (Bellah et. al, 1985/2008; Emerson, 2008; Jason, 1997; Payne, Bergin, Bielema, & Jenkins, 1991; Putnam, 2000; Saguaro Seminar, 2009; Tocqueville, 1969). Churches not only act as mediating institutions (Brennan, 2010; Cyuma, 2006), but also wield a significant amount of influence within contemporary society (Che-Po & Beatrice, 2000; Chilean TV, 2004; Krause, 2010). There are, in fact, more than 300,000 faith-based congregations in the United States alone (Cnaan, Brody, Handy, Yancey, & Schneider, 2002). More than one hundred million Americans are involved in church to some degree, and the majority of Americans visit a congregation at least once per year (Emerson, 2008). Although these figures have declined in recent years (Barna, 1999; Barnes & Lowry, 2006; Rainer, 2001), an estimated “one half of the stock of social capital in America is [still] religious or religiously affiliated, whether measured by volunteering, philanthropy, or time spent on civic participation” (Saguaro Seminar, 2009). Putnam (2000) comments on this reality by writing:

Faith communities…are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America… Nearly half of all associational memberships in America are
church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context. So how involved we are in religion today matters a lot for America’s social capital. (p. 66)

Religion’s potential influence for positive social change is especially salient among disadvantaged people groups. As Bellah et. al (1985/2008) write, “In American society religious associations have the strongest hold on their members and almost alone have the capacity to reach individuals of every class” (p. xxxvii). Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) further elaborate on religion’s ability to address social inequality:

Only religious institutions provide a counterbalance to [the] cumulative resource process [that favors the originally advantaged]. They play an unusual role in the American participatory system by providing opportunities for the development of civic skills to those who would otherwise be resource-poor…Another way that American society is exceptional is in how often Americans go to church – with the result that the mobilizing function often performed elsewhere by unions and labor or social democratic parties is more likely to be performed by religious institutions. (p. 18-19)

Despite religion’s potential for positive social change, organizational communication scholars have not routinely studied religious or faith-based organizations, focusing instead upon for-profit and professional contexts (Ashcraft, 2011; Giddens, 1986; for recent exceptions see Edgell & Tranby, 2007; Edwards, 2008, 2009; Schultze, 2010; Soukup, 2010). Even less research and reflection has addressed issues of racial difference (Allen, 2007; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Mumby, 2011; Nkomo, 1992; Proudford & Nkomo, 2006). Cox and Nkomo (1990) comment on this
reality, referring to minorities as the “invisible men and women” of organizational research. Only recently have communication researchers begun exploring matters of race within organizational contexts by focusing upon “key cultural formations of difference-sameness” (Ashcraft, 2011).

Given the lack of research by organizational communication scholars on the intersection between race and religion, this study centered on Common Point Community Church, an intercultural congregation located in Tampa Bay’s urban corridor. Although it has been noted that a disproportionate number of studies focus upon Christianity (Gorsuch, 1984; Gorsuch & Miller, 1999; Hall, Tisdale, & Brokaw, 1994; Piedmont, 2007; Piedmont & Leech, 2002), the locale for this study was chosen due to Common Point’s uniquely diverse congregation, as well as Christianity’s continued influence upon contemporary society (Kurth, 1998; Waldrep, 2007).

This section includes both an historical and contemporary discussion of Christianity, as well as a discussion of the specific organizational context in which this study took place (see Bateson, 1972/2000; 2005; Capra, 1997; Meadows, 2008). The specific context for this study is significant since no two organizations are alike. In order to fully comprehend the results and communicative implications of this analysis, however, Common Point must first be placed within the larger historic and contemporary landscapes of Christianity. As Agar (1980/1996) writes:

One no longer studies isolated, cradle-to-grave communities; one studies citizens and immigrants in turbulent states that are part of the world. One no longer reports fixed traditions; one deals with ongoing processes of change. One no longer limits the research to meaning and contexts; one includes the power that
holds those meanings and contexts in place. Groups no longer have clear edges, and people present multiple and often conflicting identities, some of them rooted outside the community. (p. 11)

**Historical Context**

Some scholars view the Christian religion to be as old as narrative itself, stemming from the creation story of Genesis to the survival story of Noah, to the exodus of Moses to the genealogy of Abraham, and so on. Others view Christianity to have begun with Jesus of Nazareth – his life and his execution in approximately 33 C.E. (Fotheringham, 1934; Humphreys, 2011; Maier, 1968). Still others view Christianity to be a creation of the apostle Paul or even the emperor Constantine an estimated 300 years later (Chadwick, 1995; Hill, 2006; McManners, 1990). It appears that the Christian religion cannot be fully attributed to any one source alone; each of these influences has worked to shape Christianity as we understand it today.

Although the core beliefs and practices of Christianity did not emerge until after Jesus’ crucifixion, the Jewish people of that time had long been awaiting their “Messiah” (Daniel 7:13-14, New International Version). Born in the village of Bethlehem and raised in the hills of Galilee, a man by the name of Jesus is believed to have fulfilled that expectation (John 12:13). In a similar tradition as the Edenic, Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants that preceded him, Jesus subsequently offered his disciples a *New Covenant* (Mark 1:27).

The life and death of Jesus is evidenced by a number of secular sources, written as early as the first century (Funk, 1998; Tuckett, 2001). Such sources include the historical writings of Bar-Serapion, Tacitus, Lucian, Josepheus, Suetonius, Thallus, Phlegon, and the
Babylonian Talmud (Durie, n.d.; Habermas, 1988, 1996; McDowell, 1987, 1999). In 73 C.E., Bar-Serapion mentions the execution of a “wise King” by the Jewish people (Van Voorst, 2000, p. 53). In approximately 116 C.E., Tacitus seemingly refers to the Jesus of Christianity by writing: “Christus...suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators” (Tacitus, n.d., par. 37). A second-century satirist also refers to Jesus as “the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account” (Lucian, n.d., par. 12), and the first-century historian Josephus writes:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day. (Josephus, n.d., par. 14)

Each of these accounts has been highly contested within both religious and secular circles (Geldman, Feldman, & Hata, 1997). Such debate, however, is beyond the focus of this particular study.

Despite the controversy surrounding Jesus’ life and teachings, news of his death and alleged resurrection soon spread throughout ancient Rome. The missionary journeys of Paul further diffused this New Covenant, reaching as far east as the Persian Empire.
Nonetheless, early Christian communities were often fragmented in their beliefs and actions. For that reason, an assembly was held in Jamnia during approximately 90 C.E. which sought to canonize Christian scripture – a process of sanctioning certain religious writings as holy or sacrosanct (Hill, 2006). In the centuries to come, that assembly served as a major step toward establishing the hierarchical role of church leadership and recorded Scripture that defined a previously oral tradition.

Another major step toward the legitimacy of Christianity came with the religious conversion of Constantine the Great in 312 C.E. Constantine became sole ruler of the Roman Empire twelve years later, and though Christianity was never made the official religion of Rome, Constantine was outspoken in its promotion (Hill, 2006). His armies marched into battle beneath a banner of Christianity and Sundays were declared a holiday. Constantine also constructed an original city entitled New Rome where he disallowed any pagan temples to be built or rites to be performed; Christian churches were erected throughout this new capital (Brown, 2003; MacMullen, 1997; Webster & Brown, 1997).

During the proceeding centuries, Christianity endured many transformations. Yet the emerging role of religious figure heads, the hierarchy of Scripture, and the centrality of church remained (McFrost & Hirsch, 2003). A unified belief system and worship style was further established in Europe during the high Middle Ages (Bokenkotter, 1990; Hill, 2006). This sense of unity was especially evident in the architecture of Notre Dame de Paris, Notre Dame de Chartres, Lincoln Cathedral, and so on. These progressive constructs served a role both physically and spiritually, their presence towering over modest surroundings (Scott, 2003). Despite reaching such architectural accolades, the
subsequent Wars of Religion and the Thirty Years’ War left Christianity fragile in most of Europe. Catholicism became unpopular throughout the seventeenth century, setting the stage for Cartesianism, rationalism, and ultimately the dawn of modernism (Hill, 2006; Ferngren, 2002).

Rene Descartes, the originator of Cartesianism, was a devout Roman Catholic who believed any assertion made about the world could be proved or disproved through careful examination. He was convinced that philosophical dilemmas could be resolved in much the same way one might resolve a mathematical equation. As a result, Descartes displayed many marks of a metaphysical realist, believing knowledge to be reflective of a universal reality that exists outside of the human mind (Grenz & Franke, 2001). Grenz and Franke further comments on Descartes’ role in the birth of modernism by writing:

The problem of error and the quest for epistemological certainty – the quest for a means by which we can justify our claims to knowledge – dates at least to the ancient Greek philosophers. But in Western philosophical history, this difficulty became acute in the Enlightenment. Historians routinely look to the French philosopher Rene Descartes as the progenitor of modern foundationalism. (p. 31)

Several philosophers took issue with Descartes’ epistemological paradigm, namely John Locke and Thomas Reid. Gottfried Leibniz, however, saw validity in this Cartesianism-style of philosophy. A figurehead for seventeenth century Rationalism, Leibniz also believed that any disagreement could be resolved through logical discourse, laboring to formulate a number of arguments for the existence of God, heaven, and so on (Hill, 2006). This quest for a source of epistemological certainty led Charles Hodge to proclaim the Bible as being free from all error: a source of verity for theologians in much
the same way that nature is a source of verity for scientists (Grenz & Franke, 2001).

Thus, Scripture became “the supreme manifestation of the Word of God…because of its ‘objective’ truth (a modern distinction)” (McNeal, 2003, p. 54, 55).

Each of these eras within the Enlightenment Period – Cartesianism and Rationalism – along with Socinianism, Unitarianism, and Deism, attempted to explain the Christian religion through use of scientific reason. Such attempts, however, are generally viewed as having failed. As a result, the Enlightenment soon gave way to atheist thought, as well as the Romanticism of David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Barnett, 2004; Byrne, 1997; Hill, 2006; Outram, 1995).

**Contemporary Context**

In contrast to the early church’s struggle for organizational and philosophical legitimacy (Ferngren, 2002; Hill, 2006; Robinson & Smith, 1997), contemporary Christianity is marked by a vast physical, political, and economic presence. Nowhere is this prevailing presence better evidenced than with the modern *megachurch* movement (Karnes, McIntosh, Morris, & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2007). The megachurch movement first emerged in the 1950s, characterized by Guinness and Seel (1992) as “a significant new initiative in the long story of Christian innovation and adaptation… extraordinarily influential and significant within American churches today” (p. 153, 154). The movement later gained attention within academia during the 1970s (Bouma, 2008; Davidson, 2008) and national attention during the 1990s (Thumma, 2007).

The megachurch movement is largely attributed to the writings of David McGavran and C. Peter Wagner (Guinness & Seel, 1992; Watson, Scalen, & Walter, 2008), who were two of the first leaders to propose a social science approach to church
growth policies (McGavran, 1955; McGavran & Wagner, 1990). McGavran and Wagner also called for maintaining accurate records, setting statistical goals for growth, and keeping numerical reports of new converts. As Watson and Scalen (2008) write, “The development of standardized indicators of growth was seen as essential to the long-term success of evangelical mission work” (p. 172).

Today, megachurches are defined as having at least 2,000 weekly attendees (Chaves, 2006; Goh, 2008; Thumma, 2007; 2009). According to this criterion, there were approximately 350 megachurches in America in 1990. That number grew to 600 by the year 2000. Even though over-reporting of attendance is a common problem within religious organizations (Marler & Hadaway, 1999; Smith 1998), there are an estimated 1,200 megachurches in the United States today (Thumma, 2009; Thumma & Travis, 2007). The average weekly attendance of American megachurches is 3,587. They are concentrated within suburban areas around the rapidly growing cities of Los Angeles, Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, and Orlando. Over 60% of megachurches are located within America’s Sunbelt, with California, Texas, Georgia, and Florida having the greatest concentrations (Thumma, 2009).

Megachurches offer a sense of community in a fragmented society, certainty in uncertain times, and one-stop shopping for social and spiritual needs. Yet the modern megachurch movement is not without its critics. Specifically, megachurches have been disparaged for their emphasis on growth (Budde & Brimlow, 2007; Guinness & Seel, 1992) and their reliance upon secular business models (Ritzer, 2004; Twitchell, 2005; Watson & Scalen, 2008). In the words of Watson and Scalen (2008), “Getting big became an obsession” (p. 173). As a result, an increasing number of religious leaders
have their Master’s degree in business administration, and the average annual revenue for a megachurch in the United States is over $6 million dollars (Baird, 2006). Some church leaders have gone so far as to claim they have been “blessed by God in their business success” (Cao, 2008, p. 64).

Another criticism leveled at modern megachurches is that their emergence has come at the expense of smaller, neighboring churches. This criticism explains how the megachurch movement has experienced such substantial growth, while congregational attendance in general continues to decline (Barna, 1999; Barna Research Group 2006; Barnes & Lowry, 2006; Rainer, 2001). Guinness and Seels (1992) further comment on this reality by writing: “It leads to an essentially consumerist competition between particular local churches that simultaneously thrusts up superchurches and impoverishes other churches and the overall work of God in a local area” (p. 155).

With growth as such a central priority in the landscape of contemporary Christianity, organizational leaders often adopt a strictly personal view of church purpose (Chappie, 2001; Swatos, 1999), as opposed to a public view (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989). Hauerwas and Willimon (1989) define this dichotomy between public and private in the following way:

The ‘private’ church [consists of] conservative evangelicals who [think] that the business of the church [is] to stick to saving souls and to concern itself with the purely private world of religion. The ‘public’ church… [feels] that Christians [are] obligated to go public with their social agenda, working within given social structures to make a better society. (p. 31)
Hauerwas and Willimon (1989) later argue, however, that American ecclesiology is not adequately expressed as a public/private binary. For this reason, Driscoll and Breshears (2008) outline a more sophisticated model of organizational purpose, offering four potential views for the contemporary Christian church: (a) evangelical, (b) fundamentalist, (c) liberal, and (d) political (Table 2.1).

**Evangelistic view of organizational purpose.** Evangelicalism began in England during the early 18th century (Bebbington, 1989). The first recorded use of this term, however, occurred some 200 years earlier as William Tyndale encouraged his readers to “proceed… in the evangelistic truth” (Johnson, 2009). The four basic tenets of evangelicalism are an emphasis on personal conversion (conversionism), a desire to spread Christian beliefs (activism), a high regard for biblical authority (Biblicism), and an emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (crucicentrism) (Bebbington, 1989; Eskridge, 1995).

Driscoll and Breshears (2008) characterize the evangelistic view of contemporary Christianity as seeking to “clean up the proverbial river of culture by simply converting as many people as possible to Christianity” (p. 288). They further illustrate this vision of church purpose by commenting:

> The focus is on outreach events, personal evangelism, and parachurch ministries. All of these are devoted to insuring lost people repent of sin and become Christians. The underlying assumption in this vision is if more people have new hearts, somehow the world and its culture will change. (p. 288)

Within the contemporary Christian landscape, evangelicalism is often used as a rationale for the megachurch movement’s aforementioned emphasis on organizational growth.
Evangelicalism also has been described as a middle ground between the fundamentalist and liberal views of church purpose (Mead, 2006).

**Fundamentalist view of organizational purpose.** Fundamentalism emerged in the early 20th century as an effort to defend the rudimentary beliefs of Christianity (Boone, 1989; Brent, 1991; Cox, 1984; Marsden, 1980; Marty, 1976; Sandeen, 1970). The defining characteristics of fundamentalism were first outlined by R. A. Torrey, Charles L. Feinberg, and Warren W. Wiersbe; known collectively as *The Fundamentals*, their writings were first published between 1910 and 1915 (Brent, 1994). Barr (1977) later summarized the three defining characteristics of fundamentalism: a belief in Biblical inerrancy, opposition toward critical studies of the Bible, and categorization of those in disagreement as non-Christian.

The fundamentalist view of church purpose regards the world as hopelessly abhorrent, focusing on personal holiness above all else (Hatfield, 2004). Driscoll and Breshears (2008) write:

> Christians should separate from the world and its culture as much as possible so as to avoid being stained in any way and to preserve one’s personal and familial holiness at all costs… Adherents of the fundamentalist vision are prone to engage in culture wars, angrily reacting against the filth they see in the cultural river that they abhor. (p. 289)

Fundamentalist church members have been shown to hold lower levels of education than other religious groups (Beyerlein, 2004) and higher levels of prejudice (Chalfant & Peek, 1983; Ebaugh & Haney, 1978; Rothschild, Abdollahi & Pyszczynski, 2009). This prejudice is particularly evident toward women, homosexuals (Kirkpatrick, 1993;
Whitley, 2009), and those of the Islamic faith (Johnson, 2006; Raiya, Pargament, Mahoney, & Trevino, 2008). As a result, the label of “fundamental” is commonly used as a pejorative descriptor (Boer, 2005; Dawkins, 2006; Harris, 2008), and fundamentalist Christians are often portrayed in the media as racist, violent, and intolerant (Kerr, 2003).

**Liberal view of organizational purpose.** Contrary to fundamentalism, the liberal view of church is outwardly and community focused. Modern liberalism emerged during the Protestant Reformation, developed by Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Lessing, and Kant. Liberalism advances the freedom of religious and political thought. It defends individual autonomy, while promoting social equality (Gruber, 1910). Within the contemporary Christian church, a liberal vision “seeks to lovingly serve people, particularly the poor and marginalized” (Driscoll & Breshears, 2008, p. 289). As Hauerwas and Willimon (1989) write, liberal Christians often criticize evangelistic and fundamentalist Christians for being too narrowly focused on spiritual matters and personal salvation, while failing “to appreciate the social character of salvation” (p. 31). In accordance with liberation theology, liberal churches often “fill the gap” between recent increases in need and “diminishing government services for the poor” (Cook, 1998, p. 3).

One such example of a liberal church is the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas. The Cathedral was founded in 1970. With over 3,000 members, it is currently the world’s largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender church (Hudson, 2009). Surprisingly, the majority of its members are former Christian fundamentalists. As Hendershot (2000) writes, this reality “offers a unique opportunity to examine discursive strategies not only for fighting the Right but also, more precisely, for fighting the Right
with its favorite weapon: the Bible” (p. 152). In recent years, the Cathedral of Hope has made a conscious effort to seek social justice for other marginalized groups. The Cathedral, in return, has experienced greater acceptance, affirmation, and advocacy from the citizens of its local community (Johnston, 2004). Although Common Point is not an LGBT church, the liberal view of church purpose most closely aligns with its current organizational focus on community.

**Political view of organizational purpose.** Finally, the political view of church purpose is characterized as seeking to “change the world through the powerful means of political influence…. [By electing like-minded candidates] the world would be transformed from the top down by virtue of having a moral conscience” (Driscoll & Breshears, 2008, p. 289). McClerking and McDaniel (2005) also define a political church as one that “holds political awareness and activity as salient pieces of its identity” (p. 723). As a result, these churches often use get-out-the-vote campaigns and invite political candidates to speak before their congregations (Blazing Saddleback, 2008; Riley, 2008).

Political churches have an especially strong presence within the African American community (Brown & Wolford, 1994; Dawson, 1994; Harris, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Liu & Austin & Orey, 2009; Marx, 1967; McAdam, 1982; Morris, 1984). Such churches promote political knowledge and participation (Brown & Brown, 2003; Harris, 1999; Tate, 1993) while “communicat[ing] political activity as a norm” (Calhoun-Brown, 1996, p. 942).
Table 2.1

*Taxonomy of Contemporary Church Purpose*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific View of Church Purpose</th>
<th>Defining Emphases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evangelistic View</td>
<td>Emphasizes personal conversion, theological activism, Biblical authority, and the crucicentrism of Jesus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentalist View</td>
<td>Emphasizes Biblical inerrancy, and the preservation of personal and familial holiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal View</td>
<td>Emphasizes the freedom of religious and political thought, personal autonomy, and social equality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political View</td>
<td>Emphasizes the power of political influence through the election of moral candidates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Organizational Context**

Within this historical and contemporary landscape of Christianity emerged the specific context for this communication study: Common Point Community Church (Figure 2.1). Common Point is a nondenominational, Christian church located in the South Seminole Heights area of Tampa Bay. The church was founded in 2006 in collaboration with two church planting organizations: *Stadia* (Stadia, 2012) and *Florida Church Partners* (FCP, n.d.). Common Point acquired its current location from Central Christian Church, following Central Christian’s decision to permanently close its doors.

Central Christian had existed within various buildings and locations around Tampa for nearly 50 years. By the year 2006, however, the church recognized that it had lost touch with its surrounding neighborhood (Danny Schaffner, personal...
communication, October 19, 2010). Although exact data does not currently exist, Central Christian’s average age rose well above that of South Seminole Heights. The congregation’s racial/ethnic makeup also belied that of the immediate area. Consequently, Central Christian’s attendance began to decline during the mid and late 1990s. With decreased attendance, the church soon became economically unsustainable. In 2006, Central Christian bequeathed its 40-year-old building and three acres of land to Common Point Community Church “in an effort to pass on their assets and create a legacy” (Common Ground, 2012c, par. 1).

Figure 2.1. Common Point Community Church.

Common Point’s current pastor had worked as a youth pastor at three previous churches in the Midwest before moving to Tampa, FL. Feeling called to begin a church in the Tampa Bay area, the pastor relocated his family in 2006, along with two associate pastors. Over the next several months, Common Point’s leadership publicized the launch of their new church plant through mass mailings and door hangers. In addition, the pastor and associate pastors went door to door, personally announcing the fact that Central Christian Church was becoming Common Point Community Church.
The pastors used this time of interaction to survey local residents, in effort to identify specific needs within the church’s surrounding community. When someone in the neighborhood answered their door, Common Point’s leadership began by introducing themselves. They then informed the residents of their plan to launch a new church in Seminole Heights, and asked what deficits Common Point most needed to address in the local neighborhood. Two primary needs that Common Point identified during this process were that of poverty and education. Residents commonly cited the neighborhood’s large number of poor and homeless members, as well as their own inability to afford such basic items as gas, food, and clothing. In regard to education, residents often cited the poor performance rate of their local elementary school, Broward Elementary School. Armed with this information, it was soon discovered by a member of Common Point’s leadership that Broward Elementary was one of the lowest ranked public elementary schools in the state of Florida. The Hillsborough school district was also found to be ranked well below average. Of the 1,943 public elementary schools in Florida, Broward Elementary ranks number 1,810 by School Digger (2012a). Of the 68 school districts in Florida, Hillsborough ranks number 45 (School Digger, 2012b).

The felt needs of Common Point’s surrounding community informed each of its current community outreach/engagement efforts. In effort to address the area’s economic deficits, Common Point has begun a community garden to benefit Tampa’s Homeless Café; We Cannot Wait, an initiative to feed, clothe, and shelter homeless citizens in the neighborhood; Movie Night Out, a monthly film screening in one of several public parks; and Angel Food Ministries, a service that offers discounted groceries to those in need. In order to address the area’s educational deficits, Common Point has begun to offer free
tutorial services to the students of Broward Elementary School. Additional education efforts include Backpack Attack, a program that provides free school supplies to local elementary students; Fall Festival, an annual community event that partners with Broward Elementary to offer free food, carnival games, and children’s rides; and Common Point Academy, a local effort to develop the artistic aptitude of Broward Elementary students.

Before opening its doors to the public, Common Point’s leadership also overlooked a massive renovation of their newly acquired building and land, in effort to (re)connect with the neighborhood’s younger demographic. External renovations included a newly paved parking lot, pressure washed brick, new windows, shingles, paint, and the clearing of an adjacent lot. Internal renovations to the building were even more extensive. The church’s bathrooms and kitchen area were completely remodeled, the sanctuary’s wood paneled walls were replaced with drywall, and the baptismal was repaired (Figures 2.2-2.4). Additional renovations included updated carpet, paint, and tile throughout the building.

As construction neared completion, Common Point held its first official service on Sunday, September 9, 2007. At that time, the church offered only one service which met on Sunday morning at 10:00 a.m. The church began with three full-time employees – the lead pastor and the two associate pastors who had relocated with him from the Midwest. There were approximately 40 adults in attendance during the church’s first week of service.
Figure 2.2. Sanctuary Pre-Renovation.

Figure 2.3. Sanctuary During Renovation.
Common Point has grown steadily since first opening its doors. The church now has three full-time and two part-time employees. Common Point’s full-time employees included the Lead Pastor (white male, age 40) and Worship Pastor (black male, age 44). Common Point’s part-time employees included the Children’s Minister (white male, age 20), Youth Minister (Hispanic/Latino male, age 28), and Director of Community Impact (white male, age 26). During the course of this study, Common Point’s average weekly attendance ranged from 140-200 adults.

Common Point currently offers two services on Sunday morning: the first begins at 9:30 a.m. and the second begins at 11:00 a.m. The move to offer a second service occurred in late 2010, not only in response to growing attendance numbers, but also in effort to spur more growth. Common Point’s leadership felt that an additional option would appeal to those who could not attend the current 10:00 service, as well as those
who simply preferred an earlier or later start time. This assumption seems to have been accurate, as Common Point’s attendance increased steadily throughout 2010 and 2011 to its current weekly average of nearly 200.

Common Point’s weekly attendance is divided evenly between the 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. services. Each service offers a casual and contemporary ambiance. Leaders typically wear jeans and button-up shirts; members of the congregation often dress even more casually by wearing shorts, t-shirts, and/or sandals. Both services also share a contemporary approach to worship music, complete with vocalists, drums, and electric guitars. A typical church service at Common Point consists of four to six opening songs (approximately 25 minutes in length), followed by a sermon (twenty minutes), communion (five minutes), offering (five minutes), announcements (five minutes), and a closing prayer. Common Point’s services do not offer the customary rites or rituals that characterize other Christian traditions, such as Catholicism, Lutheranism, or Episcopalians: responsive readings, call to worship, or recitation of the Lord’s prayer.

Common Point’s decision to appropriate Central Christian Church’s building and property stands in stark contrast to several strategies that are typical of contemporary church planters (Danny Schaffner, personal communication, October 19, 2010; see also Malphurs, 2011). Conventional wisdom suggests that a new church plant should acquire a sizeable portion of land that is suitable for future expansion. This site should be located in a growing and/or newly developed area, coupled with a homogenous and upper-middle class demographic. Each of these characteristics, in fact, is evidenced by the aforementioned megachurch movement (Thumma, 2007; 2009). In contrast to typical church planting strategies, Common Point acquired an aging building, with little room for
expansion. As a member of the national register of historic places (Historic Seminole Heights, 2012), the South Seminole Heights area of Tampa Bay is neither growing nor newly developed. Finally, the racial and economic demographic of Common Point’s surrounding neighborhood is far from homogenous or upper class. There are an estimated 160,000 persons living within six square-miles of Common Point (Percept, 2007). Thirty-nine percent of this population self-identifies as Hispanic, 30 percent identifies as Non-Hispanic White, 27 percent identifies as African American, and four percent identifies as Asian-American/Multiracial. Meanwhile, 28% of South Seminole Heights is considered below the poverty line (Hillsborough Community Atlas, 2011), as compared to the national average of 15% (Yen, 2011).

Common Point’s leadership, however, embraced the geographic, racial, and economic limitations that surrounded their new location. During my initial interactions with the church’s leadership, they commonly referred to this reality as a welcomed challenge: “The last thing Tampa needs is another church… We want to be different. And we want to be the kind of church that makes a difference” (Danny Schaffner, personal communication, March 10, 2010). One specific way that Common Point has attempted to make a difference is by being an intercultural congregation.

An intercultural congregation, as defined by Pettigrew and Martin (1987), is one in which no one racial/ethnic group makes up more than 80 percent of attendees (see also Emerson, 2008; Yancey, 2003). By this standard, less than eight percent of American congregations are intercultural (Chavez, 1999; Emerson & Smith, 2000). In contrast to the national trend, only sixty-three percent of Common Point’s congregation self-identify
as Non-Hispanic White. Sixteen percent of attendees self-identify as Hispanic/Latino\(^1\) and fourteen percent self-identify as African American. The remaining six percent of individuals self-identify as Asian-American or Multiracial. Such a uniquely diverse congregation is especially significant, since Common Point’s surrounding community reflects the projected demographics of America by year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008; Table 2.2)

Table 2.2

Comparative Percentages of Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-identification</th>
<th>% of Common Point</th>
<th>% of Community</th>
<th>% of 2050 Projections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-American/Multiracial</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to race/ethnicity, Common Point’s diversity includes age, economic income, education level, marital status, and even political affiliation. Regular attendees of Common Point range from newborn to 91 years of age, with a mean of 37.43. Meanwhile, Common Point’s surrounding community has an average age of 36.5 years. The economic income of Common Point’s attendees range from $10,000 to $200,000, with a mean of $51,300; economic incomes in the area range from below $15,000 to above $150,000, with a mean of $41,457 (Percept, 2007).

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\(^1\) I recognize the status of Hispanic/Latino as a marker of race and/or ethnicity is highly contested, as are the terms “race” and “ethnicity” in general (see Proudford & Nkomo, 2006). Participants in this study, however, used these terms interchangeably to denote a racial category. Consistent with an interpretive perspective, for this study I chose to employ the terminologies used by the participants.
A Bachelor’s Degree is the highest level of education achieved by 33 percent of Common Point’s attendees. Twenty-five percent have completed “Some College,” fourteen percent have a Master’s Degree, twelve percent have a GED/High School diploma, seven percent have an Associate’s Degree, six percent have completed Middle School/Junior High, and two percent have a Doctorate or Professional Degree. In comparison, nineteen percent of adults living in the surrounding community have a Bachelor’s Degree, and less than six percent have a Master’s Degree (Percept, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a).

Fifty-three percent of Common Point’s attendees self-identified as being married, 35 percent self-identify as single, nine percent self-identify as divorced, and three percent self-identify as engaged. Comparatively, 40 percent of adults living in the surrounding community are married and sixteen percent are divorced or widowed (Hallett, 2011; Percept, 2007; Robinson, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).

Finally, political affiliation is also diverse within Common Point’s congregation and surrounding area. Thirty-six percent of attendees self-identified as Democrat. Twenty-three percent self-identify as Republican, twenty-three percent self-identify as Independent, and eighteen percent self-identified as “Other.” In comparison, Common Point’s surrounding community donated a total of $10,350 to the Democratic candidates of John Kerry, Howard Dean, and Bob Graham during the 2004 election cycle. The community donated $1,700 to the Republic candidate, George W. Bush (Color of Money, 2010). Having outlined this study’s historical, contemporary, and organizational context, the following chapter discusses its research methodology.
Chapter 3:
Research Methodology

Before outlining this study’s methodology, it is important to acknowledge my positionality as a researcher. In brief, I am a white, middle-class male who has experienced consistent educational and material privilege throughout my life. By pursuing this project, I accepted Allen’s (2007) invitation for all communication scholars to study race, rather than positioning race as a topic of study reserved for scholars of color. Furthermore, I engaged this project from an interpretive perspective by focusing my observations and analysis on the unique, plural, simultaneous, and local reality as it is (re)constructed within Common Point Community Church (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). I remained simultaneously attuned, however, to relations of power and domination as they emerged through my observations and interviews; thus, following the work of Barker and Cheney (1994), I position the study’s methodology as interpretive research with a critical edge. The present section outlines this methodology in more detail, including: (a) entrée, (b) approach, (c) procedures, and (d) analysis.

Entrée

This study came to fruition as result of several interrelated factors. During my first month in the Tampa Bay area, I attended Grace Family Church, an exemplar of the aforementioned megachurch movement. I was immediately dissuaded, however, by the
organization’s size and sophistication. Grace Family averages several thousand attendees each week. During my only visit to the church, I was directed to a parking spot by church volunteers waiving fluorescent sticks, as if attending a sold-out music festival. I was then picked up at my car in a golf cart and ushered to the building’s main entrance. Finally, the church service itself was filled with beautiful people and professional musicians. I personally interpreted each of these characteristics as impersonal, desiring what I would describe as a more modest and authentic faith experience.

The following week I attended Common Point Community Church for the first time. I desired to find an intercultural congregation with a youthful and contemporary ambiance; I discovered the organization through a simple online search. In contrast to Grace Family, at Common Point I was neither directed to a parking spot nor driven to the building’s main entrance. Dare I say it, the church service was not filled with beautiful people or professional quality musicians. Rather, I was met at the door by two couples in the mid- to late-twenties who immediately struck up a conversation about my reason for moving to Tampa, the beaches I had visited, and whether or not I had eaten at a local restaurant called the Taco Bus. (At the time, I had not). Inside, the congregation was a fraction of Grace Family’s size, and even though the lead pastor was out of town that weekend, I immediately felt at ease in the space, as if it were the kind of place I could call home, the kind of church I could learn to grow alongside.

My master’s thesis had explored postmodern communication within a religious congregation, so I had experience working with(in) faith-based organizations. Yet I initially had no intention to use Common Point as the context for my dissertation work. I had no intention, in fact, to study another religious organization, for fear of restricting my
future line of research. I made this clear to Common Point’s pastor on several occasions, in order to alleviate any expectations or potential confusion.

Soon after I began attending Common Point, however, the lead pastor showed a clear interest in discussing some of the tensions he experienced as a white male attempting to lead an intercultural congregation. We spoke informally on the topic several times, both in the foyer before/after services as well as over coffee/lunch during the week. As our relationship grew and the wealth of research possibilities became more evident, I soon began to question my initial reluctance to research another religious context. I wondered whether I was overlooking an obvious opportunity and/or “making it hard on myself” by not studying Common Point. As a result, I soon began to keep a notebook of ethnographic field notes, in anticipation of a possible future project. That project presented itself in the following semester.

In the spring of 2010, I took an Action Research course at part of my doctoral studies at the University of South Florida. During one of our initial class meetings, students were asked to brainstorm possible research sites. I suggested Common Point and to my surprise a spiritually diverse group of classmates expressed their interest in working alongside me. Our four-person team consisted of one Atheist, one Agnostic, one Buddhist, and one Christian. Each member of our team seemed interested in the project for a different reason, each recognizing religion’s influence on society and its potential for positive social change.

Our research team met together with Common Point’s leadership several times over the next few weeks. We initially met with Common Point’s lead pastor; in later meetings additional members of the church’s leadership joined us. Early on, Common
Point’s pastor made it clear that he was “great at brainstorming…but not at making decisions” (field notes, January 26, 2010). As a result, our preliminary conversations covered a number of topics and possible research foci. Just as our group thought the discussion had uncovered a felt need within the organization, another topic would surface, another need was uncovered. After several weeks, our group became inundated with possible research topics: the role of race/ethnicity within current organizational relations, the ways in which “diversity” was understood by current members of the congregation, the ways in which Common Point could increase its community outreach efforts, etc. It was then that an associate pastor of Common Point highlighted what he saw as the common thread in each of our conversations: the organizational metaphor of “community.” The demarcation of community’s significance within Common Point became a defining moment for our group project, as well as my continued research within/alongside the organization.

In addition to meeting with Common Point’s leadership, our research team also attended three Sunday morning services together. We then concluded the semester by hosting a World Café with church leaders and a representative sampling of organizational members (see Brown & Isaacs, 2005). Participants were chosen in cooperation with Common Point’s lead pastor. He named several lay-leaders within the organization whom he thought would be interested in participating, as well as those who he thought would offer our research team a rich and diverse response. Drawing upon our experiences within the organization, our research team made additional suggests of our own. After a minimal amount of negotiation, we settled together on 25 congregational members.
Our World Café focused upon community within four distinct areas: music, spatial arrangement(s), the spoken word, and written materials (e.g., bulletins and website). We asked research participants how a sense of community could be increased within each of these areas. Participants spoke at length about the need for more diverse music styles, better circulation in the foyer and café areas, and a more clear communication of Common Point’s mission statement.

This World Café served as a pilot study for the current study. It also laid a solid foundation for my continued research of Common Point, helped to delineate lay-leaders within the organization, and solidified my rapport with organizational leaders and members. After the semester ended and our research team disassembled, I presented the preliminary results of our research to Common Point’s leaders and members, along with potential suggestions. I spoke informally with the organizational members who took part in our World Café over the next several weeks; I spoke more formally with Common Point’s leadership during a staff meeting the following month. The leadership clearly expressed their gratitude to both me and our research team, promising to initiate several of the suggestions.

During the following semester, I continued my research focus on Common Point’s “community” metaphor. As part of my coursework for a Doctoral Seminar on Resistance, I decided to take a more culture-centered approach to my ongoing work with Common Point Community Church. Due to its Action Research origins, my study had worked intimately with the organization’s leadership up until that point. In the spirit of the culture-centered approach (as further discussed in the following section), I decided at
this time to work exclusively with minority members of the congregation. In order to do so, I chose to use photography-driven interviews.

I was previously unfamiliar with photography-driven research methods. I only learned of the technique secondhand, through a graduate colleague who had taken a summer course on alternative interview methods. With roots in cultural studies, photography-driven interviews seemed to complement the aspiration to take a bottom-up approach with my research. I subsequently acquired copies of the course readings through my colleague, and began implementing the method with a small sample size of participants. By semester’s end I had completed twelve interviews, each with minority members of the congregation who had also taken part in the previous semester’s World Café. This exploration not only honed my application of photography-driven methods, but also served as a foundation for the present study. I augmented the data in coming months with more interviews, and my sample size eventually increased to 30 participants: five members of the leadership and 25 members of the congregation.

In the subsequent semester I ventured outside of the Communication department in order to take a course entitled Visual Anthropology. During this time I continued my photography-driven interviews, while also working with participants to create a “self-portrait” of/for the organization. The lead pastor was especially enthusiastic about this project’s potential. He immediately began to describe a collage of faces that represented the church’s diverse community of believers. As a result, I began to work on a grid of faces using stock photography, intending to represent the various races, ages, etc. of the organization.
After some time I became dissatisfied with the direction this idea was taking me. I simply was not happy with the organizational self-portrait that I had created; my project screeched to a halt. I began fresh by speaking informally with dozens of congregational members about the project and by analyzing the leadership’s oral and written use of language in order to identify specific terms that characterized the organization. I soon noticed four symbolic and three material themes that were used by members and leaders to describe Common Point. The four symbolic themes were: community, love, service, and acceptance; the three material themes were: the cross, food/coffee, and musical instruments. One participant in particular touched on three of these themes by commenting: “Love is what I think of when I think of Common Point… Loving and accepting others… serving those in need in our community” (Hispanic/Latina female, emphasis added).

I interpreted the symbolic themes of service, love, and acceptance to be smaller-order themes beneath the larger-order theme of community; thus, I viewed each of these smaller-order themes as specific ways in which the organizational metaphor of community was expressed by/within Common Point. For this reason, I decided to combine each of the smaller-order themes with one of the material themes, resulting in a series of three art pieces (Figures 3.1-3.3). Specifically, I combined “service” with the image of a guitar by etching the word onto its rosette. I combined “acceptance” with the image of coffee by replacing the Starbucks text and logo on a travel mug. I combined “love” with the image of a cross by inscribing this word in an ornamental script.
Figure 3.1. “Service” etched onto guitar.

Figure 3.2. “Acceptance” transposed onto travel mug.
The following week I revealed my artwork to Common Point’s leadership during a staff meeting. They each responded enthusiastically to the results. The lead pastor in particular mentioned printing and hanging the images as series of artwork in his office. As flattering as this proposal was, it served to highlight a concern that had already begun percolating in my mind: Was this project for the leadership’s benefit alone? Hadn’t congregational members also helped in delineating these symbolic and material themes? Was I abandoning the culture-centered approach that had characterized my photography-driven interviews?

I decided that I wanted the participants’ voices to be more evident within my final class project. Furthermore, I did not want the artwork to be cloistered away in a pastor’s office. For each of these reasons, I followed up with the participants that I had previously
interviewed, asking whether they would email me an image of themselves. As a surprise to me, nearly all the participants replied in a timely manner by sending an image of themselves (Figure 3.4). Inspired by Wiles and colleagues’ (2008) article on visual ethics, I then began to alter the photos using Photoshop, in effort to ensure anonymity. I accomplished this by drawing and painting each individual face, thus, creating a caricature of the participants. I also returned to my original goal of making a collage of faces that represented the church’s cultural diversity. The project’s final result used the single, unifying phrase of “community” as a graphical element to link each of the faces together (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.4. Sample photos supplied by congregational members.
In the end, I was not pleased with final self-portrait I had created of/for Common Point. Visually, I preferred the earlier series of three art pieces that Common Point’s pastor had wanted to hang in his office. Nonetheless, the process by which I came to create this final self-portrait helped to reiterate the organizational significance of community, as well as to confirm the importance I felt toward taking a culture-centered approach to my study of Common Point. Together, each of these projects – the group project from my Action Research course, the culture-centered research from my Resistance course, and the self-portrait from my Visual Anthropology course – also informed the present study by crystallizing its focus and forging the present rapport I have with Common Point’s leaders and members.

To date, I have been a regular attendee of Common Point for over thirty-six months. Institutional support has shown to be an essential requirement for the success of
ethnographic research (Clark, 1999; Clark-Ibanez, 2003, 2004; Orellana, 1999; Schwartz, 1992). Consistent with this argument, the rapport I established with Common Point’s leadership and congregational members during entrée proved essential to the success of this study. That is not to say, however, that I have not experienced tensions throughout the research process, as discussed further in Chapter 7.

**Approach**

Having discussed this study’s entrée process, the present section outlines this study’s *culture-centered* and *Action Research* (AR) approaches. In the spirit of the culture-centered approach, the study focused on bottom-up interpretations of daily life by engaging current congregational members of Common Point Community Church. In order to enact change, however, this study also took an AR approach by researching *with* rather than *on* the organization’s current leadership. The resulting methodology engaged all stakeholders in the research process, reflecting both an integrational and differentiatational view of organizational structure.

**Culture-centered approach.** Several studies have explored the organizational milieu of intercultural congregations (e.g., Becker, 1998; Christerson, Emerson, & Edwards, 2005; Dhingra, 2004; Dougherty, 2003; Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Edwards, 2008; Emerson, 2008; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Garces-Foley, 2007, 2008; Marti, 2005, 2008, 2009; Stanczak, 2006). Yet most of these studies serve to reify the conventional top-down, managerial bias that plagued early studies of organizational communication (Eisenberg & Eschenfelder, 2007). As a result, their foci and research questions are often derived from a dominant value system, concerned primarily with the leadership’s ability to “make” or “produce” a desired organizational culture. As Pal (2008) writes, it is
typical for “dominant academic knowledge [to be] invested in understanding what the dominant system wants to know” (p. 3). In contrast to previous investigations, this study counteracted the top-down approach to understanding intercultural congregations. In spirit of the culture-centered approach to communication research, I engaged directly with the organization’s diverse membership.

The culture-centered approach to communication research suggests that the way we communicate about a given concept is based upon our taken-for-granted assumptions about that concept (Basu & Dutta, 2009; Dutta, 2007, 2008; Dutta-Bergman, 2004a, 2004b; Dutta & Basu, 2008). For this reason, the culture-centered approach highlights unobserved, universal logic structures that are rooted within an organization’s dominant value system. It brings about “hidden agendas embedded in the top-down frameworks… providing a critical entry point for interrogating them” (p. 3). The culture-centered approach allows access to discursive knowledge structures present among diverse populations. It also centralizes the potentially marginalized voices from within (Basu & Dutta, 2008), and stresses the importance of participation by current community members (Guha, 1988; Guha & Spivak, 1988).

Although the culture-centered approach originated within the field of health communication, it offered a useful lens for which to explore an intercultural congregation. The culture-centered approach suggests theoretical and methodological guidelines for working alongside diverse populations within the long-established structure of a religious organization (Airhihenbuwa, 1995; Dutta-Bergman, 2004b, 2005; Dutta-Bergman & Basu, 2007). Dialogical engagement with organizational members is also consistent with the philosophy of the culture-centered approach, which allows
congregational needs and solutions to develop from within the community, rather than being developed by an organization’s leadership. Ultimately, this approach allowed me to include the voices of diverse cultural members into how the organizational metaphor of community is understood.

**Action research approach.** The end goal of this study was to enact existent change – to explore how community is understood by organizational leaders and members, and to offer potential implications for better managing the community metaphor. The goal was not to subvert or undermine current organizational leadership, but rather to work alongside them. As aforementioned, Common Point’s leaders also played a foundational role in helping to outline the present study’s focus on community as metaphor. I worked alongside Common Point’s lead pastor from the beginning to determine whether there was anything of interest or worth to study, and if so, what. The lead pastor, associate pastors, and congregational members also helped to hone this study’s focus and scope throughout the research process. For each of these reasons, this study also used an Action Research (AR) approach, in combination with the culture-centered approach.

Reason and Bradbury (2008) define AR as “a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment” (p. 1). Greenwood and Levin (2007) offer a similar definition:

> AR rests on processes of collaborative knowledge development and action design involving local stakeholders as full partners in mutual learning processes… AR is a set of self-consciously collaborative and democratic strategies for generating
knowledge and designing action in which trained experts in social and other forms of research and local stakeholders work together.  (p. 1)

AR works under the assumption that “our world does not consist of separate things but of relationships which we co-author” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 7). For this reason, AR inquiry is not a fragmented process, but rather treats all communication phenomena as a coherent social field (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Such an approach recognizes that “understanding comes from building up whole pictures of phenomena, not by breaking them into parts” (Flood, 2008, p. 117), while simultaneously respecting “the multidimensionality and complexity of the problems people face in everyday life” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 53). As a form of generative research, AR is ultimately concerned with co-creating positive change, by researching with rather than on persons of interest. As Reason and Bradbury (2008) write: “The important thing is not to understand the world but to change it” (p. 3).

Each of these characteristics of AR exemplify Marshall’s (2008) notion of inquiry as life process. Each of these characteristics also capitalizes on the aforementioned rapport I established with Common Point, while simultaneously counteracting the conventional research assumptions that “center on epistemologies that posit the radical separation between the researcher and the subject of the research” (p. 91). In the words of Senge and Scharmer (2008):

Managers are unlikely to tell an outsider what is really going on unless that outsider can offer real help… Researchers there to “study” what is going on are rarely seen as providing much help, so people are not likely to share with them the most important, and problematic, aspects of what is happening. (p. 199)
Procedures

In order to enact a culture-centered approach to AR, the present study used a variety of qualitative research methods: (a) participant observations, (b) semi-structured interviews, (c) photography-driven interviews, and (d) *World Café* (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

*Research Procedures & Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Procedures</th>
<th>Research Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant observations</td>
<td>Organizational leaders &amp; members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Organizational leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography-driven interviews</td>
<td>Organizational members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>World Café</em></td>
<td>Organizational leaders &amp; members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant observations.** As a regular attendee of Common Point Community Church for more than thirty-six months, I logged over 100 hours of participant observations and recorded more than 100 pages of ethnographic field notes. The majority of my observations centered on Sunday morning: the time immediately before, during, and after church services. I spent most of this time within the building’s foyer and sanctuary. This allowed me the opportunity to observe informal interactions between members and leaders of the organization, as well as the formal messages made by leaders during each church service. A simple pen and paper method of note taking was utilized, as I recorded any and all observations that occurred to me. These notes consisted primarily of short sentence fragments and descriptive adjectives, which were later typed and fleshed out where necessary.
In addition to observing on Sunday morning, I also had the opportunity to observe three staff meetings. These weekly meetings were held on Tuesday mornings, between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. During my initial meeting, the lead pastor introduced me to the entire staff and explained that we were working together in order to outline a possible research project. After this initial introduction, I removed myself from the proceedings as much as possible. I continued my standard note taking process as a silent observer. In subsequent meetings, I was invited as an active participant to report findings from the aforementioned pilot studies, to reflect on possible ways to implement those findings, and to brainstorm with leadership about future directions of research.

**Semi-structured interviews.** After several months of ethnographic fieldwork, I began to integrate semi-structured interviews into the research process. These interviews centered on Common Point’s leaders: two full-time and three part-time employees. Common Point’s full-time employees included the Lead Pastor (white male, age 40) and Worship Pastor (black male, age 44). Common Point’s part-time employees included the Children’s Minister (white male, age 20), Youth Minister (Hispanic/Latino male, age 28), and Director of Community Impact (white male, age 26). This study’s results and analysis do not privilege the leadership’s perspective over that of organizational members. In order to enact existent and positive organizational change, however, I considered it vital to include the leader’s voices in my research.

Each of Common Point’s five employees was interviewed at a time and location of his choosing. I recorded each of the interviews using a digital recorder. Interviews lasted between 38-74 minutes; interviews took place within one of two places: Common Point’s campus or a local Starbucks. Each interview was semi-structured, allowing
opportunity for participants to direct our conversation as much as possible. Sample questions included: “What does ‘community’ mean to you?,” “What does it mean to be a ‘community church’?,” “Do you believe Common Point is a community? Why or why not?,” “What do you see as the greatest obstacle to community within Common Point?,” “If I were new to this church and asked you why I should consider joining it, how would you respond?,” and “If Common Point were to hire a professional consultant, what issue/area would you most want her/him to address?” (Appendix A). I personally transcribed each of the interviews. The confidentiality of each participant was insured by removing his name from the transcriptions and from all subsequent manuscripts. A digital copy of each interview was stored in a secure location.

**Photography-driven interviews.** In addition to semi-structured interviews with the leadership, this study also engaged organizational members through an expanded variation of photovoice (see Baker & Wang, 2006; Carlson & Engebretson, 2006; Dutta, 2008; Goodhart et al., 2006; Haines, Oliffe, Bottorff, & Poland, 2010; Lopez, Eng, Randall-David, & Robinson, 2005; Singhal, Harter, Chitnis, & Sharma, 2007; Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006; Wang, 1999). Photovoice can be implemented in several ways, resulting in a variety of terminologies: reflexive photography (Berman, Ford-Gilboe, Moutrey, & Cekic, 2001), photo interviewing (Hurworth, 2003), participatory photo interviews (Jorgenson & Sullivan, 2010), photo elicitation (Harper, 2002; Radley & Taylor, 2003), photofeedback (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007), autodriving/autodriven interviews (Clark, 1999; Heisley & Levy, 1991), photo novella (Wang & Burris, 1994), and so on. Regardless of the terminology used, each of these methods relies upon photographic images to help initiate and guide the interview process. One common
technique involves participants responding to images supplied by the interviewer. A stock image or photograph taken by the researcher is placed in front of the participant or focus group. This image is then used as a starting point of conversation. The photovoice technique that was used for this particular study, however, involved participants supplying their own image or images.

I began this process by soliciting a representative sampling of twenty-five congregational members, in search of what Morse (1994) labels as a descriptive slice of the organizational culture. The chosen participants were those who had previously taken part in the World Café pilot study – those who had previously been identified by myself and the lead pastor as opinion leaders and potential change agents within the organization. Participants’ ages ranged from 22 to 58 years of age (M = 39.4). Fourteen of the twenty-five participants were male; eleven were female. Thirteen participants self-identified as Non-Hispanic White, six identified as African American, five identified as Hispanic/Latino, and one identified as Native American.

I provided a bag to each potential participant containing a disposable camera, a sketch pad, modeling clay, a pair of scissors, and a variety of pens, pencils and markers. Each participant was then asked to visually communicate their understanding of “community” via photographs, drawings/sketches, sculptures, or by cutting/collecting images from other print materials (e.g., magazines, newspapers, etc.) Participants were also encouraged to think and work outside the confines of the bag they were given, using whatever visual means they deemed appropriate. Such a variety of representational possibilities expanded upon the established methodology of photovoice, which relies on photographic images alone (see Haines, Oliffe, Bottorff, & Poland, 2010). It also
allowed participants a broad range of responses without privileging any singular form of representation. Finally, it served to displace my position of power as the researcher, allowing each participant to actively co-direct the research process.

Participants were given a minimum of two weeks to complete their visual representations of community. Once complete, I interviewed each of the twenty-five participants at a time and location of her/his choosing. I recorded each of the interviews using a digital recorder. Interviews lasted between 30-75 minutes. The majority of interviews took place within one of two local coffee shops: Café Hey or The Independent. One interview was conducted within the participant’s home. I began the interview process by inviting each participant to reveal her/his visual representation of community and to explain its meaning. I asked follow-up and clarifying questions when appropriate. The interviews were otherwise unstructured, allowing opportunity for participants to direct our conversation as much as possible. When necessary, open-ended questions were used to spur discussion. Sample questions included: “Describe your image/picture to me?,” “What’s the story behind this picture/image?,” “Why did you make the decision to take/make this picture/image?,” “How does this image/picture represent ‘community’ to you?,” and “Do you believe Common Point embodies/represents your understanding of community? Why or why not?” (Appendix B). The confidentiality of each participant was insured by removing her/his name from the transcriptions and from all subsequent manuscripts. A digital copy of each interview was stored in a secure location.

Photovoice was an especially appropriate method for working with the intercultural organization of Common Point. Photography-driven interview methods
were first developed by Collier (1957, 1967, 1987) to challenge conventional
categorizations within the communication patterns of ethnically diverse people groups
(Harper, 2002):

A common criticism of cultural studies is that researchers often assume how
audiences or a public define hegemonic or other ideological messages. Photo
elicitation offers a means for grounding cultural studies in the mundane
interpretations of culture users. (p. 19)

It is not surprising, then, that photovoice is frequently used for studies within
marginalized populations (Haines, Oliffe, Bottorff, & Poland, 2010; Novak, 2010) and
culture/cultural studies (Craig, Kretsedemas, & Gryniewski, 1997; Curry & Strauss 1986;
Snyder 1990; Snyder & Ammons 1993; Stiebling 1999).

Due to the unrecognized status of photovoice (Harper, 2002; Novak, 2010), this
methodology also “defamiliarized” the interview process. It helped to establish rapport
with someone who may not otherwise share a taken-for-granted cultural background
(Radley & Taylor, 2003), it served to displace the “privileged place of the spoken word in
social research” (Novak, 2010, p. 293), and it elicited more emotive responses than
traditional interviews alone (Harper, 1998b; Pink, 2001; Radley & Taylor, 2003). Harper
(2002) writes:

There is the need, described in all qualitative methods books, of bridging gaps
between the worlds of the researcher and the researched. Photo elicitation may
overcome the difficulties posed by in-depth interviewing because it is anchored in
an image that is understood, at least in part, by both parties. (p. 20)
In addition, by removing typical barriers of hierarchy (Harper, 1993, 1998a), photovoice served to raise consciousness within each participant about their interpretation of their own situation (Radley & Taylor, 2003), while connecting “core definitions of the self to society, culture and history” (Harper, 2002, p. 13).

Photovoice interviewing complemented the culture-centered approach as well. This method introduced “marginalized voices into the discursive spaces that have been systematically erased through one-way models built on the assumed expertise of the… communication scholar” (Basu & Dutta, 2008). It allowed potentially silenced populations to visually express their lived experiences to both internal and external stakeholders. It offered a way for me as a researcher to listen to the marginalized accounts of others, and offered a means of participation for those who have historically been viewed as devoid of agency (Dutta, 2008). In fact, some photovoice researchers train participants on how to take part. As Novak (2010) writes, “training give the researcher the opportunity to inform the participants how to do photovoice [and] what to take pictures of” (p. 295; see also Strack, Magill, & McDonough, 2004; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000). In spirit of the culture-centered approach, however, I rejected such an approach to the present study. I felt that “training” participants would only serve to reinforce an asymmetrical power structure between researcher and participant while restraining their level of creativity. Thus, if participants were unable or uncomfortable using a camera, this dilemma was circumvented by offering several additional means of representation.

**World Café.** Finally, I used the methodology of World Café to co-generate ideas for how Common Point might navigate the dialectical tensions of maintaining a
“community” metaphor. The World Café was the final procedure in this study’s research process. As such, it was informed by and built upon each of the insights learned through this study’s previous research methods: participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and photography-driven interviews. This process also brought together each of the study’s previous participants: both organizational leaders and a representative sampling of twenty-five organizational members.

The specific practice of World Café divides organizational members into subgroups of six to seven people. Each subgroup meets around a table in response to a particular question or discussion topic. After a brief period of time, participants “cross-pollinate” by switching tables with one another. The conversation at each table continues, allowing new arrivals to build upon previous groups’ ideas. This procedure is repeated, as collective understanding is forged via conversations that matter. Brown and Isaacs (2005) characterize this procedure as: “A simple yet powerful conversational process for fostering constructive dialogue, accessing collective intelligence, and creating innovative possibilities for action, particularly in groups that are larger than most traditional dialogue approaches are designed to accommodate” (p. 3, emphasis original). As a result, “World Café conversations simultaneously enable us to notice a deeper living pattern of connections at work in our organizations and communities – the often invisible webs of conversation and meaning-making through which we already collectively shape the future, often in unintended ways” (p. 3, emphasis original).

For this study, four tables were covered with butcher paper. Each table focused on one of four distinct areas: music, spatial arrangement(s), the spoken word, and written materials (e.g., bulletins and website). Three guiding/discussion questions were placed at
each table’s center, relating to that table’s area of focus. Questions asked, “How is community created by/through Common Point’s current use of [music/space/spoken word/written materials]?,” “What are potential barriers to community within Common Point’s current use of [music/space/spoken word/written materials]?,” and “How might community be better fostered by/within Common Point’s current use of [music/space/spoken word/written materials]?” (Appendix C). Participants were supplied with pens, markers, and crayons to record their groups’ thoughts, and to expand upon the thoughts of previous groups. Participants spent approximately twelve minutes at each table before cross-pollinating. When time to switch, one person was instructed to remain at each table as a “connector,” helping the next group to build upon the previous groups’ discussion. Throughout this process, I supplied background music and light snacks. We concluded the World Café with a group discussion, where participants reported-out and collectively reflected upon their group conversations.

In light of Common Point’s racial diversity, World Café was an especially appropriate research method to use as the conclusion of this study. The procedure allowed me to move beyond conventional research methods, which have “continually proven to disserve, alienate and undermine the black community” (Bell, 2008, p. 50). Rather, as an involved observer I consciously made use of a method “that allow[s] for collaboration, and equalize[s] the relationship between researcher and participant” (p. 53). As detailed in stage two of Checkland’s (1981) soft systems methodology, World Café granted participants explicit room for creativity by structuring the situation in a way that does not hinder original thinking (see also Checkland & Holwell, 1998; Checkland & Scholes, 1990). In accordance with stages three through seven, this process also
remained rooted in real-world application, fleshed out a core understanding/definition of complex terms (i.e., “community”), and offered practical implications to the staff and congregation of Common Point (see Flood, 2008, p. 123). Greenwood and Levin (2007) write:

The broader set of experiences and attitudes the participants bring to the research process can permit more creative solutions to develop… A second and equally important argument is the ethical position that it is important to sustain diversity as a political right in itself. AR must be constructed to gain strength from the creative potential in the diversity of the participant group, not to create solutions to problems that unnecessarily reduce diversity. (p. 65)

World Café also constituted as a relationship-building event as opposed to a single product event (Gustavsen, 2008, p. 23). Consequently, this choice of research method allowed me to both initiate and reveal co-constructed discourses among/between the leaders and congregational members of Common Point, resulting in symmetric reciprocity (Fals Borda, 1999, 2008; O’Neill, 2007) and democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 2008, p. 19; see also Deetz, 1992; Eisenberg, 1994; Gustavsen, 1992; Gustavsen & Engelstad, 1986). In the end, results I received from World Café were condensed, synthesized, and returned to the participants. Together we searched for leverage points (Meadows, 1999) within the data and decided upon next steps, thus, demonstrating a truly emergent developmental form (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Throughout it all, I also remained mindful of my presence’s affect upon the World Café process by assuming a complementary role (Bateson, 1935; Bateson, 1972/2000).
Analysis

I analyzed the data collected through participant observations, semi-structured interviews with leaders, photography-driven interviews with congregational members, and World Café using Morse’s (1994) four-stage conceptualization of data analysis: comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing. The comprehending stage involves selecting the most appropriate methodological approaches, entering the field, and gaining rapport with participants. After collecting the data, I worked to identify when I had enough data to offer what Morse (1994) labels a *descriptive slice*.

In order to answer each of the study’s three research questions, I began by transcribing and coding the data gleaned from observational notes, semi-structured interviews, and photography-driven interviews. Each of these procedures informed my results. I examined the coded transcriptions in search of dominant themes, and completed an intensive reading of the individual codings. I then clumped and re-coded the codings together until a tree of large-order and small-order themes emerged from the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). My subsequent analysis focused upon theorizing, a process Morse (1994) describes as “the constant development and manipulation of malleable theoretical schemes until the ‘best’ theoretical scheme is developed” (Morse, 1994, p. 32).

The final step of my analysis engaged in recontextualization: finding ways in which my theoretical explanations could prove useful to other organizations (Morse, 1994; Gibson & Papa, 2000). This stage of my analysis was informed primarily by the World Café, which combined organizational leaders and members from Common Point Community Church. I followed the same procedure as outlined above in order to form
potential implications: transcription, coding, intensive reading, and re-coding. A representative sampling of each method’s results are included as appendices (see Appendix D-G).

Summary

In review, a sense of community has declined throughout the United States. In order to address its own institutional legitimacy, Common Point Community Church has responded to this trend by prioritizing “community” as an organizational metaphor. The present study used a culture-centered approach to Action Research to investigate the way racially diverse leaders and members of Common Point co-construct the concept of “community.” Building upon more than three years of ethnographic fieldwork, this study explored the community metaphor via participant observations, semi-structured interviews with organizational leaders, photography-driven interviews with organizational members, and World Café.

In the following chapter, I reveal four specific ways that “community” is understood by current organizational leaders and members. I then discuss potential limitations that result from this metaphor. Next, I detail specific ways in which dialectical tensions are managed in order to maintain Common Point’s organizational metaphor of community. I then offer three theoretical implications, three practical implications, and ways in which each can be recontextualized to other intercultural milieu. I conclude this study by reflecting upon the research process itself.
Chapter 4:
Understandings of Community

A common shortcoming of metaphor-based analyses is the tendency for researchers to over generalize their findings: “Metaphor scholars in organization studies and the social sciences need to stay as close as possible to the life-world of the people that they study when they interpret the meaning and uses of a particular metaphor” (Cornelissen, Oswick, Christensen, & Phillips, 2008, p. 16; see also Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Cameron, 1999). In response to this tendency, I used an inductive approach to explore the present study’s first research question: RQ1: How is “community” understood by the racially diverse leaders and members of Common Point Community Church? In doing so, my goal was not to add to the array of organizational metaphors that already pervade communication literature (Oswick & Grant, 1996). My goal, rather, was to develop a deeper understanding of the existing “community” metaphor, and its potential role within the specific, intercultural context of Common Point.

I explored Common Point’s understanding(s) of the community metaphor through participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and photography-driven interviews. Together, each of these methods informed the present discussion. Upon transcribing and coding the field notes and interview data using Morse’s (1994) four-stage conceptualization of analysis (see also Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), four themes emerged as to what defined community within/among Common Point’s racially diverse leaders and
members: (a) articulations of a common cause, (b) representations of cultural diversity, (c) acts of genuine relationship, and (d) opportunities for crossing social categories. The present chapter outlines each of these themes in more detail. I then discuss the significance of a common cause among Common Point’s intercultural members, the recursive necessity of diversity, and the way this chapter’s results further challenge the traditional metaphor of organization-as-container.

Common Cause

The first theme that emerged from this study was *articulations of a common cause*. Whether implicitly or explicitly, each of the participants interviewed for this study indicated the necessity of a shared goal or objective in order to be(come) a true community. One congregational member, for instance, began our photography-driven interview with an image he had cut from a magazine (Figure 4.1). The image depicts a herd of sheep, each facing in the same direction. When asked whether the image would still represent community if each sheep faced a different direction, the participant responded: “No. They would no longer be looking at the same thing… seeking the same goal” (Hispanic/Latino male).

![Herd of sheep](image)

*Figure 4.1.* Herd of sheep.
Another member of Common Point’s congregation used the scissors and construction paper he had been provided to create a collage of images (Figure 4.2). The collage was comprised of a tree growing from a set of human hands. The cupped hands were filled with seeds to represent the tree’s origins. The tree itself was made of Scripture verses. Meanwhile, each of the tree’s branches were leaved with specific characteristics of what this participant saw as defining community: a family with their hands raised toward the sky, a classroom of school children, etc. According to the participant’s description of what he had created, the collage’s central theme was “unity” and the communal act of “growing together.” We all “came from something, from the same thing… And we’re all returning to that same thing in the end, that same cause” (African American male).

A third congregational member outlined the importance of communal purpose even more explicitly:

Well, if I was to define community I would say coming together for a common goal…or common purpose… I see [community] as forming a circle and, yeah, I always see something as a focal point. There can be God in the focal point, there could be family in the focal point, and there could be friendship. You could have a tangible in the focal point…family values as a common cause…I always think of people surrounding something when I think of community. (white male)
A fourth participant seemed to agree:

I see community as coming together for a common vision, a common cause…

anytime we have a partnership with a church or a business and we come together

as a community to help our children and our families, to me that is God… that is

what we are supposed to be doing. (African American female)

When asked whether Common Point has a strong sense of community, this member also

used the presence/absence of a clearly communicated goal to gauge her answer:

In regards to whether we have a community, I think it is a growing community, it

is a developing community. But is it solid, or is our message clear? I can say that

[the pastor] in my opinion is doing a great job with being clear about the message
that he has about us coming together and working together and not just seeing each other on Sunday. (African American female)

Building upon the assumed necessity of a common cause, a fifth member of Common Point went as far as to describe the clear and simple manner in which such a cause must be communicated to organizational members: “The articulation of the cause… has got to be simple and compelling and can’t be confusing…it has got to be simple” (white male). This participant concluded by saying that a clear and simple articulation of the common cause benefits the organization because it fosters greater commitment and personal investment from each of organizational members.

Common Point’s leadership also referred to a common cause as the defining feature of community. When asked during an interview whether he currently viewed Common Point as a community, one leader responded: “I think so. I think so we’re all in this together…I think we all want the same thing” (Hispanic/Latino male). Another leader responded similarly, commenting on the necessity of joint and/or mutual activities in order to achieve a shared goal:

I don’t see how you can really be a part of the community if you’re not part of the actual rhythm and rhyme… To be identified with it and not do anything outside of just showing up Sunday morning… I think it’s a different dynamic if you’re working with someone to accomplish something [as opposed to] sitting in a seat by yourself or singing by yourself. Until I’ve done something with somebody that we both care about, with the same end goal in mind, I think working together to accomplish a similar goal is what really connects people. (white male)
Conversely, when asked about potential obstacles to community, this leader described instances when organizational volunteers had become more interested in their own goals and activities than that of Common Point Community Church. His response further revealed the taken for granted assumption that a common cause is central to creating and maintaining true community:

There have been volunteers in other areas of ministry within the church that really thought ‘This is my ministry,’ not ‘This is my opportunity to serve within the church, my opportunity to serve within… it’s mine.’ So it turned into more of ‘this is me’ than being about being part of a greater cause, you know? (white male)

**Cultural Diversity**

The second theme that emerged from this study’s results was representations of cultural diversity. A majority of organizational members referred to diversity as an essential characteristic of community; each of the five organizational leaders referred to this theme’s necessity. One member even related this theme to the previous one by commenting that cultural diversity is critical, yet only possible when the diverse members share a common vision:

Communities must be able to be open-minded and open the doors to all members, even if their viewpoints are different from yours, as long as they are along with your vision. For example, we want to serve our kids, whether you are a Christian, non-believer or whatever… If you are here to serve our kids, then you are welcome because that is our common vision and that is the community we are forming. (African American female)
Another member of the congregation offered an instructional booklet from the videogame *Starfox* as a visual representation of community (Figure 4.3).

![Starfox Instruction Booklet](image)

*Figure 4.3. Starfox instruction booklet: front & back cover.*

This participant called specific attention to the diversity captured by this instruction booklet’s back cover:

> Community is made of people that are not alike… Obviously you got a fox here, got a bird, got a bunny rabbit, and you got a toad or a frog, and they’re on a team working… The common goal to save whatever, maybe the home planet. So I guess when I was thinking about community there was two definitions or two – I guess – criteria that had to be met: A group of people working together towards a common goal and none of them are the same. They all have unique characteristics. (Hispanic/Latino male)

A third participant offered a literal depiction of diversity by taking a picture of herself alongside two fellow congregants (Figure 4.4). The picture shows three adults whom this participant described as being “closest of friends” (African American female). During our interview, the participant also made a point to describe the three adults as representing three unique races/ethnicities: black, white, and Hispanic/Latino.
She then elaborated on their friendship by saying, “I have learned so much from [Jane] and [John]. And I think they’ve learned a lot from me – I know they have. We’re so different from one another… And I think that’s why.”

![Figure 4.4. Depiction of diverse congregants.](image)

These comments again build upon the previous theme of a common cause, while also highlighting the importance of heterogeneity. Each of these congregational members emphasized the differences represented in their images – the Starfox team members and diverse congregants – while clearly framing that difference as a positive condition.

A final, visual illustration of the need for cultural diversity included a clay effigy of Buddha (Figure 4.5). The participant replaced Buddha’s belly with a globe, allowing his arms to “embrace” the world. This artistic decision represented the way different “races, nations, and cultures” of Earth must “coming together” in order to form true community (Hispanic/Latino male).
Leaders of Common Point echoed the significance of diversity as well. Although each of the leaders acknowledged difficulties in maintaining such a uniquely diverse congregation, they each expressed diversity as being necessary for true community. One leader in particular commented:

Just because it’s difficult doesn’t mean it’s negative… There’s some wonderful things that come from meeting things that don’t have the same experiences that you have, or have had. It’s sort of like going to college. You know, one of the greatest things, I think, about going to a big school is, you know, the greatest learning takes place outside of the classroom. It’s just meeting all these different people, people with different ideas, it’s like: ‘Wow, I never would have thought of that.’ (African American male)

This participant continued by elaborating on the various types of diversity beyond race/ethnicity alone that are required for genuine community (e.g., religious, geographic, and cultural diversity, etc.):
We have people come in from different churches, different parts of the country, who are all part of the Great Community…we all have some vastly different opinions about many things that go along with reading the same Scriptures. So, I think it’s great because it takes us back to the source of reading and praying together. And it’s great to learn different ideas, to learn about different cultures.

(African American male)

A second member of Common Point’s leadership expressed diversity’s necessity in the following way: “[Diversity] definitely helps community because it helps you to see that it’s not just about you. It gives you a different perspective into life”

(Hispanic/Latino male). This participant went on to describe three specific examples of diversity that offer a “different perspective into life” – the way people greet one another, disparate financial situations, and language differences. He commented:

In the Hispanic culture it’s traditional to greet one another with a kiss on the cheek. You don’t see that in the Caucasian culture. In the Caucasian culture you’ll see more of a handshake, or a high-five, or maybe a hug… [For some,] life is all about having the white picket fence…[but others] have a 700 square foot townhouse with no doors, no rooms, and the whole family lives there. One bed with the grandma, daughter, son… You even have politicians saying Spanish is the language of the ghetto, but that’s not true all. Spanish is a world language, just like English is a world language, you know? So, it’s important to have the opportunity to encounter all those different cultures – different dynamics – to learn more about who they are no matter what their color of skin or what language they speak. (Hispanic/Latino male)
Genuine Relationship

The third theme that emerged during this study was *acts of genuine relationship*. Each participant – both organizational leaders and members – discussed the value of being able to trust others, of being accepted, and of being able to enter into genuine relationship with other community members. One organizational member noted, “It’s not just religion, but anything you decide to be part of you have to have faith and trust in the people that are in it” (African American male). A second member referred to the significance of genuine relationship by commenting, “Community is giving that helping hand, listening, praying, and being a part of each other’s lives, and just letting everyone know that we are here and if you need us, we can help” (African American male). A third member of Common Point said:

[What’s important is] genuine, authentic concern for each member of the community… It is that simple… You have to care about each individual and you have to share the commitment for the cause. There is a value in the genuine caring, the sincere, and the true concern for each member of the community… So typically when you have the values that are implicit in truly caring about other members in this community, any cause that you are working on is going to be based on the same values that represent an agape kind of love, of selfless and serving attitude and heart. (white male)

In addition to offering visual representations of community, this participant also used the pens and sketch pad provided to write about the need for genuine relationship (figure 4.6). His words emphasize community’s “genuine,” “sincere,” and “authentic” concern for the welfare of others.
Figure 4.6. Community as “genuine,” “sincere,” & “authentic.”

Each of these responses suggests that true community cannot be forged via spatial relations, shared values/emotional responses, or speech acts alone. Rather, organizational leaders and members must engage in what Buber (1955, 1957, 1958) referred to as genuine dialogue. By relating to the other as I-Thou, each member must participate in the reality of the other. In this way, the other is confirmed as each individual is able to “meet” in the “between” (Buber, 1955, p. 204). As exemplified by one participant’s image of an ear (Figure 4.7), neither member subsumes the other, but rather each individual co-exists through deep-listening and genuine dialogical engagement.

One of Common Point’s leaders summarized the importance of genuine relationship by commenting: “I see community as a group that genuinely cares for one another… who is able to meet the needs of the other people, and be actively involved in their day-to-day world. That’s what it means to be community. I don’t see any other way” (white male).
Crossing Categories

The final characteristic of community that emerged from this study was opportunities for crossing social categories. This theme revealed the need for community members to interact and interrelate beyond the organization’s physical confines. As a result, several participants produced photographs that represented diverse contexts beyond that of Common Point’s material structure (Figures 4.8-4.10):

*Figure 4.8. Community at a local animal shelter.*
One organizational member also spoke disparagingly of Common Point’s formal attempts at community building: weekly men’s breakfasts, women’s luncheons, etc. This participant discussed the inherent shortcomings of such attempts, while simultaneously highlighting the importance of informal interaction outside of church – opportunities to “share life together.” Specifically, this participant referred to a recent fantasy football league that was created by another Common Point member, as well as his experience at a past church:
The church I was going to in Georgia…they had something called Girlfriends and they would all get together and do coffee and just little informal activities. They were outside the church but they all shared something in common. (African American male)

Similarly, a different participant discussed the way fellow congregational members of Common Point had recently surprised her at work:

A perfect example [of community] is what Sara and Taryn did for me. Man, it had been a rough we for me at work and when I saw my church family come in and bring me flowers and brownies, it was hard to hold back the tears . . . and to just take a minute out of their busy schedule and day and life to make a difference in my life . . . Sara and Taryn were a perfect example of church coming together and they crossed those boundaries and came into my work arena for just a brief moment and that was powerful. (African American female)

When asked to identify Common Point’s best source or cause of community, one leader pointed to the church’s weekly Community Groups, and the opportunities they offered for members to interact outside of a formal religious framework:

I think [Community Groups] really offer the opportunity to get to know people outside of the normal ‘I saw you at church’ kind of thing, because there’s actual conversation…It’s [reflective of] who you really are. I think at some point in a Community Group that you’ve got to let down the walls you build up. You have to let people see you to some extent. (white male)

A second leader responded similarly: “Being a community is about more than seeing each other once a week; it’s about being involved in each other’s lives” (Hispanic/Latino
male). Yet another leader went as far as to describe the organization’s goal as, “To connect inside church, with the intent to go outside of it” (African American male). This leader continued by saying:

The faith community is not about what you do in church… It’s about what you do outside of these walls… at work and in your neighborhood and alongside your neighbors…There can be no community within the church, unless we focus on community outside the church. (African American male)

Discussion

The first theme that emerged from this study – “articulations of a common cause” – is especially significant within a racially diverse congregation such as Common Point Community Church. Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory argues that people perceive those with similar characteristics as being in-group members and those with diverse characteristics as out-group members. Furthermore, people are more likely to prefer association with those that they perceive as being in-group. Research has shown, however, that superordinate identities can supersede in-group/out-group discrimination (Rabinovich & Morton, 2011). In other words, out-group discrimination diminishes when a superordinate identity is established (Gaertner et al., 1993). As such, articulations of a common cause has potential to overcome many of the inherent distinctions within Common Point’s intercultural congregation, namely racial/ethnic difference.

Not unlike the skyhook principle (see Schtogren, 1999), by creating and cultivating a shared vision, Common Point can simultaneously develop a superordinate identity for its intercultural congregants. By focusing on an ideal or concept that is of a “higher order” than racial/ethnic difference, its leaders and members can come together
beneath the banner of this common cause. In contrast to many other types of organizations, most religious institutions have an inherent or built-in common cause, whether it is referred to as God, love, worship, service, or a number of other possibilities. This reality bodes well for Common Point’s community metaphor. In many ways, the community metaphor itself also supplies Common Point with a potential superordinate identity. Paradoxically, the “community” metaphor necessitates a common cause among its members while simultaneously supplying that cause to its members.

The role and necessity of diversity also played a paradoxical role among Common Point’s current leaders and members. Throughout my participant observations and within several of my interviews, Common Point was regularly referred to as a “diverse community.” Such a common use of this phrase implied that one was impossible apart from the other. A leader within the organization spoke to this view even more explicitly. He not only viewed diversity as prerequisite for community, but also viewed each as working to cultivate the other: “I don’t think you can have one without the other” (white male). According to this leader, diversity promotes community; conversely, genuine community promotes diversity. Diversity promotes community by interweaving a variety of unique skills, views, and perspectives. Community promotes diversity by building bridges of communication and acceptance which, in turn, welcome those with unique skills, views, and perspectives. Thus, within an intercultural organizational such as Common Point, the possibility of one is necessitated by the possibility of the other.

The fourth theme that emerged from this study – opportunities for crossing social categories – is also significant in several ways. This theme serves to further counteract the traditional metaphor of organization-as-container, while positioning communication
itself as the genesis for community. It is common for theorists and laypersons alike to define an organization by its physical location (e.g., Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996). A small business, for instance, is often thought of as the building it occupies, and the exchange of goods and services that occur within its premises. A school is often thought of as its classroom space and recreational areas, a hospital is often thought of as the sum of its various wings, etc. The communal need to “cross social categories,” however, expands upon this limited understanding of organizations. It positions the communicative act itself as the site of community – thus, the site of organizing – rather than within the limited confines of any particular space (Ashcraft, 2011). As such, the results of this chapter suggest that community can be cultivated by/among Common Point’s members in an infinite variety of physical and social contexts. In addition to Sunday morning worship services, a sense of community can also be developed over dinner within members’ homes or at a local restaurant. In addition to religious and/or formal relationship building efforts, a sense of community can also be developed in situations where neither religion nor relationship building are seen as the focal point. In fact, by expanding the physical and social contexts in which community is built, members can actually create stronger social ties with one another (Wenger, 1998). By successfully crossing social categories, members can identify additional shared interests and forge shared identities beyond that of religion alone (e.g., hobbies, weekend activities, political affiliations, etc.) Common Point attendees will come to see each other not only as members of the church, but also as members of Tampa Bay’s larger social fabric – not only as part of one another’s religious life, but as part of life writ large.
Finally, the results of this chapter reveal the need for increased engagement. When each of the four themes of community are organized according to Wenger’s aforementioned model of community of practice (Wenger, 1998, 2004; Wenger & Snyder, 2000; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002), one theme aligns with the dimension of joint enterprise and three themes align with mutual engagement (Figure 4.11). Specifically, “articulations of a common cause” aligns with the dimension of joint enterprise, which is defined by collective goals and endeavors. Each of the remaining themes – “representations of cultural diversity,” “acts of genuine relationship,” and “opportunities for crossing social categories” – aligns with the dimension of mutual engagement, which is defined by engaged diversity and social complexity. None of the themes that emerged from this study’s results aligns with the dimension of shared repertoire, which is defined by organizational routine and tradition (Wenger, 1998).

![Figure 4.11. The model of community of practice with study results.](image-url)
The emphasis that participants placed upon mutual engagement stands in contrast to the historical emphases religious organizations have often placed upon the dimension of shared repertoire. Participants of this study valued diversity, dialogue, and social interaction. Historical Christian congregations, however, have typically sought to define and differentiate themselves via particular belief structures, rites, and practices. This reality is evidenced by the sacraments of Catholicism (e.g., baptism, confirmation, communion, confession, etc.) and the ordinances of other Christian denominations (e.g., foot washing for Anabaptists, temple endowment for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, etc.) Such a disparity of emphasis between traditional religion and the findings of this study suggest that if organizational leaders and members desire a greater sense of community, they should focus more upon the three themes of mutual engagement: fostering cultural diversity, encouraging genuine dialogue, and offering opportunities to cross social categories.

Suggestions that emerged from this study’s World Café for fostering cultural diversity included (a) hiring diverse staff members, (b) welcoming various worship styles, and/or (c) physically relocating to a culturally diverse area. In order to encourage genuine dialogue, World Café participants suggested (a) allocating time before, during, or after worship services for congregational interaction, (b) emphasizing the value of genuine dialogue within the organization’s public discourse, and/or (c) fostering a supportive atmosphere within which community members feel comfortable sharing personal information with one another. Finally, potential implications for crossing social categories included an endless number of informal and non-religious events: (a) shared meals, (b) athletic/intramural teams, (c) fantasy sports leagues, (d) running/cycling clubs,
(e) movie nights, (f) exercise classes, (g) yoga classes, and/or (h) ballroom dance lessons.

Each of these implications, as indicated by the participants in this study, is essential to creation and maintenance of community within intercultural contexts. By understanding how community is co-constructed among racially diverse persons, each of these implications can also be recontextualized to other culturally diverse milieus: corporate settings, educational institutions, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

**Conclusion**

This chapter revealed four themes that define community within Common Point Community Church’s uniquely diverse congregation: (a) articulations of a common cause, (b) representations of cultural diversity, (c) acts of genuine relationship, and (d) opportunities for crossing social categories. Each of these themes reveals particular way(s) in which the “community” metaphor is interpreted by/among current organizational leaders and members. Each of these themes also expands upon current understandings of the community metaphor, and its potential role within the specific, intercultural context of Common Point.

Just as metaphor can offer understanding to its organizational leaders and members, however, metaphor can equally serve to mask certain insights, understandings, and taken for granted assumptions (Davidson, 1978; Ortony, 1992; Oswick et al., 2002; Oswick & Grant, 1996): “In highlighting certain interpretations [metaphor] tends to force others into a background role” (Morgan, 2006, p. 4). For that reason, the following chapter builds upon the results of this chapter in order to discuss the potential limitations of Common Point’s community metaphor.
Chapter 5:
Limitations of Metaphor

Having delineated four defining characteristics for how the “community” metaphor is understood by/among Common Point’s racially diverse leaders and members, the present chapter explores this study’s second research question: *RQ2: What potential limitations result from the community metaphor?* Specifically, this chapter uses data collected from participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and photography-driven interviews to reveal the way organizational discourses of Common Point require its members to deny desires and preferences associated with their own race in order to achieve the superordinate goal of community. This process occurs in two interrelated ways. (a) First, observational and interview data revealed a one-sided insight that valued a white normative view over alternative understandings of “community,” thus, silencing current minority members within the organization. (b) Such a narrow conception of community was not only justified as being a worthwhile goal that merited the loss of racial identity by/among certain congregation members (e.g., nonwhites), but also resulted in the self-disciplining of minority members within the organization. The following sections discuss each of these findings in more detail.
One-Sided Insight

As previously outlined, the notion of “community” can be understood in a variety of ways (e.g., physical space, disembodied concept, communicative practices, and so on). Organizational metaphor, however, has the tendency to emphasize only one potential interpretation, while deemphasizing the dissimilarities that also exist between a metaphor’s target and source domains (Davidson, 1978; Ortony, 1975; Oswick et al., 2002). By focusing on the “optimum overlap” between two objects in comparison, metaphor can mask certain insights, understandings, and taken for granted assumptions. Organizational leaders and members can become blinded to alternative interpretations of a given context, while reinforcing existing power structures and relations (see Cornelissen, Oswick, Christensen, & Phillips, 2008; Eisenberg, Goodall, & Tretheway, 2010; Putnam & Boys, 2006). In other words, any understanding that is afforded by organizational metaphor inherently becomes a way of not understanding; any way of seeing simultaneously becomes a way of not seeing (Morgan, 2006). As a result of this tendency, leaders and members of Common Point have come to value a white normative view of community above all others, thus, perpetuating a one-sided insight that devalues alternative understandings.

White normativity views white ideology and cultural practices as the conventional mode of association and belonging (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Edwards, 2008; Mills, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1994; Ward, 2008; Wellman, 1993). How whites act and interact are accepted as the way things “should be” or “just how things are.” Consequently, white normativity privileges white individuals because they need not validate their own way of being. Nonwhites are left the burden of explanation when/if they stray from white
normative beliefs and practices. Characterized as white transparency, white individuals lack awareness that they are also “raced;” they believe only minority groups display distinct racial/ethnic propensities (hooks, 1984/2000; Waters, 1990). Defined more broadly as white hegemony, white normativity and white transparency often lead to white structural advantage. As such, whites in the United States display a “disproportionate control or influence over nearly every social institution in this country” (Edwards, 2008, p. 6). Whites wield the capacity to structure social life in a way that privileges them, thus, perpetuating the distribution and redistribution of power and wealth to white individuals (Anderson, 2003; Doane, 2003; Flagg, 1993).

The most frequent example of white normativity, as cited by participants of this study, involved the music performed during Sunday morning church services. Like many places of worship, Common Point prominently featured the live performance of religious songs. On most Sundays, the band comprised a relatively equal number of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and white members. Table 5.1 evidences this reality by specifying the band’s racial composition on four consecutive Sundays, during the month of November, 2011.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Service</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic/Latino</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 6, 2011</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 13, 2011</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 20, 2011</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 27, 2011</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the band’s visual diversity, several racial minorities noted that this feature failed to influence the band’s performance (e.g., tempo, song selection, choice of instruments, etc.) Specifically, Common Point’s band typically played Contemporary Christian style music. Contemporary Christian music originated in the 1960’s. It is characterized as blending spiritually uplifting lyrics with popular forms of rock music. Contemporary Christian music is also associated with white audiences (Howard & Streck, 1999; Romanowski, 2000). Gospel music, on the other hand, originated during the American slave trade. Its roots come from the rhythmic dancing, drumming, and “field hollers” of enslaved African Americans (Baraka, 1963; Darden, 2005; see also Banjo & Morant Williams, 2011). As such, gospel music is most often associated with African American audiences. One participant in particular commented on this dichotomy:

It took how many years to get our (African American) music….just here in the last few weeks I finally heard a song that was done with a salsa beat…more than half our congregation has probably grew up with that music in the background….that is the music of their lives. (African American male)

From the perspective of these members, the music selection reveals a valuing of what they describe as “white church music” while devaluing music they associate with their own racial groups. As a result, many minority members expressed displeasure with the Contemporary Christian music selection, and desired a shift that would demonstrate the value placed upon their own racial group (i.e., gospel). A second participant commented:
I mean it’s almost like if we’re going to be an open community, I don’t know, let me just, let’s pick something. Let’s say music. If you’re African American, you come in there and there’s gospel music…You know, I say, it’s got to work both ways, and that’s what I don’t know if it’s the case…it’s also got to work the other way too. (African American male)

Other minority members appeared to express their displeasure by choosing not to fully participate during the worship service. On several occasions I observed a noticeable lack of enthusiasm among African American congregants during the performance of Contemporary Christian songs. Demeanor and often shifted dramatically when/if a traditional gospel song was played, resulting in raised voices and hands, as well as swaying, bobbing, and even dancing in the pews (field notes, November 13, 2011; January 8, 2012; March 25, 2012). Despite the apparent desire by minority members to hear more gospel music, it is revealing that the participants I interviewed chose not to vocalize their displeasure. Rather, their sensemaking (re)constructed the band’s behavior as an acceptable attempt by white congregation members: “They’re just trying…they’re trying their best” (African American male).

A second example of white normativity involved time management. The lead pastor of Common Point adhered to a strictly monochronic understanding of time (see Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2011). As a middleclass white male, this pastor expected congregational members to arrive on time for weekly services; he expected the same punctuality from other members of leadership. Opposing conceptions of time is a commonly cited difference among diverse cultures (Cohen, 2004). As Guerrero, DeVito, and Hecht (1999) write, “There is no more powerful, pervasive influence on how
individuals think and cultures interact than our different perspectives on time – the way we learn how we mentally partition time into past, present and future” (p. 227). Consistent with this argument, different understandings of time management led to several acts of everyday resistance by/among current minority members of Common Point.

One example of minority members’ resistance to a monochronic view of time involved the digital countdown that Common Point used to mark the start of each service. This digital counter was projected overhead each week, along with an accompanying soundtrack. On most Sundays, however, only a handful of congregational members were in the sanctuary when this countdown reached zero. During my observations, the average attendance for each service ranged from 140-200 adults, yet there were typically half that number in their seats at the start of each service. Furthermore, the majority of these members were white.

The resistance to a monochronic view of time was further evidenced by staff members. As I stood in the foyer one morning with a member of the leadership team, she referred to the congregation’s tardiness by saying: “This is a ‘rollup’ church. We rollup late…whenever we want to” (African American female). A second leader agreed with this statement by suggesting someone place a box of bulletins within the foyer. “That way,” he explained, “people who come in late can just get their own bulletin on their way through” (white male).

The lead pastor responded to this trend by promoting punctuality in a variety of ways. On several occasions, the pastor walked through the foyer and café, encouraging people to move into the sanctuary (field notes, June 5, 2011; June 12, 2011; July 17,
2011). During staff meetings, the pastor also encouraged other members of leadership to do the same: “Let’s get them into the sanctuary on time. Let’s get things going” (field notes, October 19, 2010). The lead pastor even addressed the issue of time management in his weekly e-newsletters, emphasizing the start time for each service and the need for members to arrive on time. Finally, after the recent hiring of a new musician, the pastor strategically scheduled a musical solo at the beginning of service. He then used his weekly e-newsletter to promote this solo to the congregation, as a way to encourage punctuality: “Don’t be late. You won’t want to miss this” (D. Schaffner, personal communication, November 24, 2010). Despite each of these efforts, organizational members continued to resist the lead pastor’s monochronic view of time via foot-dragging, dissimulation, and even feigned ignorance of the services’ actual start time. As a result, minority members continued to “rollup” 10-30 minutes behind schedule.

Results from this study’s previous chapter revealed diversity and genuine relationship as defining characteristic of community. The examples above, however, reveal that the organizational discourses of Common Point offer a narrow conception of the community metaphor, thus, blinding organizational leaders and members to alternative interpretations of what it might mean to be a body of believers. Rather than seeing a community as fluid and decentralized – the very source of its potential strength and future viability – organizational leaders have fashioned “constructive falsehoods” (Morgan, 2006). They have exclusively framed community by its white normative characteristics: the use of Contemporary Christian music and a monochronic approach to time management. This emphasis has inhibited organizational leaders from recognizing
or appreciating the potential benefits of alternative understandings. It has also served to discipline current organizational members.

**Self-Disciplined Members**

In addition to producing a one-sided insight, results of this study also revealed that the organizational discourses of Common Point often require its members to deny desires and preferences associated with their own race in order to achieve a unified and unifying sense of “community.” Again, this reality was most evident among minority members. As a result, the organizational metaphor of community was commonly framed as a worthwhile goal that merited the loss of racial identity by/among certain congregation members. One participant described this necessity in the following way:

> Under [the pastor’s] leadership…the clear message that this is what it is about; this [rejecting individual preferences] is what we need to do. We have to first build that relationship, that trust and that communication and all those challenging things but once we do that we can take the next step and serve and reach out and do what we need to do. (African American female)

A second respondent built upon the previous excerpt, going as far as to describe Common Point’s metaphor of community as “courageous:”

> The pastor always makes reference that most of the churches are, a high percent, a single ethnic background or race. So our church is very diverse and out of the box and I think courageous is a characteristic of our church. We are trailblazers and I love it. I love the fact that we do things different, and I love not being afraid when I say courageous. (African American female)
Even more, by adopting the metaphor of community, minority members of Common Point have also come to discipline themselves within the organization. According to Foucault, “Power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (1980b, p. 86). Disciplining does not occur in isolation; rather, it is collaboratively (re)generated and (re)inforced (Barker & Cheney, 1994). In this way, “discipline is embedded in the social relations of the organization and its actors” (p. 30). Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) further elaborate: “Discipline does not simply replace other forms of power which exist in society. Rather, it invests or colonizes them, linking them together, extending their hold, honing their efficiency” (p. 153). The previous chapter revealed articulations of a common cause as a central component of the community metaphor. Consequently, Common Point has managed to hide its own mechanisms of power, veiled behind the superordinate notions of “diversity” and “community.” Meanwhile, organizational discourses have colonized these terms, linking the act of self-sacrifice to what it means to be a good citizen within this space.

Thus, with the ostensibly honorable intentions of promoting racial harmony, minority members often serve to (re)construct Common Point’s racially oppressive organizational structure. They have been brought under control by the organizational structure, while simultaneously being taught to bring themselves under control (see Deetz, 1992; Foucault, 1976, 1980a, 1980b). As Barker and Cheney (1994) write, “Discipline often entails unobtrusive methods of gaining willful individuals subjectification to the organization’s power relationships” (p. 28). Such disciplining is often made possible by appeals to a greater good: “Disciplinary mechanisms are perhaps
the most potent when they are associated with or grounded in highly motivating values that appeal to the organization’s actors’” (p. 30). In the case of Common Point, these motivating values are the “higher” or “superior” goals of racial unity and solidarity (a.k.a. community). This reality is evidenced not only by the previous interviews and observations, but also the fact that each of the participants cited continues to attend Common Point regularly. Their personal dissatisfaction is viewed as a sensible and necessary sacrifice for a greater, organizational good:

It isn’t about me; it isn’t about you. It’s about Common Point, about you and me together, what we’re accomplishing here as a church…Are things perfect?...Of course not. But they are what they are, and they’re making a difference in our community. A positive impact. (African American male)

As a result, even though Common Point is explicitly attempting to address racial inequality by being an intercultural congregation, minority members’ attempts to cope with the dialectical tensions they experience actually serve to reify racial inequality.

**Discussion**

As outlined in the previous chapter, out-group discrimination often diminishes when a superordinate goal or identity is established (Gaertner et al., 1993; Rabinovich & Morton, 2011). In the case of Common Point Community Church, however, the superordinate goal of “community” was actually shown to perpetuate a one-sided insight. As a result of this tendency, leaders and members of Common Point came to value a *white normative* view of community above all others, thus, silencing alternative understandings and self-disciplining minority members within the organization.
Such an oppressive organizational structure was made possible because of way Common Point’s leaders and members conceptualized the notion of “diversity.” Throughout my observations and interviews, diversity was consistently framed as visual representations of race. Such additional factors as education, income levels, or political affiliation were rarely considered in organizational literature, or during my interviews with congregational members. More contemporary taxonomies of diversity – such as sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, etc. – were disregarded entirely. Meanwhile, alternative approaches to church music, scheduling, and/or sermon topics were also dismissed in favor of visual representations of race.

The organization’s contracted view of diversity was expressed by both leaders and members of Common Point. Promotional materials distributed by the organization prominently featured individuals with stereotypical phenotypes associated with African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, and whites (Figure 5.1; see also Allen, 2011). The lead pastor frequently challenged congregation members to interact with other individuals “who do not look like you,” and to invite them to attend. He even opened one service by imploring the congregation to “take a look to your left and to your right. Isn’t it beautiful to see so many different types of people here celebrating together? This is what we’re all about” (Field notes, April 17, 2011). Several members of Common Point also highlighted the value of visual diversity. When asked to describe the organization, participants referred to “unique physical characteristics” (Hispanic/Latino male), “a variety of races” (Hispanic/Latina female), and “people who look different and act different” (African American male).
Figure 5.1. Promotional materials featuring stereotypical phenotypes.

By focusing on visual representations of race, the leaders and members of Common Point not only ignored alternative understandings of diversity, but were also able to maintain their view that the church’s organizational structure was diverse, without ever considering or altering the church’s fundamentally white approaches to music choice and time management. Thus, Common Point’s leadership was able to perpetuate white normative practices – the use of Contemporary Christian music and the adherence to a monochromatic view of time management – while simultaneously extolling the organization’s racial diversity.

The consistent framing of diversity as visual representations of race also made it difficult for minority members to voice their displeasure, even when they felt that their views/preferences were not being represented. Despite the desire by minority members to hear more gospel music, for instance, music choice was not the discursive scheme used to measure diversity within Common Point. According to the organization’s rhetoric,
changes in music would not affect its racial diversity. As a result, grievances against such a “minor” detail as music were dismissed by leaders and other members as merely personal preference. Or worse, such grievances were seen as grumbles of discontent and division.

Finally, the emphasis placed on visual representations of race perpetuated an oppressive organizational structure among Common Point’s leadership by suppressing their own self-awareness/reflexivity. Church leaders commonly expressed pride in the organization’s diversity: “We’re doing something different here, you know?” (Hispanic/Latino male). Throughout my observations and interviews, there was no evidence that leaders were aware of the oppressive structure they had helped to create. Based upon the visual variations of race observed during a typical church service, these leaders seemed to genuinely believe that their organization was diverse, with no need for change or improvement. Due to such a limited and limiting scheme of diversity, leaders were unable to recognize the way in which this scheme restricted their own understanding. In other words, they disseminating an oppressive organizational structure without realizing it, while simultaneously believing that Common Point alleviated the very issues it served perpetuate.

By viewing diversity as merely racial, Common Point’s leaders failed to account for alternative perspectives and lifestyles. They also overlooked the power and significance of intersectionality (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Ashcraft & Flores, 2003; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991): the way in which race interrelates with “multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations” (McCall, 2005). Ultimately, with such a narrow view of diversity, Common Point was
unable to meet the needs of a truly diverse congregation/community. It was unable to reach the very people in which it claimed to be serving.

**Conclusion**

This chapter explored potential limitations of the community metaphor among Common Point’s racially diverse leaders and members. Results reveal a one-sided insight that values a white normative view of community over alternative understandings, thus, disciplining current minority members within the organization. Despite a reported need for cultural diversity and genuine relationship in order to create/maintain the community metaphor, Common Point has colonized the terms “diversity” and “community” as superordinate causes that warrant self-sacrifice among nonwhite congregational members. The next chapter continues this discussion by identifying three dialectical tensions that emerged during this process, as well as how each of tensions were managed by organizational leaders and members.
From a dialectical perspective, difference surfaces in multiple ways: through the social construction of opposites, as a medium of the interplay among tensions, and as a product that results from coping with, acting on, or moving forward amid the tensions (Putnam et al., 2011). During my study of Common Point Community Church, it was revealed that organizational members seeking to manage the dialectics of organizational life unknowingly reified an oppressive structure that centers on dominant/white notions of church membership, while simultaneously silencing and marginalizing members of color. Three specific ways in which difference emerged as members attempted to manage these dialectical tensions include: (a) individuality-community, (b) valuation-devaluation, and (c) inclusion-exclusion. Baxter (2011), however, advocates for dialectic research that moves beyond the mere identification of competing discourses. For that reason, the present chapter discusses how “discourses textually play off with and against one another” (p. 169) in order to answer this study’s third research question: \textit{RQ: How are dialectical tensions managed in order to maintain the organizational metaphor of community?} Participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and photography-driven interviews were each used to inform this chapter’s results.
Individuality-Community

One prominent dialectic that frequently surfaced at Common Point was a tension between individuality and community (i.e., unity and solidarity). This tension was not inherently problematic but represented what Harter (2004) describes as “the central conditions around which participants organize” (p. 99). The ways that organizational members enacted choices to cope with this tension drew upon particular ideologies that became manifest in discursive patterns and actions. Through my interviews and observations, it was clear that members frequently used the strategy of selection in managing this tension. Selection occurs when individuals/organizational units select one side of a pole, while rejecting the other (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Putnam et al., 2011; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004). Through this process, both poles are acknowledged, but patterns and practices reify a binary between them that deems one pole as being more desirable.

At Common Point, negotiating the tension between individuality and community was a matter of drawing upon particular notions of difference. Common Point’s leadership explicitly espoused selection as the organization’s preferred strategy for managing the dialectic between individuality and community. Specifically, the leadership of Common Point selected community as the desired/dominant pole. Through this process, organizational members were encouraged to set aside their individual preferences in order to embrace the universal goals of the organization. The management style of selection was evidenced in several distinct ways: on the organization’s website, through comments made by the organization’s lead pastor, and during my interviews with congregational members.
Common Point’s website described the organization as “a multi-ethnic community…transforming the world through Jesus Christ.” By constructing (and promoting) itself as multi-ethnic, Common Point highlighted diversity as an important organizational value. Diversity, in this case, related to increasing the number of underrepresented groups (i.e., African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos) in the organization (McClellan, Williams, & Deetz, 2011). This notion of diversity is important in the management of the tension between individuality and community: in order for organizational members to become a “multi-ethnic community,” they must dismiss their personal preferences, while embracing the organization’s singular style and structure.

The lead pastor of Common Point (a white male) also demonstrated this emphasis on community. During Sunday morning services, the lead pastor commonly noted that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and white communities have particular ways of “doing church” that are unique and may be preferred by members of those communities (e.g., music styles, organizational structures, and organizational activities). This sentiment draws upon a larger societal discourse linking race and religious practice (Tomlinson, 2010). While emphasizing the existence of such differences, however, the pastor challenged congregational members to set aside such individual preferences in order to embrace Common Point’s style and structure as a means of building community. On at least one occasion during my observations, the pastor even encouraged members to leave the church if they did not agree with this sentiment (field notes, November 14, 2010). The pastor further positioned the style and structure of Common Point as a necessary step for positively influencing the church’s surrounding community, and as a way to promote racial harmony. However, his discourse typically pointed to the
rituals/structures associated with racial minority groups as a marker of difference that opposed the mainstream culture of Common Point (Putnam et al., 2011).

Common Point’s pastor also made clear the value his organization places upon community during informal conversation. The pastor did so by differentiating Common Point from that of Mosaic Church, an intercultural congregation located in the American Midwest (see Mosaic, 2012). Having had the opportunity to attend Mosaic for four consecutive weeks, I can attest that this organization also works to link religious practice and race. Yet Akin to Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) strategy of connection, Mosaic embraces an alternative strategy for managing the tension between individuality and community. As such, it attempts to link perceived differences in a way that respects, preserves, and interrelates racial particularities. Mosaic does so specifically by alternating between several racially diverse pastors and band leaders each week. The resulting church services vary from week to week in length, structure, organization, and even spoken language. In contrast to Mosaic, Common Point’s leadership discards such an approach to managing tension; thus, being a member of Common Point requires the rejection by members of particular practices and preferences in order to assimilate into the organization’s universal style and structure.

Finally, members of Common Point also acknowledged the tension between individuality and community, while simultaneously accepting its management through selection. In describing their acceptance of this management strategy, members often drew upon the larger organizational discourses to describe its necessity:

Under [the pastor’s] leadership…the clear message that this is what it is about; this [rejecting individual preferences] is what we need to do. We have to first
build that relationship, that trust and that communication and all those challenging things but once we do that we can take the next step and serve and reach out and do what we need to do. (African American female)

Other congregation members rationalized their acceptance of this management strategy because of the organization’s perceived potential to decrease racial/religious divisions in society. Members often went as far as to describe this strategy as a courageous and honorable goal:

The pastor always makes reference that most of the churches are, a high percent, a single ethnic background or race. So our church is very diverse and out of the box and I think courageous is a characteristic of our church. We are trailblazers and I love it. I love the fact that we do things different, and I love not being afraid when I say courageous…doing what we feel like is what is under God’s eye what does the world look like, we are all different and we are all….and a lot of people intentionally segregate. (African American female)

Through my observations and interactions with Common Point’s website, leadership, and congregation, it was clear that management of the individuality-community dialectic revealed race to be the primary difference that mattered, and selection to be the preferred management strategy. The next section reveals ways in which Common Point’s attempt to promote community actually served to value and devalue religious practices associated with particular racial groups.

**Valuation-Devaluation**

In effort to manage the tension between individuality and community, Common Point promoted the selection of a style and structure that was unique to the organization.
Such a selection required members to reject religious practices associated with their own racial groups in order to promote a unified and racially diverse community. Through my ethnographic observations and interviews, however, it became evident that a tension existed between the valuations and devaluations of particular forms of both diversity and religious practice. This tension was managed through the strategy of *separation*. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) describe this approach as one in which individuals vacillate between poles or address only one at a given time or in a given situation.

Consistent with this description of *separation*, the management of what is valued and devalued by the organization revealed that some aspects of diversity were promoted while others were ignored. As aforementioned, Common Point placed great value on the visual representation of diversity (i.e., the presence of differently raced bodies within the organization). This was evident via promotional materials that featured stereotypical phenotypes, promptings by the lead pastor to interact with those who look different, etc. Although visual representations of racial diversity were promoted at Common Point, several minority members criticized organizational styles and structures that valued what they described as “white religious practices” (see Edwards, 2008a). Meanwhile, styles and structures associated with African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos were often “devalued” or “overlooked.” A discussed in the previous chapter, a frequent example cited by participants involved the music selection on Sunday mornings. Despite the band’s visual diversity, several racial minorities noted that this diversity failed to influence the band’s performance (e.g., tempo, song selection, choice of instruments, etc.) Specifically, Common Point’s band typically plays Contemporary Christian music, which is most often associated with white audiences (Howard & Streck, 1999; Romanowski,
2000). The band rarely plays gospel music, which is most often associated with African American audiences. Such selection reveals a valuing of what minority participants described as “white church music” while simultaneously devaluing music they associated with their own ethnic heritage. As a result, many minority members expressed displeasure with Common Point’s decision to play Contemporary Christian music, and desired a shift that would demonstrate the value placed upon their own racial group (i.e., gospel).

This discourse constructs polar opposites between religious practices that are white and non-white as congregational members make sense of what is valued and devalued in the organization. The management of this tension also reveals discordant notions of diversity, as members challenge assimilatory discourses who suggest that the religious practices of all racial groups should be valued. Despite expressing such concerns, however, the African American and Hispanic/Latino members I spoke with were reluctant to verbalize these concerns to the leadership or other congregation members. Instead, the next section reveals how many minority members avoided behaviors that they perceived as potentially disruptive to their inclusion in the organization.

**Inclusion-Exclusion**

Several African American and Hispanic/Latino members of Common Point voiced their displeasure about particular aspects of the organization that valued white religious practices over those they associated with their own race. Yet many of these participants chose not to voice their opinions with other members or leaders within the organization, thus, avoiding behaviors that could challenge their inclusion in the
organization. This occurred even in cases where overt and covert comments/actions were based in white power and privilege (see Hopson & Orbe, 2007).

A poignant example of this practice was the response to what one participant described as “instant familiarity.” He described this term in the following way:

That’s the concept where I think you may hear, um, coming from the black community that uh, instant familiarity, meaning that because you look at the color of my skin, now you instantly know where I’m coming from, so now you can use your vernacular to speak to me a certain way that you would not speak towards, let’s say, a white person…They got to throw man at the end of it or bro. (African American male)

Despite the overtly racist overtones of this practice and his own admission that he “did not appreciate it,” the participant chose not to vocalize his displeasure with encountering instant familiarity. Rather, he reconstructed this behavior as a rational attempt by white congregation members to be inclusive. He thus exonerated the white individuals who engaged in this behavior as merely misinformed and/or as having noble intentions.

Furthermore, this participant (re)constructed his own behavior as logical because he could be excluded from the organizational community if he labeled a white member as racist. In the end, his fear of expulsion seemed validated. On at least one occasion, the pastor of Common Point encouraged members during his sermon to leave the church if they did not agree with the organizational value placed upon community: “This may not be the place for you” (field notes, November 14, 2010). Another organizational leader echoed this sentiment during our interview by commenting, “If you don’t agree with what
we’re doing here, what we’re trying to do here…then I’d say you might need to look somewhere else” (Hispanic/Latino male)

A second minority participant recounted her experience with the tension of inclusion-exclusion when she first joined Common Point. Citing a distrust of white individuals that stemmed from her childhood, the participant described how Katie (a white female layperson within the organization) often made her feel guilty for not being a part of social activities outside of church:

I know initially when I first started, with no wrong intentions [Katie] really tried to do things like outside the church, and I didn’t know her and to be honest I didn’t trust her because I didn’t know her. All I knew is that I wanted to be at church and it almost lost me and I almost stopped coming because I felt guilty that I didn’t do things with her, and the reason I didn’t do anything personal with her is because I was just getting to know the church family. (African American female)

Although the participant attempted to address this issue with Katie, the discomfort she felt continued. Eventually this participant decided not to discuss the situation further. She chose instead to reframe her experiences, learning “not to take it personal when [she] saw [that Katie] did it with a lot of people.” This participant also drew upon the organizational discourse of Common Point by describing her response as a necessary sacrifice she needed to make in order to “promote connection among people who look different.” By reframing Katie’s actions and her own, the participant was able to normalize Katie’s behavior and to position her own response as a logical (and necessary) sacrifice for inclusion in the organization.
My observations and interviews revealed several other examples of African American and Hispanic/Latino congregation members making sacrifices and/or reframing their expectations in order to feel included. Because they were unwilling or felt unable to directly address such issues, those who did not engage in this process either voluntarily left the organization or were forced to leave. For example, the African American participant referenced above described her mother’s response to Katie’s behavior, as well as her mother’s eventual decision to leave the organization:

My mom [and I] joined together, and we were baptized together and my mom left because of that and she isn’t coming back because of that…She was feeling pressured and guilty almost into doing things she didn’t want to do, and she loved the church but she just wasn’t ready.

At the leadership level, an African American was also asked to leave the organization when the lead pastor deemed his behavior as “unprofessional” (see Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). Shortly after Common Point’s launch, the associate pastor began arriving late to leadership meetings. This behavior created friction among the leadership staff. The lead pastor spoke to the associate pastor on several occasions about the importance of time management. The associate’s behavior was unaffected; he was eventually asked to resign (field notes, February 2, 2011).

Interestingly, none of the white congregational members I spoke with described a similar need to reframe expectations and/or behaviors in order to feel included within the organization. In contrast, the failure to explicitly address such issues allowed some white participants to deny such racial tensions existed within or outside the church:
I just don’t know if race is as big of a factor as we want to make it in 21st century America. Now, I say that as a white guy who has never been treated badly because of my race and I recognize that and I defer to my brothers and sisters who have suffered from some kind of prejudice or bias, but I know my own heart and I think I am somewhat representative of an awful lot [of people] in the church.

(white male)

Discussion

The results of this study revealed three dialectical tensions within the organizational structure of Common Point Community Church. Consistent with Tretheway and Ashcraft (2004), however, I view a preoccupation with resolving organizational tensions as problematic, as it ignores the inherent irrationality of organizations. When current strategies of coping with and managing tensions promote racial inequality and oppression, it is necessary to identify ways of living better with the inevitable tensions of organizational life (see Tretheway & Ashcraft, 2004, p. 84). To this end, the present section discusses the need for (a) genuine dialogue and (b) nurtured reflexivity among Common Point’s current leaders and members.

In response to the dialectical tensions they felt, several participants of this study described a need for more dialogue between organizational members and the leadership. One participant specifically commented:

And see what the deal is, we don’t talk, you know it’s like, we don’t come together and talk about hey, yeah, these are some of the things that I struggle with. I think, what’s that big church in um, Chicago outside there some place? Anyway…they just bring [the members] together and say, hey let’s talk. What’s
going on? What’s happening? And then they talk that way, because it’s amazing what happens when it gets through dialogue and talk. (African American male)

Many participants seemed to view “dialogue” as mere opportunities for talk in the organization. During informal conversation with congregational members, for instance, it was suggested that Common Point extend the time between services to give people more time for fellowship. Congregational members also mentioned a better utilization of the church’s café area, in order to foster small talk and interaction (field notes, January 30, 2011; February 20, 2011). Although such opportunities may be beneficial, I feel the organization would be best served by pursuing opportunities for what Martin Buber (1965a) called “genuine dialogue.”

Buber (1965a) describes genuine dialogue as interactions where “each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them” (p. 19). In order to pursue genuine dialogue, Common Point members and leaders must work to address factors that Buber (1965b) argued impede dialogic engagement. In particular, Common Point seems to suffer from leaders’ attempts to “impose” a certain view of diversity and community at the expense of allowing these conceptions to “unfold” through natural and organic interaction (Buber, 1965b). One way of addressing this issue may be to create opportunities for organizational dialogue by following David Bohm’s (1996) method of facilitating dialogic interactions among groups 20 to 40 people. A commitment to pursuing genuine dialogue at Common Point would provide opportunities to understand and attend to the experiences and perspectives of all organizational members.
Once dialogue has improved, Common Point must also seek to implement reflexive strategies of organizational learning (Senge, 2006). Reflexivity is the recursive turning-back of personal experience upon itself (Maxey, 1999; Mead, 1962; Pang, 1991; Schon, 1983; Steier, 1995). In the words of Myerhoff and Ruby (1982) reflexive research is “consciousness about being conscious; thinking about thinking” (p. 1). Myerhoff and Ruby elaborate on this understanding by writing: “Reflexive, as we use it, describes the capacity of any system of signification to turn back upon itself, to make itself its own object by referring to itself; subject and object fuse” (p. 2). Similarly, Soros (1994) characterizes the concept of reflexivity as:

A two-way feedback mechanism in which reality helps shape the participants’ thinking and the participants’ thinking helps shape reality in an unending process in which thinking and reality may come to approach each other but can never become identical (p. 2).

Such a view of reflexivity draws obvious comparisons to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle (Heisenberg, 1930); however, Heisenberg deals with external observations, while reflexivity deals with the role of thinking as a generative tool for observable phenomena (Soros, 1994).

Reflexivity is also embedded within – while drawing upon – our current understandings of reality. Mead (1962) writes:

It is by means of reflexiveness – the turning back of experience of the individual upon himself – that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals in it…[Reflexiveness is] the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of mind. (p. 134)
In this sense, reflexivity is both a result and limitation of our communicative encounters with others: “Reflective understanding is an integrating process that draws upon understandings gained from the body’s interaction with the world and from the accumulated wisdom of the culture” (Polkinghorne, 2004, p. 151). The researcher can only be understood in terms of those who s/he seeks to research. Those s/he seeks to research can only be understood in terms of the researcher. To paraphrase Spencer-Brown (1973), we are all conglomerations of the very particulars we seek to describe (p. 105). There is no “I,” “they,” or “them.” We are all “I;” we are all “they;” we are all “them.” We are all “we.” As reflexive researchers, our presence and processes inevitably become part of that which we seek to observe (Foerster, 1991; Woolgar, 1988). It is only together that we mutually specify our own conditions of existence (Varela, 1984). Thus, reflexivity is “relational-in-a-context” (Steier, 1995, p. 64).

Due to reflexivity’s pensive and recursive nature, reflexive scholars are often more interested in process than product. As Schon (1983) writes, this reality offers a welcomed contrast for many scholars to the majority of contemporary research: “With [the current] emphasis on problem solving, we ignore problem setting, the process by which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, the means which may be chosen” (39, 40, emphasis original). Schon continues by addressing the erroneous nature of strictly empirical studies: “In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain” (p. 40).

Finally, reflexivity’s recursive nature is often illustrated as a set of mirrors doubling back on themselves: “The mirrors must be doubled, creating the endless regress
of possibilities, opening out into infinity, dissolving the clear boundaries of a ‘real world’” (Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982, p. 3). Pels (2000) describes this recursive aspect of reflexivity as an infinite set of loops that fail to reflect or generate anything beyond itself. Such recursivity has also prompted certain scholars to disparage reflexivity for its narcissistic nature (Hatch, 1996; Marcus, 1992; Patai, 1994; Weick, 2002; see also Babcock, 1980; Montaigne, 1973; Steier, 1995). Recent scholars, however, have venerated reflexivity for its ability to challenge patriarchal knowledge production (Haraway, 1991), its potential for personal transformation (England, 1994; Jackson, 1989; Steier, 1991), and its promise for social change (Gilbert, 1994; McLafferty, 1995). Pels (2000) further addresses this issue by offering a potential solution for communication scholars:

I…defend a view of reflexivity which I call ‘one step up.’ This exercise aims at freeing some initial conceptual space between two unattractive epistemological alternatives: the ‘flat’ or rectilinear discourse of straightforward naturalism, which finds strength and certification in the object, in the world as it is, and the infinite spiraling of metadiscourse, which adds layer after layer of reflexivity in order to recover a final grounding in the subject… ‘One step up’ reflexivity proposed to add only one level or dimension of self-reference, not more, in order to display the narrative’s hermeneutic point of departure and point of return. It ties just one loop, adds one level of self-exemplification, in order to bend the rectilinear story into a curvilinear or elliptical one. (p. 3)

By nurturing a reflexive, “one step up” culture among current organizational leaders and members, Common Point will learn to reflect-in-action upon organizational
practices and structures (Schon, 1983; Steier, 1991). They will be able to address the leadership’s aforementioned and faulty assumptions about their organization’s present level of diversity. Furthermore, instead merely addressing the current organizational issues that have been highlighted in this study, the organization will gain an ability to identify and manage future concerns on their own, when they eventually and inevitably emerge.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the way organizational members, seeking to manage the dialectics of organizational life, unknowingly reified an oppressive structure that centers on dominant/white notions of church membership, while simultaneously silencing and marginalizing members of color. Three specific ways in which difference emerged as members attempted to manage these dialectical tensions included: (a) individuality-community, (b) valuation-devaluation, and (c) inclusion-exclusion. In accordance with Baxter’s (2011) support for dialectic research that moves beyond the mere identification of competing discourses, this chapter also discussed how each of these tensions were managed by current minority members, while offering two suggests for current organizational leaders and members: (a) genuine dialogue and (b) nurtured reflexivity. Continuing in this spirit, the next chapter discusses three theoretical implications and three practical implications that resulted from this study, as well as the way each can be recontextualized to other intercultural milieu.
Chapter 7:
Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study examined specific ways in which “community” is understood by Common Point Community Church’s racially diverse leaders and members, potential limitations that result from this metaphor, and ways in which dialectical tensions are managed in order to maintain the organizational metaphor of community. In addition to perceptions of community and the management of dialectical tensions, however, this study also contributes a theoretical understanding to organizational communication scholars. Specifically, this study reveals (a) the propensity for intercultural organizations to promote a narrowed view of organizational culture, norms, and values, in a way that (b) diminishes alternative possibilities for organizational life, (c) resulting in racial tokenism for/among current minority members – a phenomenon that is hereto referred to as the diversity paradox.

The present chapter continues by discussing three practical implications that emerged during this study: (a) Common Point “Voices,” (b) Congregational Videos, and (c) Creative Arts Team. Each of these implications has since been implemented by Common Point to one degree or another. Each of these implications also has the potential to be recontextualized to other intercultural milieu, in effort to alleviate oppressive organizational structures while fostering community among racially diverse members. For that reason, the chapter concludes with a discussion of how this study’s
theoretical and practical implications might be transferred to additional organizational contexts.

**Theoretical Implications**

Although admirable on the surface, results of this study revealed that the value Common Point placed upon its “community” metaphor paradoxically removed opportunities for expressions of racial/ethnic difference. This *diversity paradox* occurred in three interrelated ways. (a) Organizational discourses promoted a narrowed understanding of diversity, thus, (b) diminishing alternative possibilities of organizational life and (c) resulting in racial tokenism for current minority members.

**Narrowed understanding.** Leaders and members of Common Point Community Church professed to value diversity, yet that value was expressed exclusively through visual and physical representations of race/ethnicity. While celebrating the notion of racial/ethnic difference, the emphasis placed upon “marked bodies” (see Allen, 2007) overlooked alternative facets and expressions of racial/ethnic identity, as well as alternative understandings of diversity beyond that of race and ethnicity alone. In this way, Common Point’s attempt to increase cultural variety actually served to narrow its conception, while ignoring alternative possibilities altogether.

In recent years, and especially since the Supreme Court’s decision in “Regents of the University of California v. Bakke” (Wood, 2003), the term diversity has become a normative reference for organizational leaders and members when discussing racial, ethnic, and cultural equality (Unzueta & Binning, 2010). Diversity is exalted by nonprofit and for-profit organizations alike as being a central priority (Bunn & LaCour, 2009), key source of strength (Richard, 2000), and present-future goal (Unzueta &
Binning, 2010). Many organizations go out of their way to publicize the value they place upon creating and maintaining diversity via formal mission statements, job calls, promotional materials, and adverts (Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Friedman, 2004; Kochan et al., 2003; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999).

Despite an increased value and emphasis placed upon the notion of diversity, this concept is still not clearly defined by the general public (Banks, 2009; Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Peterson, 1999; Unzueta & Binning, 2009). Such ambiguity affords a broad understanding of diversity’s potential role, definition, and importance. Diversity can be defined, for instance, by difference in age, gender, religious practice, economic income, education level, able-bodiedness, sexual orientation, nationality, political affiliation, geographic location, and marital status, to name but a few. As evidenced by the results of this study, however, leaders and members of Common Point Community Church gravitated toward a specified understanding of diversity. Despite the broad range of possible understandings – or rather because of them – organizational leaders and members focused on only one potential aspect of diversity. Rather than embracing diversity’s broad range of possibilities, the organization chose to extol one specific feature.

This process of “fractionation” (see Graham & Rickwood, 1997; Mill, Pinnegar & Polunin, 2007) offers the opportunity for intercultural organizations to make sense of a potentially overwhelming topic (see Pondy, Frost, Morgan & Dandrige, 1983; Weick, 1979, 1993, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). Originating in the field of chemistry, the term fractionation initially referred to the separation of an isotope into smaller quantities (O’Neil, Clayton, & Mayeda, 1969). Fractionation has sense been used
as a theoretical framework to describe the subdivision of large, complex concepts within social science into smaller, more palatable ideas. Thus, by subdividing the issue of diversity into smaller parts and focusing upon only one potential understanding, organizational leaders and members are able to “get their mind around” an otherwise complex issue. By limiting their options they are able to sharpen their focus.

Although useful in many instances, such a fractionated approach to diversity is also problematic because it inherently neglects alternative understandings. Just as organizational metaphor inherently emphasizes one understanding while simultaneously deemphasizing other understandings, the valuation of one aspect of diversity simultaneously devalues alternative aspects. An organizational focus upon diverse representations of gender, for instance, synchronously moves the focus away from sexual representation, an organizational focus upon diverse representations of sexuality synchronously moves the focus away from economic representation, and so on. In the case of Common Point Community Church, an organizational focus upon visual and physical representations of race moved the focus away from other understandings of diversity that I observed and recorded throughout my 36-month ethnography within the organization (e.g., age, economic income, political affiliation, etc.) Furthermore, as an intercultural organization led by a white majority and guided by white normative practices, such a narrowed understanding of diversity also resulted in diminished alternatives for current minority members.

**Diminished alternatives.** In addition to a narrowed understanding of diversity’s meaning, the *diversity paradox* also diminished alternative possibilities of organizational life for Common Point Community Church’s membership. This reality was especially
evident for/among current minority members. As such, the emphasis that Common Point’s organizational discourses placed upon visual and physical representations of race/ethnicity not only overlooked alternative understandings of diversity but devalued alternative ways of being. Specifically, and as evidenced by the previous chapters of this study, the value placed upon visual and physical representations of diversity devalued alternative approaches to music choice and time management. Contemporary Christian Music was used by Common Point’s worship band, as opposed to Gospel music. A monochronic view of time was used by Common Point’s leadership, as opposed to a polychronic view.

Other potential examples of diminished alternatives include approaches to service structure and choice of sermon topics. African American church services are typically longer in length, lasting up to four hours (Nelson, 2005; Pinn, 2006). In contrast, the church services among predominately white churches average a mere 65 minutes in length. In addition, African American church services typically focus the majority of its time on communal singing and dancing; churches comprised predominately of white attendees reserve the majority of Sunday morning for the pastor’s sermon. The choice of sermon topics also differ between predominately African American and predominately white churches. Stemming from the African slave trade and rooted in the Biblical account of Moses leading his people from bondage, African American congregations typically view salvation as the deliverance from present day hardships and appreciation (Pinn, 2006). In contrast, white congregations typically view salvation as the deliverance from eternal damnation, focusing upon its spiritual and long term dimensions, rather than the physical and temporal.
Despite each of these potential alternatives, the organizational discourses of Common Point Community Church focused solely upon visible differences among racial/ethnic groups, while simultaneously valuing a white normative view of music choice, time management, service structure, and sermon topics. For this reason, minority members within the organizational felt unable to express their diverse views and approaches to organizational life. Rather, their physical presence and appearance within itself was enough to “satisfy” Common Point’s diversity quotient, thus, relegating racial/ethnic minority members to token status within the organization.

**Racial tokenism.** First defined by Kanter (1977) during her study of gender representation in the workplace, *tokenism* is a perfunctory gesture toward the inclusion of minority members into an otherwise majority group or organization. Such inclusion is typically used to create an artificial façade of diversity, while averting any potential accusations of discrimination. Token individuals are often appointed to highly visible roles within an organization, yet are granted limited influence or capacity for organizational change (see Kanter 1977, 1993; Kelly, 2007; Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, n.d.).

According to this understanding, Common Point Community Church has relegated its minority members to that of token status. By emphasizing visible and physical representations of race, minority members are made highly visible within the organization. Yet by diminishing alternative possibilities of organizational life, minority members are granted limited influence or capacity for lasting organizational change. In this way, the *diversity paradox* not only diminished alternative views of diversity, but
also diminished the value and worth of minority members within Common Point’s current organizational structure.

Practical Implications

In addition to the diversity paradox, three practical implications also emerged from the results of this study: (a) Common Point “Voices,” (b) Congregational Videos, and (c) Creative Arts Team. My participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and photography-driven interviews served to contextualize the present chapter; however, each of this section’s practical implications emerged primarily through the methodology of World Café (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). In review, the World Café process brought together each of the study’s previous participants: both the organizational leaders and a representative sampling of twenty-five organizational members. The thirty participates were divided evenly among four tables. A guiding/discussion question was then placed at each table’s center. Participants were supplied with pens, markers, and crayons to record their groups’ thoughts, and to expand upon the thoughts of previous groups. Participants spent approximately twelve minutes at each table before cross-pollinating. When time to switch, one person was instructed to remain at each table as a “connector,” helping the next group to build upon the previous groups’ discussion. We concluded the World Café with a group discussion, where participants reported-out on their group conversations in search of leverage points (Meadows, 1999; see also Brown & Isaacs, 2005).

Common Point “Voices.” As discussed in the previous chapter, one potential way for Common Point to live better with the tensions of organizational life is through an increased sense of genuine dialogue. During this study’s World Café, participants made
several suggests for how to increase dialogue by/among organizational leaders and members. One common theme for doing so was the use of social media and online content: blogging, Facebook, Twitter, etc. (field notes, November 16, 2011). I mentioned this theme to Common Point’s lead pastor following the World Café event. The organization’s leadership responded to this challenge/suggestion with an initiative called Common Point “Voices” (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1. Blog header for Common Point “Voices”

Common Point “Voices” is a blogging series that used Facebook and the organizational website to generate conversation by/among current congregational members. Each week, a diverse participant was invited to blog in response to the week’s sermon message. Blogs were initially to be submitted to the Community Outreach Leader on Common Point’s leadership staff, before being posted online. During an impromptu conversation with the lead pastor, however, I suggested that blog entries be posted without editorial oversight or censorship. I emphasized the importance of trust, freedom, and democratic dialogue. I argued that if Common Point truly wanted to foster genuine dialogue by/among its members, it must allow their genuine and unfiltered
comments to be read by others. Consequently, the lead pastor encouraged participants in the coming weeks to raise questions and voice doubts through their blog entries. He also made it clear that the participants’ original views and thoughts were to be posted online as-is, free from editorial input or scrutiny by Common Point’s leadership.

On average, blog entries were 500-1000 words in length. They augmented the week’s sermon with additional anecdotes and/or pop cultural references. They seldom used Scripture or other religious sources, but were typically more personal in nature. Authors commonly used past experiences and intimate details to reveal a shortcoming in their own life – a way in which their lives related to the week’s sermon. For exemplars see Bridges (2012), Rennels (2012), Wilder (2012), and Yates (2012).

Common Point “Voices” addressed the issue of genuine dialogue in several ways. First, the leadership’s decision to not editorialize the blog posts broadened their authors’ potential range of expression, without imposing any singular view of the issues discussed. This blogging initiative also provided a tangible opportunity for organizational leaders and members to engage in dialogue with the specific experiences and perspectives of others. Finally, Common Point “Voices” served to engage a diverse group of participants, beyond racial difference alone, which also served to address this study’s second implication.

**Congregational videos.** In addition to increased dialogue, this study also outlined the need for a variegated understanding of diversity. Among Common Point’s leaders and members, the notion of diversity was typically measured and expressed via visual representations of race alone. Thus, a number of participants offered suggestions for how to represent a broader range of understanding. One specific suggestion that
emerged during this study’s World Café was the use of congregational videos before and during worship services (field notes, November 16, 2011).

Shortly after this suggestion was made by the World Café participants, Common Point began to record and present a series of congregational videos. These videos were shown to the entire church before, during, and/or following Sunday morning worship services. In addition, the videos were often uploaded to Common Point’s website and other social media outlets such as Facebook. One such example can be found at Common Ground (2012a).

Video participants were sometimes asked to share important announcements with other congregational members. At other times, participants were simply invited to share their personal stories and experiences (e.g., how they came to be a part of Common Point’s congregation, the positive impact Common Point’s community had on their lives and/or their neighborhood, etc.) Thus, the congregational videos constructively complicated Common Point’s limited/limiting understanding of diversity in several ways. First, the videos served to offer several representations of diversity beyond that of race alone. Videos featured men and women of all ages, races, sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, and economic backgrounds. The result represented a variety of dialects, dress, etc. Second, the congregational videos created by Common Point offered participants the opportunity to share personal details and narratives that reached past phenotypical markers. Such narratives often discussed marital and financial struggles/successes, political tension, and even depressive tendencies. One video, for instance, featured a middle-aged white male and the stress he felt during a recent stint with unemployment (field notes, September 18, 2011). A second video featured a 20-
something Hispanic/Latina female and the positive impact of Common Point’s tutoring initiative upon her child’s education (field notes, November 20, 2011). Stories such as these served to construct a more sophisticated and holistic understanding of fellow congregational members, allowing each to “see through different eyes from beyond” (Edwards, 1997, p. 54). Finally, Common Point’s congregational videos constructively complicated its limited/limiting understanding of diversity through their inclusion of peripheral details. The videos were often recorded in a variety of contexts and locations, they varied in length and structure, and they included an assortment of video filters and musical styles. By including cultural elements and objects beyond that of skin color, hair texture, body type, and facial features, the congregational videos promoted a view of diversity beyond racial/ethnic difference alone.

Creative arts team. A final way in which Common Point Community Church has attempted to address the tensions and limitations raised within this study is through the formation of its “Creative Arts Team.” Inspired by the World Café experience, The Creative Arts Team was created as an opportunity to bring diverse participants together in open dialogue with one another. The Creative Arts Team consists of 15-20 organizational members that meet with Common Point’s leadership once per month to discuss past, current, and future initiatives within the organization. The group’s unstructured conversations typically reflect upon the previous month’s services, outreach efforts, etc. Congregational members take time to share their personal perceptions and experiences. Together, the Creative Arts Team decides what was a success, what needs to be altered or modified, etc. The Creative Arts Team then “dreams together” (field notes, February 5, 2012) on what future direction(s) Common Point should go.
Throughout this process, participants are encouraged to question taken for granted assumptions within the organization and to challenge current norms of operation. Gatherings usually end by reflecting on the gathering itself: leaders and members commonly ask whether the meetings should be structured differently, whether a different setting, style, or method would prove more fruitful, etc. Such an approach embodies many of the ideas that are central to reflexivity by turning members’ personal experiences back upon themselves. Common Point’s Creative Arts Team is also conscious about its own consciousness, thus, making the organization itself an object for critical and analytical consideration.

Discussion

The diversity paradox reveals a need for leaders and members of/within intercultural organizations to employ ever-broadening definitions of diversity, as well as reflexive mechanisms of change. A broadened view or definition of diversity would positively correlate with organizational members’ ability to express their unique views, perspectives, and approaches. Through a broadened understanding of diversity’s potential meaning, additional alternatives for organizational life would also emerge. However, a broadened understanding of diversity alone is not enough for lasting change, as social and cultural categories of difference are ever changing. For that reason, organizational leaders and members must also remain continuously receptive to understandings of diversity beyond those presently held by the organization and society writ large. Rather than merely adopting a broadened understanding of diversity, intercultural organizations must employ an ever-broadening definition of diversity. In other words, an organizational view of diversity must be viewed as ephemeral: fluid and
ever changing. As such, any formal or written classification(s) of diversity developed by organizational members must remain a living document, open to future and continual change.

In order to actualize such an ever-broadening definition of diversity, organizational leaders and members must adopt reflexive mechanisms of change. As outlined in this study’s previous chapter, reflexivity is defined as the recursive turning-back of personal experience upon itself (Maxey, 1999; Mead, 1962; Pang, 1991; Schon, 1983; Steier, 1995). Thus, reflexivity acts as a recursive set of mirrors, allowing organizational leaders and members an opportunity to question their own thoughts, assumptions, processes and, ultimately, an opportunity to question their own questions. In relation to an ever-broadening definition of diversity, potential mechanisms of change include the invitation of outside perspectives, the scheduled/periodical self-reflection upon internal organizational processes, and the creation of an atmosphere in which organizational leaders and members feel free to voice their own dissenting views and opinions.

By inviting outside perspectives into the organization, organizational leaders and members will gain an increased capacity to recognize their own masked assumptions. By scheduling opportunities for reflection, organizational leaders and members will be forced to pause periodically in order to self-evaluate their own communicative processes and procedures. By creating an atmosphere that welcomes dissenting views and opinions, individuals who recognize a potential need for change will feel free to voice their observations within the organization. Ultimately, through the use of each of these suggestions, intercultural organizations – such as Common Point Community Church –
will gain an ability to identify, incorporate, and pursue future conceptions of diversity, beyond that of visual representations of race/ethnicity.

Each of the practical implications outlined in this chapter are also worthy of discussion because of their potential to be recontextualized to other intercultural milieu. This reality is especially relevant as America’s racial/ethnic composition continues to diversify (Bean & Stevens, 2005; Riche, 2000). Consequently, this study’s implications have potential to alleviate other potentially oppressive organizational structures via genuine dialogue, variegated diversity, and increased reflexivity, thus, fostering community among racially diverse members. Finally, and as evidenced by the actions of Common Point Community Church, each of these implications can be quickly implemented through the minimal use of technology – particularly through the use of congregational websites.

Congregational websites are typically created to connect with current members as well as to recruit new members. Keeping each of these audiences in mind, congregational websites often emphasize attractive features of congregational life, as well as guiding beliefs and principles of the organization (Baab, 2008). The websites function as a space for self-representation, enabling self-directed performances of organizational identity: “Congregational websites in themselves are performative, a carefully choreographed assemblage of words, photos, graphics, and links” (Baab, 2007, p.166). In addition, most all congregational websites employ various communication strategies in order to influence current and future congregants, just as secular organizations use their websites to increase business. Functioning as “electronic storefronts” (Winter, Saunders,
& Hard, 2003; see also Waters, 2011), these websites offer a first impression to new/potential congregants (i.e., “customers”).

Due to the increased popularity of congregational websites (Baab, 2007; Esrock & Leichty, 1998), it is essential for contemporary religious leaders to harness this medium for positive organizational and societal change. In fact, the number of American churches with congregational websites nearly tripled between 1998 and 2007, increasing from seventeen to 44 percent (Chaves & Anderson, 2008). Meanwhile, more than 28 million Americans report using the internet for spiritual reasons, and many do not visit a church without first browsing its website (Baab, 2008; Larson, 2000). As outlined above, Common Point has attempted to utilize online content by inviting members to write public blogs and by posted congregational videos to the internet. Additional implications for fostering community via congregational websites include: (a) comment boxes for current content areas, (b) a suggestion tool where visitors can offer direct feedback to the congregational leadership, (c) a networking element to help visitors locate and connect with other organizational members in the surrounding area, and (d) the designation of (cyber)space for visitors to share and discuss their own lived experiences. Discussion threads could be created in response to past or recent events, current announcements, future goals, and so on. Such participant-organization and participant-participant dialogue could also be left open ended, allowing visitors to create their own threads of discussion (see also Jenkins, 2012c).

Conclusion

Drawing upon more than three years of research, this chapter discussed the diversity paradox: a propensity for intercultural organizations to promote a narrowed
view of organizational culture, norms, and values, in a way that diminishes alternative possibilities for organizational life, particularly for that of racial/ethnic minority members. The present chapter went on to discuss three practical implications that also emerged during this study: Common Point “Voices,” Congregational Videos, and Creative Arts Team. In effort to live better with the inevitable tensions of organizational life (Tretheway & Ashcraft), this chapter concluded with a discussion of ways in which each of these implications can be recontextualized to other intercultural milieu: broadened definitions and mechanisms of change. The following chapter turns this study’s focus even further inward by exploring the dialectical tensions I felt as a white, middleclass male studying an intercultural congregation.
Chapter 8:

Reflections of a Researcher

I stand in back of the sanctuary, shifting my weight impatiently. The room’s barrel vault ceiling towers overhead, crowned with iron rivets and laminate pine. The paisley patterned carpet spreads out before me like a giant tie traversing the room.

I scan the congregation, taking mental note of their seating arrangements, their proximities to one another, their postures. I use a pen to record my observations, scrawling as frantically as a newspaper reporter. From my present angle, I can only see the back of one hundred heads – all hair and neck. I squint as if peering into a computer monitor. At this distance, it is difficult to estimate age, race, or even sex.

“Are you ready?” Bob asks.

I turn toward the question. My focus shifts from the back of one hundred distant heads to Bob’s immediate face, drifting less than two feet from mine own. I cannot help but notice the dry bit of skin on the end of his nose. He is clearly in his 60’s, I note. White. Male.

“Are you ready?” he repeats.

I pucker my lower lip and nod confidently, hoping to alleviate the previous moment of awkward silence, awkward observation. Bob had asked me to help with the collection earlier that morning; the time had apparently arrived. He hands me a wide brimmed plate, not unlike the chargers my mother once used to decorate our dining room
table for holiday dinners. Hers were always brightly colored red or green or orange.

This one looks metallic, as if made from polished steel or white gold. It weighs of plastic.

Three others join me in the back. Male. Middle-class. Two are Black, one is white. I am clearly the youngest among them. I continue to take mental notes as we wait together for the pastor to give us a knowing nod.

Moments later I find myself passing out the collection plates. I move from one row to the next, from pew to pew. I near the end of my duties and realize that I have become preoccupied with the task at hand, failing to examine the actions of those around me. To how many people had I passed a collection plate? What percentage of people had added to its contents? Were there any correlations between race and giving, sex and giving, age and giving? Was it even ethical for me to monitor charity in such a way? Am I a participant in this space or a student of it? Am I an organizational member or an organizational scholar? Am I either? Can I not be both?

... 

The present chapter reveals two dialectical tensions that emerged throughout my research with Common Point Community Church: (a) majority-minority and (b) faith-academe. I begin by outlining each of these tensions in more detail, as well as the way I attempted to manage each. I conclude by discussing three potential suggestions for future researchers who find themselves in a similar situation.

Majority-Minority

Throughout my research with Common Point, I was acutely aware of its intercultural emphasis and racial diversity. As a white, middleclass male who has experienced consistent educational and material privilege throughout my life, I often
found myself to be hypersensitive to my own corporeal realities. On one hand, I desired to accept Allen’s (2007) invitation for all communication scholars to study race, rather than mitigating its consideration to scholars of color. On the other hand, I was apprehensive about assuming a dominant role within the organization and/or alluding to the societal privilege I experience as an educated white male (Allen, 2007; Hopson & Orbe, 2007; Monaghan, 2010; Lund, 2010). Several instances exemplified this dialectic, including my interpersonal interaction with Common Point’s leadership, my limited ability to appreciate diverse perspectives, and my conversations with others within academia.

After some time with the organization, Common Point’s leadership began to view me as a “researcher in resident.” I initially perceived this reference as a positive reflection of the rapport I had built as a researcher; however, the label of “researcher in resident” also served to amplify my role and responsibility within the organization. I became apprehensive that my research might be perceived as an effort to assume a paternal or patriarchal role. I also feared that Common Point’s leadership might misperceive me as a “white savior” within the organization (see Diane, 2003; Hughey, 2010; Scott, 2010; Strickland, 1993). As a result of this tension, I found myself reluctant to assume the role of resident researcher. Although this label was a fairly accurate description of my ongoing work with the organization, I inherently sought to shed all allusions of power. I consistently downplayed my role as a researcher when speaking with congregational members, and emphasized my role as an organizational member when speaking with leadership.
Throughout my research with Common Point, I also questioned my ability to fully comprehend and appreciate the diverse perspectives of other congregational members. I wondered whether I could possibly see beyond my own limited paradigm. This reality further fueled the majority-minority dialectic. I had logged over 100 hours of participant observations and interviewed a representative sampling of twenty-five organizational members. Yet as a white, middleclass male, I wondered whether I could ever fully understand the range of data and perspectives gleaned from these methods. I wondered whether I could ever draw conclusions about the organization or suggest future implications.

Finally, I experienced the majority-minority dialectic within academia as well. On at least one occasion, I was told by a senior faculty member to avoid pursuing intercultural studies. Due to my dominant positionality within contemporary society (white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.), I was cautioned to “not hang my hat on intercultural communication.” Regarding my future career, this faculty member encouraged me to focus my studies within the arena of “whiteness” (see Gibson, 1996; Grimes, 2001, 2002; Simpson, 2008), or else to avoid issues of race/ethnicity altogether.

In effort to manage the dialectical tension I experienced as a racial majority researching a racially diverse organization, I found myself utilizing the management strategy of integration (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Putnam et al., 2011; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004). According to Putnam and colleagues (2011), the management strategy of integration “results from interactions that merge both poles simultaneously through compromising each pole or creating a forced merger between them” (p. 39). In this way, the tension I felt as a white male within Common Point was minimized by
finding mutuality with diverse congregational members. Our differences were mitigated, thus, minimizing both poles. Meanwhile, our similarities were emphasized. Although this management strategy seemed effective, it also undermined the presence and beauty of Common Point’s racial complexity. Rather than learning to work with those who were different from myself, I managed the majority-minority dialectic by simply diluting or denying our differences. In the end, I realized this was not the most constructive approach to take. Having learned from my own experiences, potential suggestions for future research and practice are discussed in this chapter’s discussion section.

Faith-Academe

The second tension that emerged during my research with Common Point was between that of faith and academe. Similar to the majority-minority dialectic, my sense of personal identity was in frequent conflict, as I struggled to descry my own sense of self. The two (seemingly) opposing poles of religion and education presented a false dichotomy. Within faith-based environments, I often felt compelled to mitigate my association with academia; within academic environments, I often felt compelled to mitigate my association with the faith-based organization I was studying. This compulsion surfaced during my writing, as well as during my interpersonal interactions with academic faculty and leaders of Common Point.

While writing the variety of conference presentations, academic articles, and book chapters that resulted from my initial research with Common Point (indeed, while writing the present study), I felt compelled to distance myself from the organization in subtle ways (see Jenkins, 2012a, 2012b, 2012d; Jenkins, in press; Jenkins, under review; Jenkins & Dillon, 2012). Within my writing, for example, I often clarified that I was
only an attendee of Common Point, rather than an official member. During this time, I also remained mindful of certain terminology. I often used the words “faith” and “faith-based” instead of “religion” or “religious.” Again, this point is best evidenced by the study at hand.

I believe there were several reasons for why I felt the need to distance myself from the organization in this way. First, I did not want to cast myself as being too close to my research. Although I recognized the “unbiased” and “objective” researcher to be a model that was both outdated and unattainable, a portion of me still feared that my results would be dismissed as unreliable and/or prejudiced. Second, I dissociated from the organization in order to distance myself from the disparaging rhetoric I often heard from fellow colleagues and faculty members. Such rhetoric often equated religion and those who are religious to the notions of fanaticism, intolerance, and narrow-mindedness. During one doctoral seminar, for instance, a faculty member commented: “Religion offers nothing positive to the world” (field notes, November 12, 2010). This professor then turned to me moments later to ask my opinion, thus, singling me out among my peers as an “expert” on the topic – the topic s/he had just personified as wholly negative.

The dialectical tension I felt between faith and academe also emerged during my interpersonal interactions with the leaders and congregational members of Common Point. Specifically, when I first spoke with Common Point’s lead pastor about the possibility of researching alongside him and his organization, I felt compelled to emphasize my own beliefs. I perceived subtle verbal and nonverbal cues that prompted me to confirm my stance as a believer, as well as the assurance that I was not planning to produce an expose of the organization. Similarly, when I was asked by congregational
members about my research, I typically felt compelled to frame my response in regard to the organization and what my work might accomplish for them. I rarely mentioned the academic aspirations of my research: conference presentations, publications, etc. On one hand, this may have simply been a tactful response to their inquiry, highlighting my research’s relevance to them as organizational members. On the other hand, I could not help but to notice my own impulse to avoid mentioning my work’s academic implications, lest they distrust my motives and intentions. I was comfortable discussing such implications with family and friends outside of the organization; however, when asked by those within Common Point, a dialectic emerged.

*Separation* is the strategy that best describes my management of the tension I felt between faith and academe (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Putnam et al., 2011; Seo, Putnam, & Bartunek, 2004). The strategy of separation occurs when an individual vacillates between two opposing poles “addressing only one of them at a given time or in a given situation” (Putnam et al., 2011, p. 38). Through this process, poles become temporarily estranged, based upon personal roles, contextual influences, and/or external pressures. I represented a separational management style by choosing one pole at a time, depending on the specific situation in which I found myself. Again, I question whether this was the most effective way to manage the tension I felt. In answer to that question, I point once more to this chapter’s discussion section.

**Discussion**

Two dialectical tensions surfaced throughout my research with Common Point Community Church. For better or worse, I managed each of these dialectics differently. For the majority-minority dialectic, I used *integration*; for the faith-academe dialectic, I
used *separation*. Upon further reflection of these tensions and the way I attempted to manage each, three practical implications emerge: (a) the necessity of positionality, (b) the value of authenticity, and (c) the benefit of tensions. I believe each of these implications have potential to benefit future researchers who encounter similar tensions in their own research. Each of these implications can also be recontextualized to other organizational milieu.

**Necessity of Positionality.** I initially attempted to avoid positioning myself in my research with Common Point. In effort to appease both my academic and faith community, I avoided the topic altogether. Rather than avoiding this issue, however, I have come to realize that one should clearly and continually address it. By repeatedly positioning and repositioning oneself within your research, researchers alleviate any ambiguity surrounding your motives while simultaneously building rapport with those whom you are writing for and/or speaking. Furthermore, by clearly positioning oneself within her/his research, a researcher is able to acknowledge and “own up” to her/his biases, as opposed to denying or pretending they do not exist.

**Value of Authenticity.** The second implication of this study is the value of authenticity. Throughout my research with Common Point, I struggled to manage the tension I felt between my academic and faith communities. I found it tempting to use the management strategy of *selection*, choosing whichever binary suited my present situation. For example, while on campus or discussing my research with academic colleagues, I would often mitigate my role in the faith community. While in the field or discussing life with congregational members, I would often mitigate my role in the academic community. This balancing of roles is natural to some extent: “shop talk” is often
relegated to the workplace, intimate conversations are saved for the bedroom, etc. At times, however, the use of selection caused my identity to become bifurcated, as if being pulled in two vastly separate directions. For this reason, I suggest that other, future researchers remain true to themselves throughout the research process. When one encounters a similar dialectical tension, refuse to sacrifice any portion of your identity, instead seeking to engage the “whole self” (Myerhoff & Metzger, 1980).

**Benefit of Tensions.** Finally, through reflecting-in-action on my longitudinal study with Common Point, I realized the benefit that dialectical tensions can offer to the researcher. The dialectic of majority-minority, for instance, heightened my awareness of my own situation, by causing me to realize the limitations of my personal paradigm. Although this realization caused me to doubt my ability to comprehend and/or appreciate the diverse perspectives of those I wished to study, it also helped me to be more cognizant of those perspectives. It spurred me to look outside of myself. It prompted me to challenge my own assumptions about the world around me. Ultimately, it caused me to become a better researcher.

**Conclusion**

Schon (1983) comments on the reflexive scholar by writing: “There are those who choose the swampy lowlands. They deliberately involve themselves in messy but crucially important problems and, when asked to describe their methods of inquiry, they speak of experience, trial and error, intuition, and muddling through” (p. 43). In many ways, this description characterizes my experience with Common Point Community Church. I feel the articles and publications that have emerged from my research address a number of crucially important problems: racial inequality, community building, and
relational dynamics, to name but a few. I have, however, leaned on intuition throughout this process. In effort to offer implications for future researchers, I have relished in trial and error. Indeed, I have chosen the swampy lowlands.

... 

*The service ends. I fold my notebook and stuff its contents into my blazer, hidden away, safely out of view for anyone to see. I would hate for the members of Common Point to feel uncomfortable around me, or to be unnerved by my incessant role as a researcher.*

*My jeans vibrate. I scoop the cell phone from my pocket, scan its screen, and choose to ignore a colleague’s inquiry about my present location. I would hate for the members of my cohort to feel uncomfortable around me, or to be unnerved by my incessant role as a believer.*
Epilogue

In recent years, a sense of community has declined throughout the United States. This reality is evidenced in a variety of ways: civic participation (Salamon, 2002), political involvement (Aarts & Semetko, 2003), religious affiliation (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007), neighbor-to-neighbor interaction, and even the likelihood for community members to work alongside others to address local problems (Patterson & Kim, 1994). In order to address its own institutional legitimacy, Common Point Community Church has responded to this trend by prioritizing “community” as an organizational metaphor. The present study used participant observations, semi-structured interviews, photography-driven interviews, and World Café to explore how this metaphor is co-constructed through the communication processes and practices of Common Point’s racially diverse leaders and members.

I began this process, first, by positioning the study within existing literature on institutional theory, institutional legitimacy, community, community of practice, social construction of race, sensemaking, organizational metaphor, tension-centered approach, and dialectic theory. Building upon more than three years of ethnographic field work, I then outlined the study’s context and research methodology. Next, I discussed (a) specific ways in which “community” is understood by organizational leaders and members, (b) potential limitations that result from this metaphor, and (c) ways in which dialectical tensions are managed in order to maintain the organizational metaphor of
community. Results revealed four primary themes that define “community” among current organizational members, including the need for a common goal/cause. In the case of Common Point Community Church, however, the common or superordinate goal of “community” was actually shown to perpetuate a one-sided insight. As a result, leaders and members of Common Point came to value a white normative view of community above all others, thus, silencing alternative understandings and self-disciplining minority members within the organization. The resulting tensions of individuality-community, valuation-devaluation, and inclusion-exclusion were managed in various ways by current organizational members, and to various degrees of success.

In response to each of these findings, this study also offered three theoretical and three practical implications. Specifically, this study revealed (a) the propensity for intercultural organizations to promote a narrowed view of organizational culture, norms, and values, in a way that (b) diminishes alternative possibilities for organizational life, (c) resulting in racial tokenism for/among current minority members – a phenomenon referred to as the diversity paradox. The three practical implications that emerged from the study, as well as ways in which each can be recontextualized to other intercultural milieu, included: (a) Common Point “Voices,” (b) Congregational Videos, and (c) Creative Arts Team. I concluded this study by reflecting on the research process itself – tensions felt as a white, middleclass male studying an intercultural congregation.

The primary focus of this study was a faith-based organization. Yet I believe its analyses and discussion apply to a variety of contexts, both religious and secular, both within and beyond academe, as leaders across America work to build community within increasingly diversified milieu. This belief was, in fact, what first drew me to the study
of community, and what compelled me to work alongside Common Point Community Church. As such, the present study offered a unique case study that collates the three interrelated factors of community, racial diversity, and religious institutions.

The human desire for community is a universal longing. We each yearn to be in personal contact with others and to belong to something larger than ourselves. Consequently, a felt sense of community has been positively correlated to both mental and physical health, as well as quality of life and life expectancy. For each of these reasons, it is vital for communication scholars to explore the notion of community. By gaining insight into how this concept is cultivated and sustained among the members of Common Point, perhaps we as communication scholars can help others to do the same. Perhaps we can stem the declining sense of community felt across America today.

Meanwhile, issues of racial disparity continue to plague our world today (Allen, 2007; Hirsch & Levert, 2009; Intoual, Kameniar, & Bradley, 2009; Peterek-Bonner, 2009). This reality is especially evident within the United States, whether measured by income inequality (Attewell, Kasinitz, & Dunn, 2010; Glazer, 2005; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008), education levels (Chowhry & Rai, 2009; Closson, 2010; Cruz & Duplass, 2009; Lund, 2010), or incarceration rates (Richmond & Johnson, 2009; Spencer, Haslewood-Pocsik, & Smith, 2009; Ward, Farrell, & Rousseau, 2009). Despite the present persistence of racial inequality, organizational communication scholars have rarely addressed issues of racial difference, prompting Cox and Nkomo (1990) to characterize racial minorities as the “invisible men and women” of organizational research. Consequently, I believe it is essential for communication scholars to explore intercultural contexts. By revealing the specific way(s) that racially diverse community
members manage tensions and limitations, I believe we can apply that knowledge to other organizations settings as well. I believe that we can make further progress in the way our society collectively views, treats, and communicates with minority men and women.

Finally, religious and faith-based organizations have an ability to address many of the social problems facing America today, namely that of racial inequality and our declining sense of community. Religion remains, in fact, one of the most powerful institutions in our world today. This reality is especially true in the United States, where more than 300,000 faith-based congregations operate on a weekly basis and more than one third of Americans are involved in church to some degree. In spite of these statistics, however, organizational communication scholars have not routinely studied religious milieu, focusing instead upon corporate contexts (Ashcraft, 2011). Such a fundamental oversight neglects the present power and influence of religious organizations, as well as their potential for positive social change. By working within/alongside a faith-based organization, it is my goal to help develop religion’s full potential as a positive change agent in the world today. As a communication scholar, it is my aim to aid contemporary congregations like Common Point Community Church by fostering an increased sense of community among organizational members, while simultaneously stemming racial inequality in the world writ large.
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Appendices
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Greeting/Rapport Building

1. Are you busy?
2. Is this a good time to speak with me?

Introductory Questions

3. Age?
4. Race/ethnicity?
5. How long have you been involved with Common Point Christian Church?

Interview Questions

6. What does “community” to mean you?
7. What does it mean to be a “community church”?
8. Do you believe Common Point is a community? Why or why not?
9. How might Common Point’s current sense of community be improved?
10. What do you see as the greatest obstacle to community within Common Point?
11. Is there another church that Common Point aspires to be like? If so, what characteristic(s) about that church make this church seek to be more like it?
12. What is the long-term vision for this church? In what ways do you hope it will have changed 5 years from now? 10 years from now? 20 years from now?
13. If I were new to this church and asked you why I should consider joining it, how would you respond?
14. If Common Point was to hire a professional consultant, what issue/area would you most want him/her to address?
Closing/Conclusion

15. Do you have any questions for me?

16. Do you have anything to add?
Appendix B: Photography-Driven Interview Guide

**Greeting/Rapport Building**

1. Are you busy?
2. Is this a good time to speak with me?

**Introductory Questions**

3. Age?
4. Race/ethnicity?
5. How long have you been involved with Common Point Community Church?

**Interview Questions**

6. Describe your image/picture to me?
7. What’s the story behind this picture/image?
8. What does this image/picture represent to you?
9. Why did you make the decision to take/make this picture/image?
10. How does this image/picture represent “community” to you?
11. Do believe Common Point embodies/represents your understanding of community? Why or why not?
12. How might Common Point’s current sense of community be improved?
13. What do you see as the greatest obstacle to community within Common Point?

**Closing/Conclusion**

14. Do you have any questions for me?
15. Do you have anything to add?
Appendix C: World Café Guiding/Discussion Questions

Table 1: Music
1. How is community created by/through Common Point’s current use of music?
2. What are potential barriers to community within Common Point’s current use of music?
3. How might community be better fostered by/through Common Point’s current use of music?

Table 2: Spatial Arrangement(s)
1. How is community created by/through Common Point’s current use of space?
2. What are potential barriers to community within Common Point’s current use of space?
3. How might community be better fostered by/through Common Point’s current use of space?

Table 3: Spoken Word
1. How is community created by/through Common Point’s current use of the spoken word (e.g., sermons, messages, teachings, etc.)?
2. What are potential barriers to community within Common Point’s current use of the spoken word (e.g., sermons, messages, teachings, etc.)?
3. How might community be better fostered by/through Common Point’s current use of the spoken word (e.g., sermons, messages, teachings, etc.)?

Table 4: Written Materials
1. How is community created by/through Common Point’s current use of written materials (e.g., bulletins, flyers, website, promotional materials, etc.)?
2. What are potential barriers to community within Common Point’s current use of written materials (e.g., bulletins, flyers, website, promotional materials, etc.)?
3. How might community be better fostered by/through Common Point’s current use of written materials (e.g., bulletins, flyers, website, promotional materials, etc.)?
Appendix D: Sample Observation Notes

Date: September 19th
Location: Common Point Community Church
Time: 9:30 service

Foyer

There are 20-30 people standing in the foyer and outside. All are adults/young adults.

There are two main clusters of people: one is around the café and one is outside on the porch. The café cluster is mostly white women in their 40s-50s (Bobbie, Hilda...); the porch cluster is mostly young adults, aged 20-35. There is more diversity among the porch cluster in both race and gender (Kelly, Kellie, Liz, Brad, Tony...)

Other people sit and stand, scattered throughout the foyer. They seem to be grouped primarily by family/close relational ties. A couple at the high top table seem to be avoiding contact with others.

Laughter from café area.
Music begins in sanctuary.

Four greeters remain outside. All are white, between the ages of 25-30. What message does this communicate to new attendees? Who might this group of greeters attract/deter?

Eighteen adults are seated in the sanctuary; ten adults remain in foyer/outside. At least a dozen others arrive within the next ten minutes and funnel into the sanctuary ten minutes late.

[The pastor] walks through the foyer from his office to the sanctuary.

The café “closes.”
Two greeters remain on the porch.

Sanctuary

By 10:00 there are 44 adults in the sanctuary, including the greeters, not including staff.

Members appear to be seated with other like-bodied attendees, representing less interaction among racially diverse members than during pre-service. Furthermore, the arrangement of white bodies tend toward the middle, while
minority members tend to the outside section. Of the 29 attendees sitting within the middle section, 23 are white (79%), while only 6 are Black or Hispanic/Latino (21%). Of the 15 attendees sitting within the two outside sections, only 5 are white (33%), while the remaining 10 are Black or Hispanic/Latino (67%) (Figure A.1).

*Figure A.1.* Seating arrangement by race/ethnicity.
Appendix E: Sample Semi-Structured Interview

Date: February 10th
Location: Common Point Community Church
Duration: 32:56

Interviewer: Okay [Participant #7], thanks again for taking some time. I really do appreciate it because, well, I couldn’t do this without you…

Participant #7: No problem.

Interviewer: A few housekeeping questions: How old are you [Participant #7]?

Participant #7: I am… I knew you were going to start with a trick question, I think 43, 44. I just had a birthday in November.

Interviewer: And what race ethnicity would you self-identify as?

Participant #7: Black.

Interviewer: And remind me, I probably know this, but how long have you been associated with [Common Point]?

Participant #7: September 12th it would have been one year, so I’m looking at a year and a half almost.

Interviewer: And also, you came on as leadership from the beginning, right? So it’s kind of like… Yeah, yeah. So one and a half years, makes sense. Okay, let’s jump right into it.

Participant #7: Okay.

Interviewer: You ready for this?

Participant #7: Sure.

Interviewer: Here’s a general question to maybe get things started. What does community mean to you? This word “community” is thrown around sometimes, but what does it mean?

Participant #7: Yeah…

Interviewer: What’s it mean to you?
Participant #7: Well I’m a musician and so language has always been very important to me in reading music, classical music, usually all instructions are written in either Italian or German so I’ve always had a love for language. So when I hear community, I immediately go to the root and think of you know to commune or you know the same root for which we get common. You know things that people share. And so when I think of community I think of sharing, and in this particular community I think of the thing that we all share as a family and the thing that binds us together is our love of God, and focus on Christ, and being a follower of His teachings. So that’s what comes to my mind when I hear community.

Interviewer: Yeah that makes sense, almost like a common cause or common goal…

Participant #7: Right.

Interviewer: So what does it mean, I wonder, to be a community church? This is also a phrase that sometimes is thrown around, but I think… but maybe I should back up. Do you think that [Common Point] is a community church, or do you view it as a community church?

Participant #7: To be honest with you, I didn’t give that a lot of thought quite frankly. I’ve been in church so to speak my whole life pretty much, growing up in a church where my dad was a pastor and I’ve worked full-time in church work or ministry for the past eight years or so. So I tend to think; I’m not very much into denominations. I’ve worked at three churches in Tampa, all different denominations, vastly different in many ways but the common thread was you know the focus on the inner Christ centered church, Bible believing church.

So when I came here I didn’t really think a lot about community, because I was thinking in a larger sense of us all being a part of community. So it’s not something I spend a lot of time on, it was emphasized when I got here that this is a church that wants to reach its immediate surrounding community in that sense. So it was something that was stressed once I became interested in working here. So I began to get the thought once I came on board and what it means to really be a community church and to reach out to your immediate surroundings because that’s fairly rare these days in a lot of churches because there’s so much tradition.

People move about so you tend to have the same people at churches for their whole lives and a lot of times they’re driving in from great distances and there’s not a lot of emphasis on reaching the immediate surroundings. So that is something that is stressed here at [Common Point]. I guess really if you think about it, technically speaking the name of the church implies community, Common, [Common Point]. It’s kind of redundant to say it’s a community church when it’s called [Common Point]. But yeah absolutely that’s a focus on the staff, and it’s something that I’ve enjoyed. It’s kind of a reminder that we’re not just gathering for you know just out of tradition, but we do have a mission and that’s; our
name is a constant reminder of that mission that we are a part of the community and we want to impact community, we want to be a community.

**Interviewer:** And so it yeah, it seems like you’re already answering the question then… So what does it mean to be a community church? What characteristics might be…?

**Participant #7:** I think a church that, well, two things: making an effort to really connect inside the church but for the greater purpose of going outside of the church. A community church I think is outwardly focused, not much of a club, it’s us mentality. Club members only; that’s not the way we go about business, that’s not the way we approach things but everything is done with an idea that it is to impact our surroundings, our community, our city, our neighborhood. So a community church I think has to be outwardly focused and missional in its thinking. So that’s pretty much what I think when I hear community church, that’s what I think it should be. I’m not sure that’s always what it means but that’s what it should be.

**Interviewer:** Yeah that makes sense. So we talked about what it means to be community and you went to the root and a little bit about what it means to be a community church maybe… You said it’s more about impact and some things like this, so then… I know I’ve asked you “do think [Common Point]’s a community church,” but do you even think [Common Point] is a community and why or why not?

**Participant #7:** You know I think we’re becoming a community always. The thing about being outwardly focused and focused on the greater community beyond the walls of the church, the challenge is that the more people come in, the more the dynamic changes on the inside. So it takes time; it’s like we’re constantly developing community because things change all the time. When you’re an inviting congregation then you’re not satisfied with the community as it is, you’re always open to that changing with every person that comes in.

With every person comes a different personality, a different philosophy, a different set of values and traditions from their own church experience, or lack thereof maybe they’re coming in with no real values but they’re just interested in what’s going on. So our willingness to embrace that change makes the community within something that’s continuing to evolve, continuing to change, and grow all the time. So in a way being a community church in our mission and focus makes being a church community very difficult…

**Interviewer:** Yeah I never thought about it that way; that makes sense though…

**Participant #7:** So in a way I guess it would be easier to be a community and church if we weren’t focused on community outside the church.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.
Participant #7: But of course we’re not here to do what’s easy, we’re here to do what’s biblical, so…

Interviewer: Are there maybe some positives that also emerge from the intentions of creating a changing community?

Participant #7: Oh absolutely, absolutely.

Interviewer: Can you flesh that out a little bit? What comes to mind or…?

Participant #7: Yeah, just because it’s difficult doesn’t mean its negative. Yeah you’re right, there are some wonderful things that come from meeting people who don’t have the same experiences that you have or have had. It’s sort of like going to college, you know one of the greatest things I think about going to a big school is you know the greatest learning really takes place outside of the classrooms in just meeting all these different people, people with different ideas. It’s like, wow I’ve never really thought of that.

You know even when we have people come in from different churches; different parts of the country who are all part of the great community of believers, we all have some vastly different ideas about many things that go along with reading the same scriptures. So I think it’s great because it takes us back to the source of reading and studying, and gathering and praying together to trying to really figure out you know some of those things.

But you know as long as we have that common bond, that common ground so to speak you know we walk together, we’re still brothers and sisters, and we support each other. Even when we argue over things, those non-essential things we call them, we’re always going to have debate over those. Why would we be different from any other body of believers throughout history? So but yeah you know it’s great to learn different ideas, learn about different cultures. We have a lot of people from the Midwest that I’ve met. And one of my daughter’s great friends she talks about her life and just being outdoors and everything. It’s just like wow it’s so different.

Interviewer: Why is it people from the Midwest do you think? I’m being serious. How does that even work out because I didn’t know Jordan, or Danny, or Brad, or anybody before.

Participant #7: Yeah and I made some assumptions that oh well these people must surely have all come from the same neighborhood. I don’t know, I don’t know how that works out. I don’t know if there’s like this Midwest network online that I don’t know about or something. Hey did you go to Tampa? No it’s pretty cool though.

Interviewer: Now that I think about it, I guess the Midwest is a pretty big geographical place.
Participant #7: Yeah that’s true, it’s not like you know this block.

Interviewer: Because even I think Patrick; you know Patrick I believe?

Participant #7: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah I think he even calls himself from the Midwest and he’s from Michigan.

Participant #7: Oh really?

Interviewer: I don’t really consider that the Midwest but.

Participant #7: I never thought of that as being the Midwest.

Interviewer: I’m pretty sure he does.

Participant #7: So it sounds like if you’re not on the East Coast or the West Coast, you’re the Midwest.

Interviewer: Exactly, or maybe the South or something, West, South.

Participant #7: Right right.

Interviewer: And basically everything else…

Participant #7: Right and everything else we don’t know what to call it, so it’s the Midwest.

Interviewer: Yeah. So what about… not to say that the community is failing, or that there’s not a community, we’re not saying any of that, but what are maybe some ways that the community could be improved even more do you think? Anything come to mind?

Participant #7: Wow, I wish I had a simple answer to that because we struggle with that all the time. In any church I guess people come and go all the time. In a place like Tampa where that’s so transient it seems. A lot of times we get people in who are kind of just checking us out because you know for whatever reason, they see a website, or ride by. There’s such a consumer mentality sometimes when it comes to everything including church that you know people come and check us out, and they go.

So it’s difficult to figure out how do we connect with everybody? I’ve come to the conclusion that we’re not going to connect with everybody. You know everybody’s not going to ultimately be a part of our small community in this particular congregation. But if we can visit, and share, and encourage them as part of their journey in the larger
community of believers, then great maybe that’s all we needed to do with them. But I do think people whether it’s good or bad, I think human beings tend to kind of end up being where they’re comfortable, where there are people like them. That’s why a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural church is not the norm. Even though in scripture it seems to be the model but we tend to do; we fall into what’s easier and what’s comfortable.

That’s why our mission here is such a challenging one and we struggle every week, every time we talk about how do we become better at being a stronger community? Maybe if you interviewed every single person in the church we could figure out what we need to do. The only thing I think we can do is if we keep the main things the main things and not worry about the small stuff so much, I think we have a better chance at really being a stronger community.

What I mean by that is no matter how incredible a speaker and communicator Danny is, or no matter how well we all think we do what we do, ultimately what matters of the heart you know that’s kind of above our pay grade. We prayerfully do what we do as Christ instructs us in Ephesians, “Lift me up,” He says. “If I be lifted up,” Jesus says, “I will draw people onto myself.” In other words, you can’t, you can’t do that; only I can do that. Your job, meaning us, our just is to lift up Christ. And so I think if we do that we have to trust that He will do what He said, which is to draw the people that should be a part of our community in. And then we just have to go through our human mess and just agree that we’re going to love each other even in the struggles and in the disagreements.

But if Christ is central and we’re all here, and our main focus is to come and be worshippers in and outside of the building then I think that’ll keep us together, that’ll make us stronger because that commonality is much stronger than any little disagreement we might have on other stuff.

Interviewer: I like your mention of inside and outside.

Participant #7: Yeah.

Interviewer: That often comes up as well, and that… I kind of buy into I guess, just the idea of it not just being about here on Sunday morning.

Participant #7: Yeah.

Interviewer: But then building relationships and other kinds of situations and other interests…

Participant #7: Right.

Interviewer: And other contexts and things like that.

Participant #7: Right.
Interviewer: Thinking about I don’t know, Kelly and Jordan you know they don’t just see each other on Sunday but they hang out and it’s true community.

Participant #7: Yeah.

Interviewer: Friendship.

Participant #7: Yeah Jordan asked; I guess I shouldn’t be giving names but as a matter of fact maybe one, Jordan said something the other day that was act really kind of cool. She actually said it to Kelly she was like, “Do you think it would be okay if I called him dad too?” And I was like, “Wow.” First of all I always think of myself as; I have a daughter who’s 18, I can’t have a daughter whose 20 that makes me old. But no she’s basically on weekends she’s at my house, she stays with us and when we go out we plan on what we have to have room for Jordan. That’s kind of cool. You know that’s community. So that’s pretty neat to experience, and I don’t even think about it now, I’ll just walk in and it’s like, “Oh hey,” you know, she’s there.

Interviewer: Yeah that’s good.

Participant #7: I think that’s kind of you know a small way what we should, what it should be totally you know expected if I call you and say, “Hey, I need to talk to you about something. Can you give me a minute?” I shouldn’t be shocked if you said, “Sure come over, I’ll meet you right now.” I mean that doesn’t happen instantly. You know we would have to work on that. I wouldn’t just call you at three in the morning right now but if we have a few more conversations maybe I would.

But I think those things happen. We didn’t set out to say, “We’re going to make Jordan a part of our family.” No, what we did was kind of the way Jesus suggested it. We lived the way we thought we should, we presented ourselves and they hit it off, and she saw something and I would swear it you know. She felt comfortable like spending time with us and I think that’s a great thing. She’s a great person and we have another family member so that’s pretty cool.

Interviewer: Yeah it is. So we may have already kind of hit on this of course, but what then do you think… Despite good things going on of course and the fact that community does occur and great relationships are being forged, you know between different people, what would be some of the greatest barriers to community within [Common Point]?

Participant #7: Wow, well I’ll take my own story. One thing is there was a time when church was more of, by church what I mean is the place, the meeting place, the building, when it was really more of the center of life in a community and a neighborhood. I grew up in a church where most of the people who attended there lived within ten minutes of the building. So the church was really the center of our lives. We were there three, four, five times a week doing something. Anytime anybody wanted to get together we’d meet at the church because everybody was so close. It really became our home and so there
was a closeness there. A barrier nowadays is just urban sprawl and everybody lives; so even if you’re connected really if I can say spiritually or emotionally to a place.

I live 35 minutes away, 30 minutes on a good day in traffic so it’s difficult for this place, this meeting, this gathering spot to be the center of my life. So that’s a hurdle, that’s a barrier because we have people that drive a ways to come here. So that’s something that makes it difficult when you’re trying to build small groups, and people who want to do life together, who want to meet up more than once a week, or just kind of hang out with friends. That makes it difficult because you work with people eight, ten hours a day, those are going to tend to be the people to talk with, hang out with, and become friends; and I don’t think that’s a bad thing but that is definitely just proximity to our gathering spot does present a challenge for community. It’s not one that we can’t overcome but it is a challenge, it is a hurdle.

We thought about even when we started doing community groups; at least when I came on board on staff you know for a while there was a focus on let’s do them geographically, let’s just set up in certain parts of the city so anybody who’s close they might be more likely to go. But it seems like you know people who are maybe at the same place in life, or who have other things in common, those things started to kind of be more important I guess than how close you live to a person. But I know I would come down and do more things here and maybe meet with people more if I lived closer to them.

**Interviewer:** So it is a difficult balance because it is about life stages, and interests, but then proximity does play a factor as well. So it’s a little bit of both I guess.

**Participant #7:** Yeah, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Because I know I lived up in the Carollwood area before; I recently moved down just a few blocks south of here.

**Participant #7:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** Just in the last couple months and so our community group used to be up there, and now luckily we meet here, and frankly if we still met up there I probably wouldn’t go.

**Participant #7:** Yeah. Right, right. You guys must obviously have a strong group because my daughter that’s like her focus for the week is, like it could be Wednesday or Thursday or even like yesterday she’s like, “I got to buy something for my community group. I want to do this.” She’ll go to the store and it’s like, “What is that?” She’s like, “No this is for my community group.” “That’s four days from now. Let Sunday take care of Sunday.” No but she’s excited about it, she’s really found some relationships there that she values and that’s great for me to see. Even for her, if it means driving 30 minutes one way three times on a Sunday, she’s going to make her community group. She may tell me, “Well dad I don’t know if I can sing with you, I got to go rest because I got to get
back at 6:30.” But that’s important to her. She’s finding community there so that’s a great thing.

**Interviewer:** Yeah it is. Maybe one more question.

**Participant #7:** You guys are a lot better at that than my community that’s for sure. But again but we’re even like okay yeah do you want to meet tonight?

**Interviewer:** Why is that?

**Participant #7:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Why is that… getting to the heart of it. What is the difference or just from your own experience maybe, what’s been the barrier there within your own group?

**Participant #7:** I think there’s a little bit of it’s just… I think your group… I don’t know if you set out specifically to do this but it’s young adult focused and I think people are kind of more in the same general space in life. My group didn’t have a focus. It was just oh we needed something out in that South County. So the first night I got someone who lived you know lived 15 minutes from me, so they have a drive to coming down here. So they went probably to my group because it was close to them, and somebody else lived close so they came. So what we got were a lot of people who other than where we lived we don’t have very much in common in terms of where we were in life, where we were in our faith which makes it more of a challenge but not bad; just we may not like each other as much as you guys like each other. I say that kind of jokingly.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Participant #7:** But there’s some truth to that, I mean we love each other we’re just are all at different places so it’s not like, “Oh I can’t wait to see these guys.” We think of it as you know this is a time for us to grow, and pray; and we love each other and we support each other but I think we probably gravitate toward different people in terms of our socializing outside of the group in church. And so while it’s not bad, it’s just a different dynamic than your group. I understand you do some great baking too it almost looks like you know something marketed or bought.

**Interviewer:** I do have a gift. [laughs]. So…

**Participant #7:** But you know a gift… I think you may have answered the question also. I think there are those who are gifted in certain parts of our overall walk. Being part of a community group, and leading that, and really I think that’s something we should all do but I don’t think we’re all gifted in the same way. You know some of us may have gifts where the big room and pouring out. And our personalities are more toward once that’s over, okay I’m ready to go in my cave and just be by myself. And while community is important, everything that we should do doesn’t come as easily to everybody. So maybe
you just got some gifted leaders in that group that really make it what it should be, and everything it could be.

**Interviewer:** Yeah that makes sense. Maybe one more question.

**Participant #7:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** That seem fair? I still got a few here, so I’m trying to figure out which one to pick. If maybe… okay, if I were new to this church and asked you maybe why I should consider joining it or why I should come back, or why this is a good place…

**Participant #7:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Then how would you answer that question? How would you make sure to convince me?

**Participant #7:** If you asked me that question I will have hopefully listened a little bit and try to find a little bit about what things are important to you. So I would probably kind of lean toward those things. But just generally speaking, or just somebody just asked me out of the blue I would look to the strengths of the church and talk about those, highlight those things. Of course…

**Interviewer:** What are they?

**Participant #7:** I think being a church that missional outwardly focused would be among the first things that I mention about this church. We have people who are not interested in just coming together just to see people on Sunday morning. I think we have people who are really interested in coming together on Sunday morning first of all to give to God a sacrifice of praise and worship which is what I think Sunday morning is primarily about. Even though we benefit from coming together, I think our purpose for worship is not primarily about what we get, and about us. It’s what we bring, as believers that is.

And so I believe we have a lot of people who come to that Sunday morning worship experience to give to God and then so doing receive from God so that we can get to what really is our passion which is to go out and impact the world. I think we have some world changing type people around in leadership, not staff but just leadership in the church and I think that’s really a strong, strong point about this church. People want to get out and do things that help other people to really impact lives. And it’s not just in kind of this religious; it’s not just a smoke screen, it’s not just like oh this is what we should do for this side of us; it’s just who they are.

It used to bother me sometimes as a musician when people talk about art in terms of the sacred and the secular. If there’s art, then it’s presented by an artist and I don’t know how an artist can be sacred and secular. I think you’re just a person and God; as a believer God is molding us into hopefully becoming more and more like He would want us to be
if we’re following Him. So there’s no; we don’t see a lot of this is how we are on Sunday but on Monday I’m a different cat you know. I think we have people and leadership around our congregation who are real, and they come on Sunday so that they can take what we share here and take it out in their lives wherever they work. And ministry is not about what you do in church, it’s just what you do.

When I’m playing in the symphony I’m the same person, I’m still praising God, wanting to play in a way that glorifies God whether I’m playing Maller or Brahms, or I’m playing something that’s sacred. I still want to do it in a way that will bring glory to God and I get the opportunity to interact with people who may never set foot on a church campus, you know at least with me. So it’s all part of worship, it’s all what we do as worshippers. Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, good.

**Participant #7:** So that’s… to get back to the question more directly, I would talk more about those people that we have. I wouldn’t spend 30 minutes like I just did explaining it but I would tell them about how people are really real, they’re genuine, you know we’re focused on making a difference outside of these walls.

**Interviewer:** Cool. Do you have anything to add or any questions for me?

**Participant #7:** I would like on a different occasion to take the questions and ask you and record your answers just for my own information, just to get to pick your brain some. But maybe on a day when I’m not starving.
Appendix F: Sample Photography-Driven Interview

Date: November 7th
Location: Starbucks
Duration: 1:09:09

**Interviewer:** We are at Starbucks with [Participant #19], and you were already starting to talk about the fall festival…

**Participant #19:** Yeah, initially, I wanted to take pictures of the fall festival because I knew that was a nice example of community with the church coming together and we also had the school, and being an educator and a member of the church and that is like to me one of the ideal situations: to have the church and schools and to come together and that is a sensitive transition, this union… A lot of schools and a lot of principals and a lot of politicians are very cautious about mixing the church into the public arena. The way that Briarwood elementary and [Common Point] is doing, that is the ideal situation for when I become principal. I didn’t take the camera but I took a lot of the pictures that were being displayed at the end of the service so if you look at those pictures pretty much that would be a great representation of what I see as community coming together for a common vision, a common cause… and working together in a risk free environment and safe environment with a goal in mind and in our case with fall festival the children. Mr. (inaudible) at Briarwood said it, our children come with so many different hardships but that night you didn’t see, you see happy faces, you see community, you see people working together collaborate and that was my initial vision of pictures of what I wanted to give you and I can go on and on from there.…

**Interviewer:** You know, I find that especially interesting because… you are a principal now?

**Participant #19:** An assistant, an assistant principal, yes.

**Interviewer:** So it is coming from an educator’s standpoint – someone who is an assistant principal… You really value the church impacting the community and reaching out to the school…

**Participant #19:** And another thing is, our children, our staff – and when I say “our” I mean specially Title I, low socially economic students and areas – the support they need is so great. To help educate our children and help meet those benchmarks those goals and when anytime we have a partnership with a church or a business and we come together as a community have a common goal to help our children’s and our families to me that is God and that is what we are supposed to be doing. That is an ideal situation for me. One of the reasons I have stayed connected with [Common Point Community Church] so much is because of the things they have done… fall festival, spring festivals
when I had my first year here…and when I brought my students to several events that [Common Point] holds and that help the community within my classroom grow. It is a beautiful thing because we did things outside of the school so they knew I cared about them as a person a not just academically. And I agree with John Maxwell, he states people don’t care how much you know unless they know how much you care – when you come together and just do funs things sometimes outside the box and it helps show that especially with children because some they don’t get and sometime adults…

**Interviewer:** How did you see that? You said that is formed more of a community in your classroom – how did you see that happen?

**Participant #19:** Oh yeah….anytime you do that…I have been teaching since ‘96 so when I build relationships with our students especially like I said there’s almost an immediate student need for attention, not just academically because a lot of people don’t realize that they just want that social interaction because for whatever reason they aren’t getting enough of it at home. So when you build those relationships and do those individuals things such as taking them to different venues, restaurants and activities they get to know you in a different perspective instead of that is just a teacher and you get to know them as a child. They just have needs….and when you come back into the classroom, the respect, the culture the mutual understanding. The classroom management that a lot of our teachers struggle with is about the turnover of Title I classroom is hard for us to maintain to keep teachers because they can’t handle the behavior aspect of our most challenging population. One of the things I want to look into – I mentioned to you that want to get my doctorate – is the importance forming those relationships in the early stages of that relationship and in the rest of the year. Because the community within the classroom is of trust and respect and of nurturing and academics because so much easier to teach because you have captivated your audience you have your audience’s attention i.e., your students…You know so that… what I have done even in New Jersey I used to take my kids to the skating rink because it was like a 10 minute walk and every month that was their reward for good behavior and completing their homework. Of course I have to tie that in there. We went skating together and the parents loves it. It made my job much easier and I was working smarting and not harder. It was good for me as well. I don’t have any children and my family was in Florida, so I had an opportunity to experience some of the fun stuff with children that I don’t get to do on a normal basis.

**Interviewer:** So what do you have here, [Participant #9]? Take your time.

**Participant #19:** Ok, so I changed courses. I still wanted to connect it to [Common Point], and I still wanted to connect it to community of course, and to me personally so… Keisha was a member of our church, we were in a community group together my community group, the first one I have ever been to, the first time I ever did *God Is My CEO*…Oh my goodness, why is the name of that author escaping me right now…..*God Is My CEO*….I thought is was John Maxwell but it is not. It will come to me in a moment.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, is sounds like Maxwell.
Participant #19: But I did a small group at my house. This is a picture of Keisha and I and she joined my group and [the pastor] has always – for the past three years – mentioned small groups and getting to know someone outside of Sunday for that one or two hour service. So I can honestly say had she not joined my community group I probably wouldn’t be a part of this experience on Saturday. This was her wedding at [Common Point] church. [The pastor] married her which is also and something else you need to know…he baptized us both at the same time and we didn’t even know that until we got into the group together. When I welcome her into my house and the group, she said “we were baptized together” and we made that connection and so that made us even closer. I actually have pictures with her I guess I can share them with you when we were baptized three years ago by [the pastor]. That spoke volumes to me because we were part of that small community group together we were able to form a relationship that allowed us to get to know each other and we don’t speak every day. We speak occasionally and see each other Sunday when we are at church, but we have this bond now that I was at her wedding and I was a part of it. We shared our moments and she mentioned some of her challenges that she had to overcome to get to this point because during our small group we talked about different things that the book focused us to discuss and help us remember that God is always leading us to the decision we make in day to day actions. So basically the pictures that are being shared of that day of hers, from the ceremony inside the church.

Interviewer: She was at the service today right?

Participant #19: Yes, I saw them both today; they just came back from their honeymoon.

Interviewer: They come to the second service? Is that where I saw them, because I recognize him but I don’t know his name…it’s Fred?

Participant #19: Yes Fred, they have been at church since I started; we started together. They went to their honeymoon in Dominican Republic on the 30th last weekend and they came back yesterday and made it to church today. So that is us and that is my friend that I brought to the ceremony and the reception….

Interviewer: Your friend?

Participant #19: Yeah. He’s not my friend anymore because you better hold this, this is a historical moment now…and it is funny…Kent I had a long talk with Kent just talking about… because I am pretty social and all that…one of things he said that stuck with me is that if you are not with someone that is going to help you stay alive then it will be very difficult to stay connected. This is a choice I am making and I want someone to help me stay because I see the difference made in my life…help me stay within the word and help me continue to practice my faith. And I love him dearly and he is a good person, but we are totally on different pages with that because that is why he is a thing of the past. That’s a nice picture to and believe it or not that is the first picture we took together and
we have known each other for years.....So these are her flower girls and then [the pastor] all walking down the aisle and everything representing community family, friends and the church coming together to meet us. To me that is the ideal community situation, his brother who flew in from out of state that’s Fred’s brother. This is her daughter Selena who was also baptized by [the pastor] not even a year ago which was a beautiful thing to see, I was at her baptism just to see because I know a little about her daughter through mom, through our community group. This is her nephew, her step daughter now, Fred’s daughter… and this is the actual ceremony where [the pastor] is waiting for the bride to come down.

Interviewer: And how long ago was this by the way?

Participant #19: This was last week, just last week the October 30th Saturday. The day after fall festival. So my whole community experience was within that whole weekend. And I didn’t plan on doing this I planned to do fall festival but I didn’t take the camera so I was like, oh, I can do this tomorrow....it is the same message.

Interviewer: And it spoke to you in the same way?

Participant #19: Yes the only difference is this is not necessarily my professional side…The Briarwood Elementary, [Common Point] represent my personal, professional, and religious all together because I am the assistant principal and that’s the school, the church and the friends…this is only the church and the friends…the union…..this is her uncle walking her down the aisle….so this is the whole, you know…and of course his family is on one side and his side is on the other but they are coming together in the whole wedding. The point that she was married at our church because we both baptized up there by [the pastor] so that is so spiritual. There was another part – Rosemary and her husband were married not too long ago and he plays in the band…I can’t remember his name…

Interviewer: I can’t either, and I was hoping you were going to say it…

Participant #19: I was hoping you knew…It will come to me…

Interviewer: Because, ok there’s Rosemary, Fred and Keisha…

Participant #19: I can’t remember Rosemary’s husband’s name but he plays in the band…and she has been at the church for a while.

Interviewer: I can’t think of his name either…

Participant #19: And she has been at our church for a while to – his name will come to me hopefully before we finish talking but I know it is an easy name….and of course [the pastor] and [his wife]. I wish I had centered the picture better…
Interviewer: (laughs)

Participant #19: And then her daughter…this is the reception. I just wanted to get a snapshot of that as well…and daughter Selena, she was the bridesmaid, she was the one who made the toast as well….their first dance together and this is just everyone dancing.…. 

Interviewer: Where was this at?

Participant #19: This is at….Fowler and 40th Street….I can’t remember the name, like a hotel there. I can get the invitation if you need….not too far from the mall area. So that is it for my pictures. Do you have specific questions for me or anything that I might not have said?

Interviewer: No, no what you have and what you’ve said is excellent….Some things you talked about were this idea of coming together and this common goal – mostly with the fall festival. You were talking about that as community. Do you agree with that? And is that an important part of community this common goal or common vision…?

Participant #19: Yes, yes, definitely.

Interviewer: You mentioned church and school coming together to reach out to community so maybe that is like almost step two then you come together then reach back out. Would you see a problem without them reaching back out or do you think that would be fine too?

Participant #19: I think coming together is great but to live a missionary life and to do God’s work, now what are you going to do now that you have come together? How are you going to serve others, how we going to help others? So the reaching back out part is a critical part. I feel it is a part of the puzzle….so however the coming together part is critical of course because you have to be comfortable and build that relationship in order for it to work together and serve together and reach back out together and I know it did not happen like the first couple of years. We didn’t do fall festival over there at Briarwood, but I know [the pastor and his wife] were just making that connection and they were coming together at that point, and then as the time progressed they were able to reach out and serve together and bring both communities together. When I saw the principal and assistant principal of our local school at our church, to me that was huge. That is big. They came and spoke a couple of words…from the culture that I have experienced you be careful with bringing the two together because you don’t want it to be misunderstood, and a lot of children don’t go to church and their parents are not Christians, and to be able to do that to come to the church and to the school. This is a powerful message. It can be done and I know this is not the only case where it happens but people are very nervous and fearful because you don’t want it to be misrepresented or misunderstood. I think the biggest fear is trying to force the children and especially if they are not our children, because they are not to believe and think in certain ways that is
different than the parents because then you get in some serious trouble and that is not the goal. The goal is to help and serve the kids and I think most of our parents get that, and most of our teachers get it, and trust me you have a few that might not… You have to be very sensitive about how to bring that union together…. Hat’s off to the pastor and principal at Hawthorne for doing that because it takes great leaders and I believe that everything starts and ends with leadership. To bring that community together, both leaders, there communication, their words, and vision have to be very clear and very understood so it won’t be misunderstood and misrepresented because that could be another news story we don’t want to see. We want the positive.

**Interviewer:** This is good stuff….so I am wondering, in my opinion… Two questions: What are the characteristics of a good community? I think you have already said some of it, but I don’t want to put words in your mouth…. what are some good characteristics of a good community?

**Participant #19:** Honestly, open communication, challenging conversations and questions, addressing those uncomfortable topics but in a risk-free, safe forum with a purpose in mind. Start with an agenda and a plan. Communities must be able to be open minded and open the doors to all members even if their viewpoints are different from yours as long as they are along with your vision. For example, we want to serve our kids, whether you are a Christian, non-believer or whatever… If you are here to serve our kids, then you are welcome because that is our common vision and that is the community we are forming… We want to serve and we are here about our kids and in this case a nice fun faith activity where they can be with their family for free relativity…Briarwood was also able to make over $800 which will go right to the kids because it was with the PTA so all those characteristics and being respectful of others. It is ok to disagree. That is very common. But it is really practiced and if you don’t agree on something can you get past that to accomplish the vision…why are we here? Keep going back to your vision, your mission statement.

**Interviewer:** So how would you define the community that [Common Point] has, or does [Common Point] even have a community or a sense of community?

**Participant #19:** In regards to whether we have a community, I think it is a growing community it is a developing community. But is it solid, or is our message clear? I can say that [the pastor] in my opinion is doing a great job with being clear about the message that he has about us coming together and working together and not just seeing each other on Sunday – Hi and bye and don’t even know each other’s first name but that takes times to develop and nurture and intentionally make us what the vision is. So I don’t feel like we are there yet but we are making progress in the right direction and I think if [the pastor] continues and not just [the pastor] but the members of the church, all of us to deliberately do this….time is short…I got my mom calling me where are you….but if you deliberately make efforts to build relationships that come together for community then make it now your vision because it is your church vision and you are a member of the church and you want to be true and do what is in the scripture and what God wants
what right and do right by not just [Common Point] but what Jesus and what we are here for then you have to make the time and effort to do that just like anything else you want. I know under [the pastor’s] leadership… I have… and now Irv, I was in his community group, the clear message that this is what it is about; this is what we need to do. We have to first build that relationship, that trust and that communication and all those challenging things but once we do that we can take the next step and serve and reach out and do what we need to do and not just in Tampa or Florida or United States but around the world and we are getting there. I have faith, I see the growth and we are back to two services and we are bringing in more people and I feel that people are making more of a conscious effort to communicate and reach out. A perfect example is what Sara and Taryn did for me. Man, it had been a rough for me at work and when I saw my church family come in and bring me flowers, it was hard to hold back the tears and brownies and just take a minute out of their busy schedule and day and life to make a difference in my life…. Amen… so that is a specific example, specific evidence of caring about people going out of your way to do something for someone else and God knows I have been in need finding that healthy balance with the hours, relationships and my principal and the staff so what they did it sent a message to my staff and to my principal who saw the flowers and ate some of those brownies because it has been challenge with relationships and healthy boundaries a challenge I was losing a lot of sleep over and ready to do something else like tomorrow/yesterday but God and continuous prayers. Sara and Taryn was a perfect example of church coming together and they crossed those boundaries and came into my work arena just a brief moment and that was powerful. That has never happened since I have been working and I have never seen anyone from church not that is hasn’t happened but I have never seen and I have been doing this since 96 and I have never witnessed that and I am sure that other people noticed. Another group is the running group we are starting with Sara, Taryn, and Kim…I am actually learning first names now look at me… who knew…. making a conscious effort but it is not just me it is so many of us who really are intentionally following the vision and mission of our church… building community, working together doing something for someone else because that is what we are here to do. That God’s words…it is all in the scripture…

**Interviewer:** Yeah, this good stuff…that really resonated with me a lot: the idea of crossing boundaries, I like the way you said that…it is getting out of the church. We often have these categories of church life, work life, family life, and you have to cross those categories. You have to cross the boundaries and that is part of what makes a good community complete. And you have good examples there of where they came to your workplace and you all running together, you know it is crossing hobbies with church life, work life. I like it; that makes sense to me. By all means, if you have anything to add or whatever, I have a few questions just to kind of get some ideas flowing more than anything else, but we don’t have to be limited by this… Ok? How about this: We had a good conversation about “if you think there is a community at [Common Point],” but what are some characteristics of what is currently there at [Common Point]?

**Participant #19:** Our community right now? It’s stable. Consistent in regards to regulars…I see a lot of regulars…consistent with membership. Another characteristic –
if this is a characteristic – it is outside the box. Our church is nothing like a lot of people have experienced. Some people for example and I am ready to get on that uncomfortable topic but a lot of people from my culture and my community and they see me here… I am very urban and I am from inner city New Jersey and so when they hear I have a white pastor and they hear I am in a multicultural ethic church it is like a second look and these are things that people are so not used to and I know in my cultural and I can speak for myself most of the people I know… African American people I know…it’s all mostly African Americans, maybe one or two aren’t, but mostly. And [the pastor] always makes reference to that most of the churches are, a high percent, a single ethnic background or race. So our church is very diverse and out of the box and I think courageous is a characteristic of our church, we are trailblazers and I love it, I love the fact that we do things different and I love not being afraid when I say courageous… doing what we feel like is what is under God’s eye what does the world look life, we are all different and we are all….and a lot of people intentionally segregate whether it is socially, work wise so many segregation areas not just race but age, hobbies then in the church and one of the reason I have never joined a church in all my years…. and I have visited a few…I would feel something is not right to me… because if we are saying that this is what God wants and everything is always the same. They have got to be different and we got to feel, we might not speak the same language and might not look the same but in Gods eye… you know… that is one of most powerful characteristics that I have seen and now that when I invite people to my church, that is one of the main things they says is like wow, we are so comfortable just because of the way we can dress… if you want to bring your tea inside during service inside our worship area….so there’s more characteristics.

Interviewer: Would you say that…I mean, I can see what you are saying that if I was going to a multiethnic church and somehow it came up in conversation that I had an Asian pastor, I would probably get a few people who wanted to know more, or if I said white then they would be like ok. So do you think that keeps minorities from joining more?

Participant #19: Definitely, the fear of the unknown… because of lack of trust… because of the country we live in today we are not trusted for a lot of different reasons. But you have to trust and you have to let God.

Interviewer: Because that’s one of the things that you said community needs: open communication, honestly. And if they can’t trust then…

Participant #19: And my thing to them is even people that look like you might have a problem with trusting, so just because they are not like you and because our past history you can’t hold on to that, and they do. I mean a lot. And it is amazing and when they are comfortable and say things to you like… you know when you have an African American colleague and they say slavery is over you know in reference to my principal who is white and you know I am black and I am like wow…. like the things that are still in the mind set of people….
Interviewer: Are you saying that slavery isn’t over…

Participant #19: It’s over…in other words you are not a slave and I am not working all these hours and they are not you.

Interviewer: Oh, they are telling you shouldn’t be working all these hours.

Participant #19: They never say that specially but you can infer. But when they say slavery is over and in reference to when you have white colleagues who are only putting in 8 hours and not even a hard 100% 8 hours, but an African American in order to get ahead because I am a minority in my arena of assistant principals is only half or say 10% but you have to work twice as hard…it’s like double tax…it’s true…

Interviewer: Double tax?

Participant #19: You gotta do twice as much because you are an African American or you are a Hispanic in white America in order to get where you need to go and remember where was a time that we didn’t get paid the same and did the exact same job or you have to work twice as hard and you know I cannot say that is not real because I have heard that from people who look like me and do not look like me. Compared two papers one times one time of someone….since college I have had all types of friends, I have had friends that are atheists, you know I have friends because I am very social…and we had a scenario when someone goes in, a white person goes into a car place and gets a whole other conversation than when the black person go in….We have done that before….its real…it still exist.

Interviewer: When did that happen?

Participant #19: In New Jersey.

Interviewer: You were setting up an experiment you mean? Your friends and you?

Participant #19: Not even being funny….it was a problem…it was years ago…

Interviewer: What place was this…this is off topic but interesting.

Participant #19: I can’t remember what the place was but I think Morristown. But don’t quote me on that. Basically a salesperson we felt like was being racist….so we did a little experiment… yeah it was a whole other environment.

Interviewer: So he was just nicer to some of them or quoted a different price.

Participant #19: Everything, nicer, different price, different interest rates…it was really bad….
Interviewer: Geez…what was he selling?

Participant #19: Cars. It was the whole tone the whole thing…it was almost in conversation about suing and making a big deal about this. You know you got a lot of people that are friends that look very different that are best friends that are married and have kids

Interviewer: How did you put that together, how did you even realize it, did someone complain to someone else?

Participant #19: I wasn’t a part of it but I had heard about it, friends talking and over hearing…it is a specific….they send you to different credit unions and send you to specific dealerships so that is how people ended up in the same place. It always comes to light you know…you never know when you are being watched or observed…or someone can deal with it in an ugly way and curse you out.

Interviewer: He probably doesn’t know to this day.

Participant #19: I think… Which was the purpose of it. We lost track, but basically.

Interviewer: This idea of trust and distrust.

Participant #19: And that is what any church or any group will form…and not just religion but anything you decide to be part of you have to have faith and trust in the people that are in it and if you don’t then it will….for example in my running group, my Jeff Galloway’s running group is started with one person recruiting me. We work together and that is how we became close and we were running together and for a few years she was trying to get me to join a group and this third year I finally joined and thank God I did but it. I had to build the relationship…and then I joined the group that she…there is like 80/90 of us and we have to break into different subgroups based on your ability. I am in the beginners group; the 13 minute mile group. But even within that group I trust them to train me correctly and I listen to them because I am the inexperienced one, and I don’t know so I am following their leadership. But it was based on her building that trust with her and trust her because we work together and really see how it comes together personally for me…it is a process. There isn’t too many people I don’t feel like that can just come into a situation like, I trust like this is going to work… You have to have a little praying knowledge and background of who you are talking to, and is this a safe, risk-free environment, and do I worry about something being said? Like right now you are recording and I have got my whole…I will be 36….I will be 36 and a lot of people would be very fearful by you, by anyone for that matter, but it is like I trust you because of the relationship we have serving on Sundays…I am a greeter now. If you had asked me that first week we met then I would have more than like been like, no, no I am not interested you know. But we have grown in our relationship because serve together: exactly what [the pastor] said: serve, connect, get to know people, talk a little. We have a few informal conversations and more importantly we have just been in
each other’s presence, and now it is more of a risk to take every time you build a relationship or you get closer. You are taking a risk but once that risk survives you have created a closer bond, closer connection…I read John Maxwell that is exactly what he talks about as far as what makes a relationship work. You are opening yourself up to possibly being let down or disappointed but when you not disappointed or let down or betrayed or lied to or all those other things that we don’t want to be a part of, the reward is so great you know you are like wow we are really growing together.

**Interviewer:** So yeah, I like this chain of thought you are going down about how you say that trust is important. You’re saying that this idea of distrust is a common problem or a big problem so what are other ways that you build trust? You said presence, you said serving, and what else comes to mind? What ways can you build trust?

**Participant #19:** Communicating, I think a lot of informal conversation where you are just not so in the box, like you talk about each other’s children a little bit or you know how was your weekend? You build a relationship with that person you get to know that person you know that to me is the key to building trust the more you know about a somebody the more you feel like you are connected to that person…you don’t just have a superficial….oh I know that Maryam, she smells all the time and she is a runner, she is A.P., I really know Maryam, she is single she wishes there was a man coming in with the candy… (laughs)

**Interviewer:** So interpersonal interaction that crosses boundaries and is beyond the superficial…

**Participant #19:** It’s called “keeping it real”…that’s what we call it.

**Interviewer:** “Keeping it real?”

**Participant #19:** I am going to give you a little bit of urban… one of my sayings, and I have a lot of them is: “I am too real to be fake.” A lot of people are very superficial and fake and I have always been very real. It is a blessing and a curse, and sometimes you have to go in there and be direct. You know, sometimes the women you work with they say be honest tell us how you really feel. But if you really tell how you really feel and a few time it bites and you think awww they really want to hear what they want you to tell them, what they wanted to hear. But I am too real to be fake.

**Interviewer:** That seems like a tension then in community because you have to go beyond interpersonal and you have to be real, but to do that involves risk…

**Participant #19:** I will give a specific example of tension in our small group today…led by Irvine, and Calvin is in there, you know Calvin…and Calvin is the type, from what I have observed from us being in group for eight weeks together, he will challenge something that someone says in regards to what a certain scripture means or what God is saying or Jesus is saying or what is the message. He will challenge Irv and that is our
leader, but what I love about that is – and I’m just listening and taking it all in because I am still relatively new in my faith and understanding the scripture and bible and everything – but what I love about when they do have this discourse like today it was a conversation about praying and continuously praying because that was the whole message and Calvin was saying that I am not sure if this is what I am supposed to be doing and he was kind of having a problem, accepting what Irv was saying. But the thing I loved about it was the fact that both felt comfortable to have this discourse among their peers and at the end of the day everything is okay. And I know that this wasn’t the first time he has done this, but Irv was at the airport and he needed a ride and I know this because he mentioned it. He called Calvin and thanked him for the ride. So they still made and still build the relationship.

**Interviewer:** So that is a tension between having a shared vision and the freedom to express difference and the freedom to disagree.

**Participant #19:** But that is when you really grow because you start stretching your thinking and your understanding of something and hopefully you reflect and you challenge yourself and saying to yourself, “Oh let me think about it like this, or “Maybe there is another way about looking at it,” or “Is it any way possible that I am not right about everything?” (laughs)

**Interviewer:** Has there been anything maybe… has there been any specific hindrances or times that you have not been able to build community like you wanted to within the church? Has there been any personal obstacles? Does that makes sense…does anything come to mind?

**Participant #19:** Personally?

**Interviewer:** This is all confidential.

**Participant #19:** I know initially when I first started, with no wrong intentions Christy really tried to do things like outside the church and I didn’t know her and to be honest I didn’t trust her because I didn’t know her. And I knew that I wanted to be at church and it almost lost me and I almost stopped coming because I felt guilty that I didn’t do things with her. And the reason I didn’t do anything personal with her is because I was just getting to know the church family…that’s critical.

**Interviewer:** Yeah this great… we were talking about crossing boundaries…

**Participant #19:** But it was too soon for me…But for someone else it might have been fine and just what they needed….but in order for me…I am too real to be fake…and in order for me to come to your house and go out with, I really got to like build on that…it is just me. That is one reason and the second reason was the time. It was hard for me to manage my time. I was in a new city, a new job, and I was learning new things and I barely had time to see my family and they are the reason I moved down here. I don’t like
hurting people’s feelings, and I like to be there and be available, so here is my dilemma: I am truly going to be a part of this and be a part of a community and make relationships and all that. The reason I stuck in there is because [the pastor] didn’t make me feel bad about it. Christy not knowing she was saying little sarcastic jokes about it and would hurt my feelings but I just let it go but the reason why I didn’t leave is because of [the pastor]. But had it been the reverse and the leader would have made me feel like that, I would have quit going.

Interviewer: She was making you feel bad with sarcastic jokes, about you not coming to church regularly?

Participant #19: Like if she invited me to something and I couldn’t make it or if I didn’t return a call and I am guilty about that or a text. I have gotten much better about that, but it happens. but not just with church family but my own family. And I get caught with what I am doing right then and then I go “Oh man…..” but I explained it to her because I am very vocal but you have a lot of people that won’t speak.

Interviewer: Yeah because people often don’t realize themselves. It seems like that’s why they get their feelings hurt or why they’re put off by something and don’t even know what….There’s just something they don’t like about [Common Point] and they don’t know why. But you were able to think it through and put some words to it and then go and express those words.

Participant #19: Right now I love Christy. I mean, because we have gotten through those challenges and she still invites me to stuff and I don’t come sometimes…

Interviewer: Maybe her heart was in the right place…? It seems there needs to be this open invitation for crossing boundaries but not the guilt.

Participant #19: Nicely said. And no matter what we are here for you and you will get these…even 10 years from now. I know start having monthly or weekly dinners with you…we arrived so what is the rush…life is a journey enjoy it…it might take her a year to connect with a person, it might take her a day or whatever but be patient with the progress. That is one of the reasons I wanted to stick it out with Wayne, because I wanted to be patient with him but my only problem personally with him is that I am not strong enough in my faith to stay focused on going to church and reading the bible…when I am in a relationship with someone who isn’t doing that at all. I am not strong enough and I have tried and I start slipping with my practice and that I can’t have. It has helped me in my stability, my peace of mind…you know I am just a different person. I was telling Kent that it is so weird and so strange…it is what it is and I don’t question it. I know I am a better person because I have God in my life, because I am a Christian, I have accountability now, I am more accountable for my actions and behavior beyond just my professional arena because I have always crossed my “T”s and dotted my “I”s professionally but personally …not so much. This is my life, my time, and I am doing what I want whatever. But my work I was very structured I knew what I had to do to
make it to the next level. So now being a Christian has caused me to consciously and intentionally make good choices… Do I fall short? Yes. But you know it is a process.

**Interviewer:** How long do think it took you to maybe “warm up” to Christy’s invitations?

**Participant #19:** To not take it personal? I learned not to take it personal when I saw she did it with a lot of people because I am very observant when I am a greeter and I see how she interacts with a lot of people and those little sarcastic jokes sometimes, I tell her she is cleverly sarcastic, she says little clever things but sarcastic and she knows it because I have brought it to her attention before to…I want to say at least a year….a year or better.

**Interviewer:** And still it was only because you observed her doing it with other people.

**Participant #19:** Let me tell you something personal, real personal….you might not have known this. My mom and I joined [Common Point] together and we were baptized together and my mom left because of that and she isn’t coming back because of that. Because my mom has been through a lot, her journey, her story is something else and I am my mother’s child and she was feeling pressured and guilty almost into doing things she didn’t want to do. And she loved the church but she just wasn’t ready but then you can also say because this is something that [the pastor] said, I remember if you are the person that don’t want to be in a community don’t want to come together then this is not the church for you or if you so that is a possibility or this could be the church for you but it takes time to get there…to where you are able to be in a community know the importance of being together besides that one hour…especially with people…all people it doesn’t matter they are not there yet but they are intentionally making time to be involved and at church I think that is a great step in the right direction….I don’t know if there is a cutoff time ok in a year you haven’t formed a community group and you haven’t connected with another person then you are not one of us and you don’t belong…or two years. And I understand [the pastor]’s vision and mission and that is why I make it a conscience effort and not only do I see it and I respect but not for everyone but it is our goals to save sinners and bring non believers to church and make sure that is where they are and they stay and support them regardless. That is what we should be doing whether they join a community group or not they should feel equally welcome. That is one argument.

**Interviewer:** Did your mom ever join another church…just wondering if she liked another one better.

**Participant #19:** No, she went to a couple more churches. She mentioned to me that she went to another, I forgot the church and it was a big church and she could serve and just go in and out what [Common Point’s pastor] didn’t like but then she said it was too much for her and it wasn’t private enough and then I went through a few months where I didn’t come to church anymore because I was missing my mom so bad so I figured I just wouldn’t do it but I was missing church so much and I missed being in the community so
God put right back there fortunately so just you know it happens and I come by myself you know and I don’t have a husband and I don’t have a family that are actively involved in church. So I am a trail blazer but that’s ok….I was the first one with my college degree, first one with my master’s degree, first one to own my home, and first one to get baptized…

**Interviewer:** Sounds like you are doing well….but this seems like another tension we are focusing on: building this community in the church, and you know [the pastor] talks about – like you’ve said – that someone who doesn’t want [community] then this isn’t the church for them. So it almost seems like maybe you have to allow space for people that don’t’ want to get involved, people who just want to come and go… have to allow places for people who do not want to plug-in...

**Participant #19:** But the church is where we are meeting, right? It is what God wants us to do so we go back to the bible and I am not an expert on it at all nor do I pretend to be, but very simply we are to open our doors and welcome especially non believers and sinners to our home and to our church and let then find comfort of knowing that this is a place that they can be and however long it takes them to align with the vision as long they are not doing anything to interrupt the growth and development of the vision they will wake up and say yes I am going to have my own community group, like I did where I did God Is My CEO - I was like I need to do a group and that connected me with Keisha….I didn’t want to be a part of a group that first year at all, I just wanted to come to church and pray and for me that was a milestone coming from a background where I never entered a church two weekends in a row in my life. And a lot of people come from similar types of background. I know I read in scripture it says to bring a non believer is much more powerful than to communicate or to bring in a believer that is the hardest part, that is the challenging part was to keep us...

**Interviewer:** Wow you are giving me a lot of good stuff, [Participant #9] – this whole idea of “crossing boundaries” and this idea of “shared vision” was one of the first things out of your mouth and that’s important. And now I am seeing something there, even though I have to think it though a little more, the idea of “in order to build a community you to have to allow margin for those who don’t want to be a part of it yet or are just uncomfortable with it”… and they don’t have the trust that’s needed yet and you have to kind of allow for it because otherwise, if you try to force people into it, it just doesn’t work. So in order to have community you have to allow space for those outside the experience.

**Participant #19:** That is my experience.

**Interviewer:** It makes sense….Just a few more questions. How about two more and then just some simple demographic questions about age, etc… If you had a problem at [Common Point] who would you go to about it?
Participant #19: Again, it just depends on the person in the relationship… I had one slight problem and I went to [the pastor] and he gave me some advice.

Interviewer: And you felt comfortable going straight to [the pastor] about that?

Participant #19: Oh, definitely. He makes me feel very comfortable to talk to. I [also] feel comfortable going to Christy, and now I feel comfortable going to Irv definitely and in most cases depending on what I am feeling and who I am having a problem with…I would like to be able to go right to that person. But honestly, the venue of a church is like one of the arenas that I am not very comfortable with addressing a problem with a person…at work it’s never been a problem. Personally, it’s never been a problem, but at church I feel a little uncomfortable because it is almost like bringing drama to the church and I don’t want to do that. That is not what I want to do.

Interviewer: Almost can be turned negative. You know, where to a bad extent we are all expected to just be happy when we come in on Sundays…You are not supposed to have any problems.

Participant #19: Especially on Sunday when you come in.

Interviewer: I don’t think [Common Point] is as bad with that as some churches I have been to, where sometimes you are supposed to have yourself all together before you come to church as opposed to the opposite you know…it makes it hard to have confrontation…

Participant #19: I try to keep it positive and peaceful and focus on the positive when I am at church as much as I can…very rarely that I have really any problems, just a couple little things but nothing big… But I feel like I am not one of those people…[The pastor] mentioned it, when people bring a problem to him and people say don’t say anything to them. I am like, if I bring a problem to a leader then I am going to trust that leader to handle that problem any way he/she feels fit even if it means bringing both of us together. But I am coming to you for advice and counsel so I am going to tell you this is a problem but don’t do this and don’t do that…then now I am dictating to you how to handle the problem If I could handle the problem then I wouldn’t have come to you! One thing if I go to my leader with a problem, I would like him/her to help me get a solution or you know suggest…do what he/she needs to do in the best interest of our church or their job or whatever.

Interviewer: How about….consider for a moment who your personal community is, maybe you can word it that way, your closest friends that you call your community. And could just picture those for a second? You might be thinking about 1 person or even 10 people. Who would you consider as part of your personal community?

Participant #19: My circle is small. I’d say about…family or just friends?
**Interviewer:** I don’t know… just whoever you view as your personal community we all view our circles differently.

**Participant #19:** Ok my quadrant, my quad, yes, yes.

**Interviewer:** And then I would just like to see if this works: can we flesh that out a bit… Who are they that you see as being part of your personal community? Are they mostly woman, are they all men…?

**Participant #19:** My best friend Adrian, actually [the pastor], Ms. McMann my former principal, my mom, my sister, my grandma, two of my sisters.

**Interviewer:** So it is family and friends and co workers.

**Participant #19:** And two or three colleagues I am very close to.

**Interviewer:** So they are all women… except for [the pastor]?

**Participant #19:** Yeah, everyone else is a woman except for [the pastor].

**Interviewer:** So you said about eight women and one male?

**Participant #19:** Yeah a strong eight… Well, Wayne used to be my friend. He would have been in that circle but we crossed the line of friendship and tried to make it something else. I should have kept it a friendship because he was a great friend, but that won’t happen now because we crossed those lines unfortunately. But he would have been in that circle… My father would have been in that circle but he made a very bad choice and now he is spending the rest of his life in prison and that happened last March… unfortunately.

**Interviewer:** Very recent.

**Participant #19:** And we were very close.

**Interviewer:** I am sorry.

**Participant #19:** Thank you but he would have been another person in that circle.

**Interviewer:** What are the demographics are they all around your age?

**Participant #19:** No, it varies. My colleagues… Patricia is 41. Venette is… she is 49, and Ms. Bersly is like 51. So I like a lot of older women. Two of those are white and one is black. My mom of course is black, my sister is 39, [the pastor] is like 39. Who did I forget? Jessica is 16 or 17 and she is my running buddy, and Ayana is 18. I am like their mentor.
Interviewer: And race/ethnicity?

Participant #19: Jessica is white, Ayana is black….pretty mixed.

Interviewer: Economically? All the same? Different?

Participant #19: We are all around the same; we are all educators for the most part. They are young in their careers so they aren’t making what we are making, but all of them are professions.

Interviewer: All women in education?

Participant #19: Yeah I never thought about that… and they all live in the Tampa Bay area, except for my… Oh Adrian, she my best friend. She is not educated Let me restate that: she has not been to college. She went up to high school. She is a custodian…she is 45, African American.

Interviewer: And did you grow up with her?

Participant #19: Not until our teens… we met about 15 years ago. I was about 10/11, we met at a children’s clothing store. I was doing my undergrad and she was working pretty much and she was the one that I went to NJ for her birthday. We got tattoos together so we are very close…we got the cross.

Interviewer: She got the exact same thing?

Participant #19: But on her left leg. We are close, very close, my best friend and we have been through a lot together.

Interviewer: So what do you think makes you such good friends?

Participant #19: The trust, the relationship, the trust because we have been a lot together, the time and I think she knows about me than my own family and she has always been there to pick me up when no one else can, besides for God. She is a special person, she is a good person. I admire her, she is one of my heroes because I work with a lot of people that make twice as much as her. I have my close circle including people that are 16 and younger, they make more money than her. They’re educated as far as society is concerned; they may look more beautiful than her but her attitude and I say this to my girlfriends when they are bickering…my best friend cleans toilets for a living don’t complain to me about a lesson you got because my best friends clean toilets. You know because she is so positive she is never negative and she is always….she has been through a lot. Her father was not in her life her mother died of aids, the story goes on and she was a foster child and pushed around homes a lot and God is all in her. You would never know her story and when you look at her she is so put together…so anytime I think about complaining and all she has taught me about being positive and appreciative – she is so
appreciative. She is deep, she has come to church before...she has come to [Common Point] twice...she usually comes here for her birthday but this year I went up there but the first two years she came to [Common Point].

Interviewer: This is good [Participant #9].... What is your age?

Participant #19: 36. Hey, wait I am still 35! I am going to be 36 in January.

Interviewer: Married?

Participant #19: Not married.

Interviewer: Racial/ethnicity?

Participant #19: Black. Or you can say African American.

Interviewer: What do you feel more comfortable with?

Participant #19: Depends on my setting...you see I said black with you though.

Interviewer: So your job title is Assistant Principal?

Participant #19: Yes.

Interviewer: And you live in Tampa?

Participant #19: Yes.

Interviewer: How long have you been coming to [Common Point]?

Participant #19: Three years. Ever since we started, I was there the first day we opened.

Interviewer: Very nice...I think that is all I got... Do you have any questions for me?

Participant #19: Just a comment: I think this is a great thing you are doing. When you approached not just me but other people, the first thing I thought was what a great way to build a community relationship...you doing a project on community. I know you are doing this for your dissertation and all, but I am like “I don’t know if he knows he is doing this, but he is building a community.” (laughs)

Interviewer: I will make a note of that.

Participant #19: So although my time is so short, not today but just period, I work Monday through Friday 6 to 6 and Saturday I try to get out at 4...This was very important to me because I needed this as much as you, because I feel the more I align
myself in the church and doing things that are really, really helping me develop as a person. I am helping you of course and your project is helping me – it is equal. This conversation was just as beneficial to me as it was for you so I appreciate and thank you for asking me to do it because it really helped. You really helped me to reflect on quite a few of things… personally, professional, and as far as religion and church, so I appreciate that… All three, every aspect of your life, plays a role building community. We are all relational we have been doing this together. I have been saying this to my staff… I am only as strong as my team… another saying I have is individual score points and teams win games… that is my basketball background…and team i.e. community. Together I think there is nothing we can do. So that is my closing.
Appendix G: Sample World Café Results

Table #2: Spatial Arrangement(s)

How Community is Created

1. “Café” (17 respondents)
2. “Food” (15 respondents)
3. “Chairs/places to mingle” (9 respondents)
4. “Allotted time” (8 respondents)
5. “Greeters” (8 respondents)
6. “Leadership making themselves available” (1 respondent)
7. “Exchange/pickup in kids’ area” (1 respondent)

Potential Barriers to Community

1. “Confining space(s)” (11 respondents)
2. “Time restraints for those serving/volunteering” (4 respondents)
3. “Time restraints between services” (4 respondents)

Ways to Foster Community

1. “Remove some of the chairs in the café and open both sets of doors to improve circulation” (4 respondents)
2. “Larger, clearer sign for café (e.g. Common Grounds Café)” (4 respondents)
3. “Utilize the entire foyer by expanding the café: Place a table with food, drink and volunteer(s) on the opposite side of the foyer” (4 respondents)
4. “High-top tables in foyer, without chairs” (3 respondents)
5. “Expand seating/meeting area outside onto the porch area (Picnic tables?)” (3 respondents)
6. “Expand seating/meeting area into back of sanctuary” (2 respondents)
7. “Utilize the old Senior High room as a more private lounge or prayer area” (2 respondents)

8. “Area for prayer and/or prayer requests” (2 respondents)

9. “Close service with prayer requests: A prayer team or group of elders for anyone who would like some to pray with them. Can be in the front of sanctuary or in the back with “badges.” Could also have someone available in the Senior High room, or could possibly transition to the Senior Room after meeting in the Sanctuary” (2 respondents)

10. “Lengthen the time between services” (2 respondents)

11. “Danny making himself more available” (2 respondents)

12. “Phone directory (Online?)” (1 respondent)

13. “Music playing in foyer/outside” (1 respondent)

14. “Boards in foyer after 2nd service of 2-3 diverse restaurants that church members are meeting to eat lunch” (1 respondent)

15. “Lunch/potluck on campus – once a month and/or as a celebration (e.g., Volunteer Appreciation, Anniversaries of the Church, Meeting certain goals and benchmarks, etc.)” (1 respondent)

16. “‘Entertainment’ during the pre/post-service time: carolers, Jay-walking, etc.” (1 respondent)

17. “Open up the café by removing part of the wall surrounding it” (1 respondent)

Miscellaneous

1. “Bulletins getting too large/overstuffed” (4 respondents)

2. “Put Connection cards in back of pews” (2 respondents)

3. “The tension of building community through fellowship and moving into the sanctuary on time (Can greeters be empowered to choral people? Is fellowship more important than being on time?)” (2 respondents)

4. “The tension of building community through fellowship and getting things done as a volunteer” (2 respondents)

5. “Do people from 1st service feel pushed out?” (2 respondents)
Appendix H: IRB Letters of Approval

March 5, 2010

Jacob Jenkins
Communication
CIS 1040

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00000403
Title: Church on Purpose - Tampa Bay Area

Dear Jacob Jenkins:

On 3/4/2010 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 3-4-2011.

Approved Items:
Protocol Document(s):

Study Protocol 2/5/2010 7:14 PM 0.01

Consent/Assent Document(s):

Consent Form.pdf 3/5/2010 1:31 PM 0.01

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:
(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-9343.

Sincerely,

Krista Kutash, PhD, Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Various Menzel, CCRP
USF IRB Professional Staff
April 20, 2010

Jacob Jenkins
Communication
CIS 1040

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00000402
Title: Finding Common Ground: The Measure of Community in a Protestant, Christian Church

Dear Mr. Jenkins:

On 4/20/2010 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 4/20/2011.

Approved Items:
Consent/Assent Document(s):

| Informed Consent.pdf | 4/20/2010 10:36 AM | 0.01 |

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or
quality assurance methodologies. As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-9343.

Sincerely,

Krista Kutash, PhD, Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Anna Davis, USF IRB Professional Staff
May 12, 2011

Jacob Jenkins
Communication
4202 East Fowler Ave, CIS 1040

RE: Exempt Certification for IRB#: Pro00000369
Title: Website Experience Analysis - Common Ground

Dear Jacob Jenkins:

On 5/12/2010, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that your research meets USF requirements and Federal Exemption criteria as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted as outlined in your application and consistent with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report and with USF IRB policies and procedures. Please note that changes to this protocol may disqualify it from exempt status. Please note that you are responsible for notifying the IRB prior to implementing any changes to the currently approved protocol.

The Institutional Review Board will maintain your exemption application for a period of five years from the date of this letter or for three years after a Final Progress Report is received, whichever is longer. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond five years, you will need to submit a continuing review application at least 60 days prior to the exemption expiration date. Should you complete this study prior to the end of the five-
year period, you must submit a request to close the study. We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-9343.

Sincerely,

Krista Kutash, PhD, Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Various Menzel, CCRP
USF IRB Professional Staff
September 29, 2010

Jacob Jenkins
Communication
4202 East Fowler Ave, CIS 1040

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00002180
Title: Co-Constructing "Community": A Culture Centered Approach to Multicultural Congregations

Dear Jacob Jenkins:

On 9/29/2010 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 9-29-11.

Approved Items:
Protocol Document(s):

| Study Protocol                  | 9/2/2010 1:14 PM | 0.01 |

Consent/Assent Document(s):

| Informed Consent Form.pdf      | 9/29/2010 10:29 AM | 0.01 |

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:
(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note, the informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-9343.

Sincerely,

Krista Kutash, PhD, Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Various Menzel, CCRP
    USF IRB Professional Staff
About the Author

J. Jacob Jenkins received his B.Arch. in Architecture from Drury University and his M.A. in Organizational & Interpersonal Communication from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He has traveled throughout China, Japan, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Great Britain, and the United States fulfilling humanitarian work; he has studied abroad in France, Germany, Italy, Vatican City, and The Netherlands. Jenkins has received numerous honors for both research and teaching, including eight “Top Paper” and “Top Student Paper” awards at the regional and national level. He has also been awarded the “Stanley L. Saxton Applied Research Award” by the Carl Couch Institute for Social and Internet Research, the “Provost's Commendation for Outstanding Teaching” by the University of South Florida’s Academy for Teaching and Learning Excellence, the “Graduate Student Research Award” by the Florida Communication Association, and the “Carol Glenn Memorial Scholarship Award” by the American Society for Training and Development. In 2011, Jenkins was selected to participate in the National Communication Association's Doctoral Honor Seminar, and was nominated for the “Distinguished Young Alumnus Award” by the Drury University Alumni Association. In 2012, Jenkins was awarded a generous research grant by the Waterhouse Family Institute for the Study of Communication and Society. Jenkins' major areas of study include Organizational Communication, Interpersonal Communication, and Applied Research Methods.