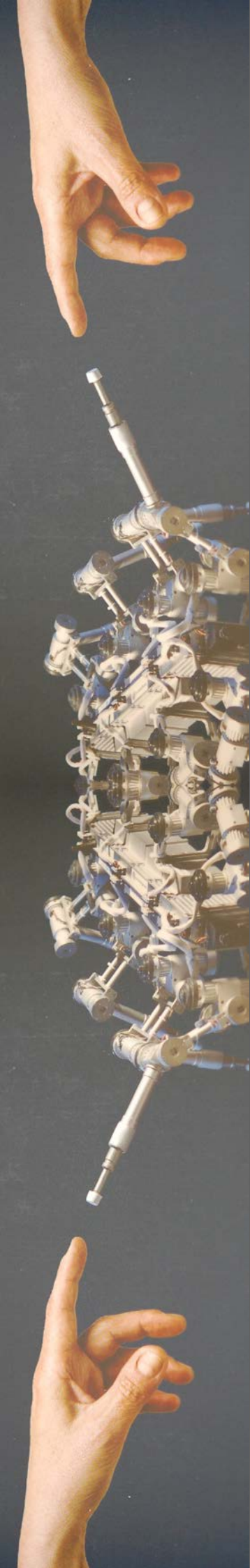


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Alecea Standlee
Concord University, U.S.A.

Technology and Making-Meaning in College Relationships: Understanding Hyper-Connection

Abstract This article explores how the use of communication technology has transformed social interactions and the sense of self that is derived from such interactions by considering the role of presence and absence in relationships among college students. Analyzing interviews with 38 participants, I explore how they construct understandings of presence, absence, connection, and disconnection within peer social groups and intimate relationships, indicating the emergence of a culture of hyper-connection. I suggest that technological developments have enabled forms of interaction that encourage frequent connection and the idealization of constant communication among participants. These findings further indicate that the normalization of hyper-connection may have impacts on relationship practices and constructions of identity among participants.

Keywords Communication Technology; Social Interaction; Presence; Absence; Relationships; College Students; Connection; Disconnection; Intimacy

Developments in information and communication technologies in the last 20 years have given rise to questions about their impact on interpersonal relationships, social networks, and identities (Birkets 1994). This work provides an examination

of the experiences and interpretations of technological innovation among college students in one Northeastern university. I focus on the practices, experiences, and interpretations of participants as they engage in a technologically-mediated and emergent means of human connection and social life. In this article, I consider the role of meaning and values of connection, disconnection, and *hyper-connection* among contemporary college students. I pay particular attention to how students derive meaning from connection and disconnection as it relates to presence and absence within social groups or networks. The focus of this work is on the relationship between social interactions and the development of individual values, behavior, and a sense of self related to technological communication.

Alecea Standlee is an Assistant Professor and Sociologist at Concord University. She studies the role of techno-mediated communication in the lives of teens and young adults, with a specific focus on interpersonal relationships. Her work focuses on the persistence of relationships mediated by both technological and traditional communication styles, and utilizes symbolic interactionism and post-structural thinking.

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The goal of this paper is to explore the way(s) in which techno-social practices are experienced and understood by participants. I am particularly interested in identifying patterns of behavior, social expectations, and self-reported interpretations of such behavior. First, I discuss how the idea of connection is constructed in social networks, through the establishment of online presence. Next, I express the self-reported interpretations and meanings participants attached to disconnection and lack of technologically-mediated interactions. I go on to consider the perceived consequences of disconnection among participants. Finally, I examine how these constructions of connection, disconnection, and presence as normal result in social pressure towards compliance in a social network.

Theoretical Context

An important debate about the consequences and impacts of technological development has emerged in recent decades. Some thinkers posit a construction of the Internet as an isolating technology that disrupts relationships and damages social skills (Sanders et al. 2000; Reid and Reid 2004). As a result, concerns about the degradation of social skills, and overall quality of life, have emerged in both academic and popular publications (Kraut et al. 1998; Engelberg and Sjöberg 2004; Booth 2013). Additionally, research in the area of Internet addiction disorder (IAD) has highlighted concerns about the role of technology and Internet in mental health (Young 1998). While most researchers view IAD as a condition related to other compulsive behaviors, there is still a great deal of debate about the symptomology and diagnosis of the illness (Bai, Lin, and Chen

2001; Hur 2006; Siomos and Angelopoulos 2008). Yet, these perceptions of dangerous technological innovation are often countered by imaginaries of utopian relationships. The imaginary of a relationship free of social stigma in which participants can be more real with one another (McKenna, Green, Gleason 2002) is central to this thinking.

Meanwhile, other scholars have suggested that communication technologies are more a danger to the self than to the social and can lead to a fragmentation of the self (Gergen 2000). While others theorize the emergence of a much more complex and nuanced self (Gubruim and Holstein 2000) within a technological world. Despite their differences, many researchers agree that the construction of the self exists in a reflexive relationship with social practices and meanings, many of which are tied to social interaction (Giddens 1991). Therefore, foundational to understanding the social consequences of technological innovation is having a clear picture of what practices and norms are central to the contemporary social environment and how they are understood by those engaged in such practices.

In order to contribute to this goal, I work to better understand the ways in which technology use and relationships are given meaning and how that meaning-making shapes the experiences and identity of a specific population, those in early adulthood. College students aged 18-24, sometimes called digital natives (Palfrey and Gasser 2008), are on the forefront of the integration of technological communication into intimate interpersonal relationships. Having grown up with technology in their lives, many in this age group have experienced the technological

integration that scholars have debated as a central aspect of their social world and their construction of self. Further, their status as college students allows for comprehensive access to modern communication technology and an emergent set of social norms that shape interaction and self.

Methodology

This project focuses on how college students integrate technological communication use into their social lives, and considers new possibilities for social interactions that occur due to the use of such technology. I developed a project that focuses on the experiences of college students in a private university in the Northeast of the United States. Using qualitative data collection techniques, including interview and observation, I gathered data about everyday activities, opinions, experiences, and expectations of participants. Specifically, I used traditional, face-to-face interviews as the primary source of my data, then supplemented the work with online ethnographic data collection methods. This process allowed me to most effectively examine the attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and experiences of participants. In this modest study, I collected interview data on 38 participants between the ages of 18 and 24. The interviews themselves were between 45 and 90 minutes long and tended to be around one hour on average. In addition, I followed participants online via social media over the course of 4 months, generating several hundred pages of postings and field notes.

I established contact with participants and conducted interviews primarily by making announcements

of the project in classes from a variety of disciplines. I provided some basic information on the topic of the study and invited students to sign up with their email address for more information if they were interested. I then emailed the students relevant information, including a project description letter and a copy of the consent form. Potential participants were given about a week to consider, then I emailed them again and, if they agreed to participate, set up an interview time and date. Students who volunteered and participated in interviews provided additional contacts and introduced me to individuals that they felt would be interested in participating. At this point, I made an effort to seek out participants from those groups underrepresented in my research. Ultimately, my participants are from a diverse set of race, gender, sexuality, and religious backgrounds recruited from among interviewees.

Each of the individuals I “followed” on Facebook gave permission after an interview. For those that agreed to participate in the online observation portion of the study, I sent them a friendship request via Facebook. Each participant had to accept the digital request in order for me to view his or her Facebook postings. Once I was given access to their online environment, I collected data in two ways. First, I kept a log of Facebook wall postings for each individual for about 4 months. I also maintained a set of field notes in which I comment on and describe portions of the postings. The data used here are from the field notes, which do not use names or identifying information. I specifically *do not* use quotations from postings because they might be potentially searchable and thus compromise the privacy of participants. Thus, the online observation is

similar to participant observation in a physical setting in which description of events or actions from field notes is the source of data.

I began my data analysis with the intention of using predefined codes gleaned from the literature. I quickly discovered that the use of a pre-existing “codebook” was too limiting, so I switched to a more general analytic approach (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). I revisited the handful of interviews that I had coded and utilized an open coding process. I conducted a close read and added brief tags or descriptors to ideas and concepts that I found interesting or important, using the “comment” function in my word processor. I then identified and grouped analytic categories that form the basis of my discussion.

Like all research, this project faces limitations. This qualitative paper focuses on the identification of patterns of experience, self reported behaviors, and interpretations among participants. The design of this project does not seek to provide a comparison between groups, but rather identify the subjective experiences of participants. Future work in this area might include a comparison between groups in order to better understand the differences and similarities in experience.

Hyper-Connection

In general, the college students who participated in this study rely on complex communicative processes to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, which may include a variety of face-to-face and technologically-mediated forms of communication. For example, common forms of communica-

tion may include: text messages, Facebook profiles, IM chats, Tweets, wall posts, photo and message tagging, shared online photo albums, YouTube videos, gaming, and other technologies. These technologies exist as more than mediums of communication, they function as a discursive environment that is separate from the content of a given message and rooted in the form and the logic of that techno-social environment. Within this environment, many of the participants share a set of interactional norms about when, where, and how communication technologies are integrated into social behavior and an individual sense of self.

One of the most important shared norms is the experience of *hyper-connectivity*. The concept of hyper-connectivity was originally identified by cybertheorists Barry Wellman and Anabel Quan-Haase. Hyper-connectivity is the “availability of people for communication anywhere and anytime” (Quan-Haase and Wellman 2005:285). Effectively, the concept expresses the idea that technological infrastructures have allowed for an expansion of communication patterns and social networks (Wellman 2001). This study works to better understand the social norms and experiences of hyper-connectivity among technologically savvy college students.

For the purposes of this article, I will use the term hyper-connection to refer to the experience and social expectations related to hyper-connectivity. Thus, hyper-connection is the set of social expectations and behavioral norms in which being available for communication “anytime and anywhere” (Quan-Haase and Wellman 2005) is essential to social relationships. For participants in this study, hyper-connection was

achieved by establishing a sense of potential availability within a peer group. Participants below share the logistics of achieving this hyper-connection, as well as the social and emotional consequences of deviance and compliance with regard to these expectations.

Understanding Hyper-Connection

Hyper-connection among participants is not only the result of emerging technology, but is the goal of emerging social actions and individual behavior. The notion of being connected is to be present and available to friends and family, and thus strengthens interpersonal relationships and social ties. Achieving this is tied to *techno-interactional* behaviors in which social interaction occurs through the use of communication technologies. The importance of availability for intimacy and collective social experience is an idea that is shared by many participants. William is deeply involved in Greek culture on campus. He claims that the technological bonds that tie him to peers shape his social status.

If I were to put my phone down and turn my phone off for a little bit...like...I could be missing out on so much. That's one of the reasons why I got the BlackBerry, is because emails would go rapid fire from the listserv at the fraternity...let's say I'd come over to a guy and say, "Did you see the stuff going on the listserv," and he'd say, like, "No, dude, I'm not by my computer, so I hadn't seen it." But, you know, already there would be this whole argument that would pan out over the email listserv that I would just completely miss. So, now, I'm connected into that. I can see it.

The fear of being left out is a concern for individuals who are connected to friendship groups and social networks. Interconnected social relationships are shaped by, and connected by, near instant communication. As Olivia explains,

since I commute, like, people I'm taking classes with, I'll add them, especially the group projects—it's the easier way to communicate 'cause some people will check their Facebook more than they actually email. So, that's one of the good things about it.

Presence, or what we might call "potential presence," is a foundational idea here. The social expectation that someone is available if needed functions as a kind of glue that holds groups of friends, and even extended social networks, together (Zhao 2003). Arthur explains that Facebook allows for the maintenance of relationships in his life that otherwise might not continue.

I think almost everyone is on it. Just...at least, for kids my age, because it started out as just the, like, college community and stuff. People were all about it because it was a great resource to keep in touch with...Sometimes the best way to keep in touch is through...was through Facebook.

The accessibility of the individual also works as a social imperative that is necessary to demonstrate belonging within peer groups and friendship networks. The above respondent goes on to explain the consequences of being without a technological device, of being literally disconnected from technology, and how that results in disconnection from social interaction. William explains,

I can't call somebody and be like, "Hey, you know, I'm gonna be there in a little bit," or, "Where are you?" Or, let's say I'm going someplace to meet and I don't see them...Like the old days, you just wait around and hope and then maybe go somewhere, and like, go to a phone and leave a message for them and say, "Hey, I missed you blah, blah, blah." Like, no, expectations like that are completely different. You can't do that.

While on the surface such problems may seem to be merely logistical, a deeper meaning emerges quickly. This is about availability, and perhaps more importantly, about the potential availability in a social situation, even if this takes the form of technological interactions. This collectivity and hyper-connection draws a sharp contrast not only to the stereotypes about technological use, but also the preceding generation, which, according to some authors, is deeply isolated with regard to social interactions (Putnam 2000). That notion of disconnection is tied to the vision of the technologically dependent loner, but the social reality of the digital natives may be very different. For example, Ruth discusses the social risks that she runs by having a policy of delaying responses to texts in certain circumstances.

I'm horrible...they texted me and I don't text back right away. Like, I don't like texting in class. Like, a lot of people you see texting in class, I hate that 'cause I know a lot of teachers, they find that simply disrespectful. So I'm late on text back right away, so a lot of people say that I'm rude...because, you know, people want a quick response.

Ruth's internalization of herself as "horrible" is important to understand just how necessary the

technologies of availability are to her social group. While not a fully internalized self-evaluation, the normative expectations of Ruth's social environment encourage her to allow her sense of identity, and even her internally directed sense of self, to be challenged by non-compliance with this social norm and shaped by the demands of interaction. Her interactions with peers, and just as importantly, her lack of interaction create a social reality in which she is deviant. Ruth has violated social expectations and that violation sends a message about her self-identity, she is "horrible" because she does not text back. The meaning Ruth derives from these interactions suggests the construction of a clear sense of shared meaning among her peers.

Meaning-Making in Techno-Interaction

The idea that being absent from the flow of communication within a peer group has real social consequences is a theme many respondents agree with. For many participants, not following the rules about how quickly they should respond to text messages, how often they post on Facebook, and how available they are via Internet, enabled by mobile devices such as iPhones, is understood to be matters of respect. As one respondent, Tyler, suggests, such delays are "being just, you know...cold and...disrespectful to your friends." He goes on to explain that lack of response or lack of availability sends a very clear message to others, a message of rejection. Jessie outlines the consequences of not responding to text messages or not responding to Facebook messages.

It means that you're ignoring them. I have...one of my roommates, he's been having this little conflict with

one of his friends because he doesn't always answer her phone calls and he doesn't always answer texts because he's busy. He's in class. He's in lab. He's doing things. He's running around all day. He does not have time for that, but she...she'll post messages to his Facebook wall, later, saying, "Hey, how come you don't respond to my text? Hey, how come you don't respond to my phone calls? Hey, how come...you have a cell phone, like, use it." Respond to me—all the time, now, now, now, now, now, now.

Ze¹ goes on to explain that messages being sent between his roommate and his friend are clear and understood by all parties. It is about commitment to the relationship, and about the friendship as a priority. The medium of technology sends a message beyond just the words present in the communication.

The secondary message being sent by a speedy response is that the friendship is valuable and important to both parties. A delayed response is an indication that the friendship is not valued by the "slower" respondent. This may be because speedy communication is a means of "being there" or establishing presence despite physical distance. As Kate notes, it makes communication possible.

All over the world, at least all over the United States, you can text your friends all day long. I have friends that go to school in Connecticut. I have friends that go to school in Florida and California, and so it's nice to be able to text them, it's like they're there without being there.

¹ Jessie is genderqueer and does not identify as a man or a woman and prefers to use gender-neutral pronouns. Jessie uses "ze" in place of "he" or "she" and "hir" in place of "him" or "her." I follow this convention in this project as requested by the participant.

This notion of "being there without being there" is key in understanding the discourse of technological use created independently of the words themselves. By establishing presence in a social situation from which you are physically absent, technological communication allows a message about the value of the relationship to be sent. Hallie explains the importance of technology in her relationships.

I use Skype a lot because my boyfriend lives on Long Island. So we're pretty far apart. And he just graduated, so, I feel like technology...if we didn't have technology, we probably wouldn't stay together. So it would be...and me and my dad, pretty much, only communicate via email. So we don't see each other very often, or anything.

The degree to which an individual is perceived to value a relationship with others is an indicator of how invested he or she is in the relationship. By establishing one's presence online, and making oneself hyper-connected or "always" present, a social environment is formed. This environment has the effect of encouraging further investment in the idea of hyper-connection. This creates a relationship between social interactions, such as availability via text, and group expectations, such as those about appropriate availability, based on the meanings attached to techno-interactive processes. Mia notes that her relationship with text messaging is rooted in acknowledging the importance of other people, through communication and "being there."

I can keep a conversation going, for, like, two days straight, with, like, one person, and so that'll be back and forth, constantly, all day. And we don't really

talk about anything important, it just kind of...I don't know...being there.

The relevance of simply being present and having access to the presence of others is reinforced not only by peers, but also her own perception about what is "normal" in the techno-social world. This socially constructed need for co-presence is at the root of the hyper-connection of the social world. One must not only be technologically present in order to provide social connection to others, but there is also an expectation of reciprocity. This reciprocity is based on the idea that techno-interaction is made possible because technology extends to human senses, allowing us to experience interaction virtually. Thus, through technology, the individual is never really alone.

Getting Out and Feeling Loss

However, it is not in discussing presence and connection where participants most clearly articulate the meanings attached to techno-interaction, but in the discussion of loss and disconnection. The medium of technology, as theorist Marshall McLuhan (1964) notes, is about the extension of human senses. McLuhan and Fiore (2001) argue technological mediums of communication carry inherent messages about their use, which are interpreted along with the message itself. The technologies of communication that are employed by participants extend the senses across geographic space to encounter others, friends, family, et cetera. In acknowledging or rejecting the importance of utilizing these virtual senses to render an individual self as present or, conversely, to acknowledge the

presence of another, a message about the value of the other is being sent. The presumption of some kind of ability to extend the senses, to connect with the other demonstrates a sense of interconnection. Among many participants in this study the extension of the virtual senses becomes most relevant when the extension is truncated. To be cut off from technologically-mediated social interaction via the loss of a phone or Internet access results in emotional distress.

Essentially, for many of the participants in this study, to lose the instrument of technological communication is to lose the intimate connection to one's community and to the self that is deeply rooted in that community. Allen explains that for him, he would be unable to access friends and his social network.

I don't think that I would have as much friends as I do now. Because of the Internet I can stay connected with my former classmates and my close friends. I think my life would also be more boring.

William also links disconnection with a sense of loss, but articulates a much more intense experience. He suggests that his relationship with technology is so important that he has complex feelings about even contemplating a lack of technologically-mediated connections. When I asked him to tell me what it would be like if he lost his phone, he explained in terms of disconnection and fear.

I've lost it, I've...you almost feel like...naked...I can't really be without my cell phone. Like when...if my phone dies...my phone just died and shuts off. I do feel off, you can't contact people right away if I need

to or anything. I can't get in contact with them. I'm like, disconnected. Nobody can reach me, and people...I can't reach them, I mean, just think about this. It's the craziest thing for me, is like, OK, so my phone dies, right. I don't know what time it is. That's one of the things right there. I don't carry a watch. Nobody carries a watch...I don't know what time it is. No access to emails, unless I go onto a computer, but I'm not always around a computer, so I can't get my emails right away. Nobody can reach me. I can't reach them...What am I supposed to do?

This question, "What am I supposed to do," lies at the heart of the presence/absence narrative. The techno-social world of participants shapes behavior and individual perceptions of the self through the real and imagined interactional expectations of other people. If the medium of communication "dies," it is no longer available to provide a connection with friends and the imagined other. Ruth agrees, becoming emotional at the thought of being disconnected.

I wouldn't...I would have to communicate with people more personally. Um...like, face-to-face. Because I use texts a lot. I don't text my mom because she doesn't really...she doesn't speak English, so I would have to call her, but I...there's a lot of things I, like, I use text for. There's so many arguments that I've won over text. It's crazy. So, since, I even wish Happy Birthday.

Without this means of accessing peers the notion of feeling naked, disconnected, and detached from the world arises. When an individual becomes absent technologically, he or she is unreachable, untouchable, the expanded senses have failed. Not only can

William not "contact people right away," but also he himself becomes someone who "nobody can reach." Logistically, William is unable to contact his friends easily, to get information and support, or even make plans about meetings and activities. However, socially he is also isolated, separated from his friends and peers in a way that engenders in him a sense of loss. Of particular note is that, for William, this is an *imagined* experience that causes an emotional response.

The lack of a technological means of communication, or even the contemplation of such an event, is imagined to result in both the truncation of the expanded senses, but also a resulting disconnection that occurs when the connection is cut off. Aiden agrees, explaining,

Without a[n Internet enabled] cell phone I would not have a social life because my phone is my outlet and source into my social world! I would not be able to survive without my phone because I wouldn't be able to speak to my mother and I also wouldn't be able to speak to most of my friends plus then I'd have nothing to entertain me during class.

This is a frequent theme when respondents contemplate life without technology. Not only do respondents feel emotional discomfort at the idea, but also often express concern about their compliance to social expectations, and even their ability to conduct day-to-day activities. As William tries to explain, "it's a dependency, and it's like you're locked in. And if you're not in it, you're just out of the loop." Like William, others have conflicted feelings about technology, but even then there is a clear

sense of a social imperative. One respondent notes both conflicted feelings about the medium itself, but also about the way in which it functions as a social imperative. Jessie mentions how ze will sometimes play hooky with hir phone.

I don't like to be tied to my phone. There are days, and if I have a day off, oftentimes I'll chuck my phone, like, underneath, or like, behind my bed, or something. And I'll go sit out on the porch for half the day. I'm gonna enjoy the sunlight and the peace and quiet and the not ringing of my cell phone and the not vibrating of my cell phone, constantly demanding my attention. And my computer will stay off and I'll do... like, I'll read a book.

Yet, ze also notes that there are consequences to such behavior as ze is likely to have dozens of text messages, Facebook messages, and instant message contacts when ze does check hir phone. Furthermore, ze explains the increasingly frantic tones of such messages. Nevertheless, for hir, the momentary disconnection is worth it.

Jessie goes on to explain that the constant need to be immediately present via technology is at once draining and comforting. Anna, too, occasionally attempts to disconnect, but struggles to do so as social pressures to remain connected are intense.

[Sometimes] I turn off my Facebook. And much of [it] is hard 'cause all my friends are messaging me through the Facebook. Like organizing things through it. I mean, so, then I'm forced to use it because that's what they're using. You know, that's how I can keep in contact with them.

Kacy agrees, explaining that she, too, feels a pressure to be present and in contact with her friends despite her own desires. Despite Kacy's dislike of texting, she gives in to pressure,

if you want to text me...I sigh and just slump away, kind of, 'cause I just didn't want to do it. [But] I don't want to lose my friend, it's not that much of a hassle just to learn to do it. I did. And, now, I'm not an advanced user, like, I can't do it under the table without looking at the word, but I still use it sometimes.

The pressure to "be present" for others via technology, for Jessie, Anna, and Kacy at least, is sometimes overwhelming. Kacy remains resistant to the norms of text messaging and struggles to set boundaries around her technology use in social situations.

It's like, with this particular friend in mind, she has unlimited minutes and unlimited text messaging, and I understand that she'll text in class 'cause she's not going to sit there on the phone and have a conversation in front of her professor, but maybe she's in class and I'm in class, and I don't want text 'cause I don't want to be rude. And then I'm ignoring her because I haven't answered her text message. So, I don't know. Should I just text her back and say, "I'm in class, can't talk right now." Or should I ignore it 'cause if I text her back, then I'm being rude to my professor. Whereas, if I text her back and she's angry, or she needs me to talk to, for solace or something, then where do I go. Where if you call me, I can always ignore the phone call, but still then, she's not getting that communication that she needs. And I'm not getting the education that I'm in class for, or maybe I just don't want to help you, so what do I do?

Kacy discusses the challenge of finding an “etiquette” of technology use. For many of her peers, the use of text messaging in social situations is accepted, but for Kacy, the demand to be available to provide her friend with “that communication she needs” is frustrating and overwhelming. For her, there is no easy solution to balancing the needs and expectations of her friend with her own desire for distance.

In contrast, Jessie manages her concerns about feeling too connected by taking some time off. Still, prolonged disconnection such as getting rid of her phone or Facebook account is not perceived as desirable. While “disconnecting” for a few hours is OK, the prospect of total disconnection or “going offline” is something that evoked nervous laughter in Jessie. When I pressed for more details, she walked me through the experience of “going offline.” Going offline, in its contemporary usage, is defined as the process of removing one’s profiles, avatars, and contact information from the Internet. Jessie explains what happens if she were to go offline in this sense.

The first thing that would happen is every...like, everyone that knows me personally, in person, will start demanding...like, “What happened to your Facebook?” “What happened to your Facebook?” “What happened...?” “What’s going on?” “Did something terrible happen?” No, I just don’t want to be on Facebook anymore. It’s ruling my life. I want to...I want to become free from it. But then, they become baffled, “But how am I going to send you messages?” “How am I gonna share YouTube videos with you?” “How am I gonna...comment on all of your photos?” I don’t even post photos. “How am I going to do all these things?” “How am I going to keep up with you in my life?”

Immediately social problems arise with friends, family, and other members of social networks. Not only does Jessie imagine an immediate response in her social network, but also discusses the ways in which the very nature of that social network might shift.

My time observing online seems to support Jessie’s assessment of the topic. At one point, Becca, one of the participants I was observing, “dropped out,” meaning she stopped posting regularly to her Facebook account, and her wall was flooded with concerned posts asking if she was OK, and requests like “post something...I miss you.” The depth of connection demonstrates the importance of being connected, not simply with technology, but also with other people, through the use of technology (Castells 2005). That notion that technology connects and ties people together in relationships with other people brings a new conceptualization to the notion of getting and staying “connected.” Thus, the question of how to maintain relationships and connections becomes a central concern, yet apparently the problems do not end there, according to Jessie. While initially mostly logistical problems arise, if disconnection from Facebook is pushed to the next level, Jessie goes on to imagine what it might be like to be entirely disconnected from the Internet.

If I disconnect myself from the Internet as a whole, the majority of my shopping is done online, so I cannot shop for things ‘cause I don’t own a car, so I can’t really go out to stores anymore, unless I am willing to walk a particularly long distance or bum a ride from someone else. I am unable to pursue many of the things that give me momentary entertainment, so I’m sort of left with myself in a house and must pursue more long-

term ways to entertain myself. I’m unable to manage my bank accounts. Because I don’t balance my checkbook anymore because it’s done online; so, everything financial I am incapable of doing, unless I go to the bank and ask for a statement ‘cause I’ve also gone paperless. Since it’s all online, I’ve asked them to stop sending me letters I’m not going to open. So, all my financial stuff is gone. Let’s see, what else do I manage on a daily basis? My access to the news is also gone. I don’t have a subscription to a newspaper service. I don’t have cable television. I don’t have news channels, I don’t have newspapers. The only way I can get information...newsworthy...is by asking other people or purchasing newspapers on a daily basis.

While Jessie and a few others expressed fantasies of being disconnected or out of touch, all of them acknowledged that such behavior would have dramatic social consequences both for the individual and for their friends and family. To be offline is to be disconnected, not only from communication technologies, but also from *other people*, as William notes above when he explains that if he were offline, he “would not have a way to stay in contact with people, or for people to contact me.” If, as McLuhan argues, technology is the extension of senses beyond human capacity, then this disconnection is about being literally out of touch and inaccessible.

Compliance: Getting Connected and Being Normal

This sense of being “out of touch” and disconnected is traumatic for some participants because they are situated in a social world in which hyper-connection is increasingly understood as not only desirable but more importantly—as normal. Participants exist in

a space that is about techno-interaction and communication of their own presence. Individuals access another, and by establishing their presence, individuals also become accessible to others; an accessibility that results in hyper-connection. Techno-interaction is increasingly regarded as a “normal” part of social network building, and further compliance with this social norm is essential to maintaining social networks. As new means of communication are made possible by technological development, new sets of social expectations also arise, as William explains. “It’s one of those things...like, you’ve got to be on it. People have got to be able to find you these days if you want to be connected.”

Thus, many individuals discuss their introduction to tools such as Facebook and texting as a consequence of social demands for their presence in online spaces, and thus their accessibility to friends, peers, romantic partners, and others. These demands are often to be present and accessible in social situations that are techno-mediated, Jessie explains further. Thus, participants are expected to conform to social norms of techno-interaction because they will be judged on the social meanings attached to their place from the techno-social network.

I’m not a huge fan of Facebook, but I’ll use it. I was actually threatened via physical violence to join Facebook by a friend of mine. She legitimately made the account for me and when I didn’t use it. She punched me every day that I didn’t use it, she would punch me. So now I use it every day.

The pressure to incorporate some form of technological communication into the social relationships

is intense. Other participants also noted that they joined Facebook because of pressure from friends or because they felt like they needed to, as Sara notes,

I didn't join Facebook until my senior year [of high school] when I knew I was going to Syracuse and kind of wanted to start to, like, meet people...it's what you did to get ready for college. I friended my dorm roommate so we weren't like total strangers when we met. We had already gotten to know each other.

The social demands of compliance are intense, just as the rules of text messaging and even emailing require a degree of technological vigilance that sometimes people struggle with. Yet, such vigilance can be worth it for some participants. Abby explains that for her, the keeping in touch aspect of texting and Facebook that allows her to connect is most important.

I think that for certain people, it has...you then have a better relationship with them, or, like, a more of a relationship that you would have had. So I know there's, like, girls on my team, and stuff that, I, like, have nothing in common with. Like we would, like, never really talk or anything. And I would never call them and be, like, "Hey, let's hang out," or whatever. But, with texting, like, you can send a mass text and be, like, "Hey, party at my house," and it, like, goes to them. Whereas, if I didn't have texting, I'd never call them and invite them.

Abby acknowledges that for her, technologically-mediated communication allows her to connect with people whom she otherwise would not interact with outside formal environments of her sports team. It also acts as a quick and efficient way to use those connections to organize social events. For college

students in general, the need for such technological devices is not just a matter of "fitting in" in the way that name brand clothing or accessories can be. This may be because such technologies not only allow people to "fit in," but also provide access to information about what is going on with other people that the student interacts with, such as offline events.

In fact, during the time I spent observing participants on Facebook I noted that making announcements had become such a common event that the site designers added an event planner function that allowed individuals to email event details to their friend lists via the website. Event organization became very common as the following excerpt from my field notes demonstrates.

Today I got 5 event invitations. Two party invites, an announcement of a meeting on LGBT issues, a request to join a Wal-Mart boycott, and an invitation to a baby shower. It looks like these invites were just sent to everyone on the list. I have the option of accepting, declining, or saying maybe to each invite and can also post and read related comments. I can see who else is attending and not attending and in some cases why.

One participant, Jadon, noted that without Facebook and texting it would be impossible for him to mobilize the student organizations he is involved with or "get the word out" about events. Increasingly, even offline interactions such as social events or organization activities relied on technology as a means to facilitate social interaction, even in face-to-face settings. As Jadon notes, "it's what you do...get people together online and get them together offline...texting or announcements...it's what everyone does."

For Lynn, part of the appeal of technology is its relative unobtrusiveness into the social world. She and her peers view this technology as so ever-present that it allows her to be available to her peers, but without the perceived intensity that would be required if she maintained that presence through another method.

It's the normal form of communication, for the most part. Rather than calling someone to ask them if they want to go do something...it's...you text them to make sure that they can do it. Or...I generally text because I don't know if I'm not interrupting something. I really feel bad if it's like, "Oh, I was just in the middle of a conversation with somebody that I really haven't talked to in a long time. Oh, good, my friend M called, that's awesome. Thanks for interrupting, jerk." So I kind of text and say, "Oh, you can get to it whenever you feel convenient." But it's normal around campus to have your phone.

For Lynn and the majority of other participants, having a cell phone is so unremarkable in face-to-face interactions that communication via text is understood to be almost invisible, and thus unobtrusive. The ability to be "there" without being obtrusive is important for Lynn because she relies heavily on her social circle for support and help with decision-making, as is the case for many of her peers (Bellotti 2008). Lynn goes on to explain that she needs to feel connected, but does not want to come across as too needy because that has the potential to damage relationships.

Ultimately, the normalcy of cell phone or Smartphone use is a result of the social pressures that my participants feel to own and use such devices. Lynn notes that it keeps her connected and is unobtrusive, both important to her, but that these characteristics

come from the technology's status as "normal." The widespread use of cell phones and Smartphones has resulted in perceptions of their universality that have led to the development of social practices that incorporate them, make them even more socially relevant. For Lynn, texting is the "normal" method of communication, and as such has given rise to expectations of courtesy and civility, including not "interrupting something" with a phone call. This perception of normality and the demand for presence within relationships has led to fundamental changes in how interpersonal relationships are conducted.

Conclusions

Throughout this discussion, I have offered examples of the way individuals grapple with issues of human interaction and hyper-connection. The desire for connection between individuals and between individuals and groups is central to understand the experience of participants. Connection is experienced through meaning-making and the expectations of social interaction that surround presence and absence. The notion of presence and absence, connection and disconnection goes beyond the simple notion of having an "Internet presence" or a profile online. Rather, the idea of presence and absence begs the question to whom are we present or absent? To what people do we have access and to whom are we ourselves accessible?

In order to begin answering this question, we must understand the contemporary nature of social networks. Social networks exist on both the physical and the virtual level. For some, social interaction occurs primarily or exclusively in offline spaces. However, for an increasing number of young people,

techno-interaction is not merely an option, but a requirement for the establishment and maintenance of social network connections. A few participants chose to reject some or all of this pressure to get connected and stay connected. Yet, all acknowledged their existence and the tension that exists between those who live in the techno-social world and those who resist it, those who belong fully to network society and those who inhabit the fringes. For some, like Kacy, it is possible to reject the social pressures for conformity, and to simply accept the social consequences. Which in her case means limited access to events and a small intimate social circle. For others, such as Jessie, a deep ambivalence exists; as ze fantasizes about disconnecting for a day to read a book, ze also knows that ze is unwilling to fully accept what a permanent rejection of the technology would result in. For many, such as Abby, disconnection is not an option, and not desirable, as they consider themselves deeply embedded in the techno-social world and feel that they thrive there.

This embeddedness means embracing a set of social expectations that include consistent “presence” within the techno-social world. This means establishing and maintaining not simply an “online identity,” but a consistent self-presentation of accessibility. The idea is to be plugged in and logged on, not simply regularly, but *all the time*. This level of hyper-connection is impossible in practice and for most participants, not entirely desirable. However, near constant availability

for interaction is the ideal that my participants *perceive* to be the norm among their peers, even as they themselves may be an exception. Many explained that among their peers for relationships to be valid, for intimacy to be achieved it is essential that one’s virtual presence be maintained. Students seek to create a technological self, a digital double that functions as a point of contact with the social world and informs an internal sense of identity. As a result of this perception, behavior is undergoing transformation. A clear demonstration of the Thomas theorem, as young people accept the reality of hyper-connection, the consequences of that reality emerge.

My research suggests that hyper-connection and social integration have emerged as a consequence of technological innovation. While it is true that young adults may be losing traditional social skills, they may be replacing them with an incredibly complex set of interactional tools that are increasingly shaping and reshaping the meaning of relationships and their sense of self. This reflexive process, in which the meaning of technology shapes the interactions between peers, and interactions shape and reshape meaning, has only just begun, and the long-term impacts of technological integration into social behavior are still unclear. Nevertheless, this work has identified some key areas in which technology may require that we rethink our own understanding of the meaning of technology and even the meaning of being connected to another human being.

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“The Real Deal”: Managing Intimacy Within Friendship at a Distance

Abstract How is intimacy constructed between friends who live apart, at a long distance? Family studies have paid considerable attention to the (re)negotiation processes of personal and intimate bonds within transnational families. However, less attention has been paid to the ways in which these structural constraints affect intimate relationships between friends. As significant members of the personal networks of individuals, friends have a supportive role that, in the continuum of other personal relationships (family, co-workers, neighbors, acquaintances), is challenged by the increasing mobility that characterizes contemporary global post-industrial societies. While a significant amount of literature has underlined the negative impact of geographical distance in friendships, other studies have suggested otherwise, stressing the renewed importance of friendship ties between geographically long-distant young adults. This paper explores long distance friendships (LDFs) focusing mainly on two dimensions: the meanings given to intimacy and the practices of friendship at a distance. The main hypothesis is that transformations of intimacy between long-distant friends are likely to be associated with reconfiguration of the meanings given to friendship, as well as to the norms that regulate them. On the one hand, the erosion of friendship is associated with the impossibility of keeping a face-to-face, co-present, accompanying contact, which is part of the expected normative role of friendship. On the other hand, its reconfiguration is mostly associated with those routines and rituals that keep friendship alive by permanently reenacting a sense of self identity and “ontological security” through the “work of memory.” The role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in fostering intimacy within an LDF is also explored, as these have considerably changed the ways we relate to geographical distance and, therefore, the norms that shape intimate relationships.

Keywords Intimacy; Friendship; Transnational Friendships; Long Distance Friendships; ICT

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Introduction: Focusing on Distance Between Friends

This paper focuses on a very simple question: How do friends living at a distance keep their relationship going? Friendship is often represented as a simple combination of two main vectors, time and space. Both are deeply connected, and articulate with other important aspects, such as the *context* in which friendships are embedded. This paper focuses on the importance of space, namely, as it relates to physical distance. Studies, particularly from the perspective of social psychology, have underlined the importance of physical proximity to the maintenance of personal relationships, including friendships, and therefore the negative impact of spatial distance on the nature and quality of those relationships (Fehr 1999). Others have argued otherwise, drawing attention to the fact that much of this emphasis on physical proximity is due to the presumed importance of the spatial proximity of networks in providing (instrumental) support, as well as in face-to-face modes of relationship (Johnson et al. 2009). This paper will try to answer two specific questions: What are the *meanings* given to friendship, when friends live at a long distance? And, what are the *practices* of friendship, when distance comes in between friends? The focus is on exploring how individuals cope with long distance in order to maintain their intimate relations, and their perceptions about how distance affects the nature and intensity of those bonds.

Spatial and geographical mobility being a major aspect relating to the maintenance of intimate ties, one must not overlook the importance of ongoing globalization processes that cross contemporary so-

cieties (though in diverse ways). Economic deprivation and global economy, cultural or ethnic conflicts, war: all are factors that enhance individuals’ global mobility and migration, impacting upon their personal relationships, including those with family and friends. Another important societal change relates to global education policies, namely, international higher education programs, which have contributed to the formation of more cosmopolitan younger generations, bred in global environments and experiencing more of the world. These changes are occurring in tandem with transformations in the global labor market, in which high levels of competitiveness demand highly skilled professionals with international experience and expectations. As Allan (2003:515) puts it, instead of this meaning a decrease in the significance of friendships in late-modern societies, “as social and economic transitions become increasingly less predictable and identity less rigid, the salience of friendships may well increase,” as “friends can play a crucial part in helping people adapt to new social identities.” Moreover, with the increasing differentiation of society and the consequent valuing of diversity, friends become important for expressing plural and sometimes contradictory identities, as “one can express different aspects of the self within different friendship clusterings in ways that are difficult to manage when personal networks are more integrated” (Allan 2003:516). This way they play a key role in the validation of the self, in the context of post-modern fluid, contingent, and uncertain societies. Although migration flows and geographical mobility have been a constant in societies throughout time, recent flows have been re-conceptualized through the development of information and communication technologies (ICT).

Due to its features of ubiquity, accessibility, and velocity (sometimes even instantaneity), technology has made communication with long-distant loved ones much easier and more frequent.

In summary, this paper aims to make a small contribution to the conceptualization of long distance friendships (LDFs) from a sociological perspective. This topic has already gained the attention of psychology and social psychology scholars; hence, this discussion seeks to contribute further to this debate by taking a sociological approach, drawing on qualitative methodologies and data, to LDFs as a product of complex social relations.

Conceptualizing Friendships at a Distance: A Brief State of the Art

Sociological literature has made an important contribution to conceptualizing friendship, not only identifying its normative definitions in contemporary societies (i.e., Pahl 2000; 2011; Allan 2003) but also as part of the individual's wider personal communities (Pahl and Spencer 2004; 2010; Spencer and Pahl 2006). However, and contrary to social psychology and interpersonal communication approaches, little or no attention has been paid to the impact of distance in managing these kinds of intimate relations.

To better understand LDFs, one immediately relevant dimension is physical **distance** itself, and the related concepts of separation and mobility. *Space* appears here as a relevant variable, not as a fixed reality (*where* things happen; the venues and places of friendship), but rather as a referent for something that, like its main players, defines itself by *being on the move*. Mo-

bility is the keyword that installs distance—the time and space that mediate between two relevant points: oneself and the friend(s). Elliot and Urry (2010) talk about “mobile intimacy” to describe what they call the new normative model for the 21st century. They argue that contemporary ways of managing intimacy at a distance are both enabled and constrained by three major areas of rapid change: globalization, transformations of intimacy, and the reinvention of personal life (Elliot and Urry 2010:87). Though acknowledging that “friendship has become extremely significant in the rich north, especially for people who do not have children, and has come to structure and organize multiple mobilities” (Elliot and Urry 2010:100), this is not their focus. Rather, they examine family and romantic relationships “on the move,” and acknowledge that mobile intimacy “is spreading to many social relations,” such as “living apart together” (LAT), “business deals in brothels,” “commuter marriages” or “distance relationships,” “love online” or “week-end couples” (Elliot and Urry 2010:89-90). Within this array of personal relations, the impact of mobility on friendship remains a secondary and underdeveloped topic. Likewise, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2014) focus on transnational families to conceptualize the “globalization of love and intimacy.” Nevertheless, in their latest writings, friendship remains an unexplored kind of intimate relationship, including its relations with mobility and distance.

Drawing from a social psychology and interpersonal communication background, and using a quantitative approach, a few studies have explored the particularities of LDFs. For instance, Becker and colleagues (2009) compare geographically close friendships (GCFs) and LDFs among 100 college students, and

conclude that LDFs are more likely to recover from negative turning points and relationship downturns, suggesting that LDFs should be conceptualized as *flexible* rather than fragile. Johnson and colleagues (2009) also compare GCFs and LDFs among young adults, focusing upon their levels of commitment, and conclude that they are not only high, but rising. Weiner and Hannum (2013) studied a sample of 142 undergraduate students, testing via a web-based survey the quantity of received and perceived social support provided by best friends, and concluded that, although GCFs declared providing more support, no differences were found regarding perceived support. These studies have provided important material to question prior assumptions about long distance (LD) impact on friendships, using quantitative and comparative methods. Aiming to complement these findings, this paper argues for a qualitative approach that can bring helpful insights, by taking into account the meanings individuals give to their actions and to particular aspects of LDFs (i.e., the relevance of face-to-face contact and co-presence, or the meanings of intimacy within LDFs).

What might be the *impacts* of distance in LDFs? Does it hinder intimacy between friends? Literature has traditionally underlined the negative impact of distance in personal relationships and networks in general, both with kin and non-kin. Research on social networks and personal communities has shown that, although the nature of the bonds changes (becoming less dense and more sparsely knit, for instance), the importance of these relations persist (for a revision, see: Clark 2007). As physical proximity is still important for direct support (e.g., of an instrumental kind, cf. Wellman 1979; Chua, Madej,

and Wellman 2011), authors such as Becker and colleagues (2009) have emphasized that distance does not necessarily have a negative impact on relationships of different kinds, pleading for a conceptualization of LD relationships as flexible rather than fragile. As mentioned above, a nonlinear sequence in the friendship trajectory that includes a shift back to the casual friendship level with recovery, after a turndown, is more typical for LD friends (Becker et al. 2009). This means therefore that the impact of LD is not always negative.

Other than distance, another important topic relevant to the present discussion is the *meanings* given to *intimacy* within friendship. The scientific literature, mainly drawing from a psychology and social psychology background, has identified a few dominant meanings. The most common, according to Monsour (1992), are self-disclosure, emotional expressiveness, unconditional support, physical contact, and trust. Sexual contact is usually referred to in relation to cross- but not same-sex friendships. Mutual support, mainly when it is directed at reducing loneliness, is also traditionally associated with friendship in literature. Monsour concludes, in his exploratory study, that friendship intimacy is multidimensional, both in cross- and same-sex friendships, with self-disclosure and emotional expressiveness being the most frequently mentioned aspects. Trust and unconditional support also emerged as important dimensions. Parks and Floyd (1996) also unpack the meanings individuals attribute to intimacy within friendship, by comparing them to the definition of *closeness*. Their study showed that three possible relations between the two concepts were possible, with almost half of the respondents viewing them as equivalent, and the

rest either as having quantitative or qualitative differences. The author concludes that closeness seems to be a more appropriate term than intimacy in describing relationships, since respondents were able to provide a wider range of, and richer, definitions for the former than the latter. Yet, none of these studies, nor the research they are based on, explore the implications of such definitions in LDFs.

The same can be said about Jamieson’s (1998) sociological work. Jamieson made a very important contribution through defining intimacy as not strictly related to physical contact, namely, sexual contact. Instead, intimacy is defined as referring,

to the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality. Although there may be no universal definition, intimate relationships are a type of personal relationship that are subjectively experienced and may also be socially recognized as close. The quality of “closeness” that is indicated by intimacy can be emotional and cognitive, with subjective experiences including a feeling of mutual love, being “of like mind” and special to each other. Closeness may also be physical, bodily intimacy, although an intimate relationship need not be sexual and both bodily and sexual contact can occur without intimacy. [Jamieson 2011:1]

Intimacy therefore encompasses practices that include kin and non-kin, with friends as relevant actors in its construction. In this work, Jamieson also provides helpful insights into intimacy as it is lived in a transnational context (e.g., transnational families), an approach particularly pertinent to my present reflections, as she questions the globalization of

the term. As she puts it, the fact that “global media circulate stereotypical ideals of intimacy celebrating relationships of individual equals impacting on imaginations across locally-specific social worlds” does not “erase other idealized notions of intimacy or level diversity in practices in lives as lived” (Jamieson 2011:2). However, notwithstanding these important contributions, the meanings of intimacy in friendships lived at a distance, in the context of a global and mobilized experience, remain an underdeveloped topic of research.

The same happens regarding the *practices* of forming friendships and keeping them going. In their seminal work about personal communities in the UK, Spencer and Pahl (2006) try to move beyond the normative definitions of friendship precisely by exploring the practices occurring within concrete relationships. However, these practices are only indirectly approached. This is the case with their notion of friendship types, in which they distinguish friendships on the basis of their complexity, ranging from “associates,” those who only share a common activity, to “soul mates,” “the most multi-stranded friendships of all,” those “who confide, provide emotional support, help each other, and enjoy each other’s company” (Spencer and Pahl 2006:69). What friends do with or towards each other is also considered in their notion of *friendship modes*, this time from a dynamic perspective. The ways in which friendships develop across different stages of the life course indirectly refer to what friends do in order to make new friends, maintain them, or lose them. The practices of friendship are here placed in the context of the modes via which individuals cope with, and respond to, the various events that cross their lives,

making them more or less turbulent journeys. Therefore, the authors acknowledge the importance of practices in achieving a scientific and complex definition of friendship; however, only indirectly do they approach these practices, their focus being mainly on the unpacking of a complex definition of friendship, better understood in the context of a variety of significant personal ties—personal communities.

This paper argues that to better understand LDFs, we must directly address the importance of **practices**, that is, of *what friends do, together or towards each other*, to keep their friendships alive, when distance is a factor. According to Reckwitz (2002:249), “A ‘practice’ (*Praktik*) is a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion, and motivational knowledge.” Schatzki (1996) describes two central notions of practices. The first one describes “practice” as coordinated activity, “as a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings,” such as cooking, voting, or recreational practices. The second meaning of “practice” describes it as “performance,” as it “actualizes and sustains practices in the sense of nexuses” (Schatzki 1996:90). As Reckwitz (2002) puts it,

a practice represents a pattern which can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions reproducing the practice...The single individual—as a bodily and mental agent—then acts as the “carrier” (*Träger*) of a practice—and, in fact, of many different practices which need not be coordinated with one another. Thus, she or he is not only a carrier of patterns

of bodily behavior, but also of certain routinized ways of understanding, knowing how, and desiring. [p. 250]

Either being “dispersed nexus of doings and sayings,” or “performances” that reproduce, actualize, and sustain these nexuses, how do practices among LD friends contribute to sustaining their intimacy, and the friendship itself? What are the practices of LD friends that contribute to keeping their friendships going, nurturing their intimacy? Exploring this dimension will help us to shed some more light on the nature of LDFs.

Collecting and Analyzing Data at a Distance: Questions of Method

This paper draws on qualitative data collected through a survey of open-ended questions, disseminated via email. A qualitative approach was chosen in order to better capture the subjective experiences of LD friends, as well as the complex meanings they give to friendship lived at a distance. The method also enabled a very important aspect of the study: the reconstitution of the context in which they live their LDFs (LD itself), as well as the (technological) means they use to communicate with their friends (one of which is email). The main purpose of the research was exploratory, thus without the intention of statistical representativeness either of the sample or the results. Instead, this kind of in-depth qualitative approach produces heuristic insights into the hidden dimensions of the studied subject, as well as provides access to the singularity and complexity of experiences. The research follows an open structure (Pires 1997:17) in which the aim is not to generalize empirically from a few cases to a whole population, but nevertheless to produce a different kind of

generalization (analytical-empirical). Moreover, following Max Weber’s (1949) comprehensive methodological proposal, the aim was to identify a few traits of a particular phenomenon (LDFs) that may help us to better understand particular similar cases, in different contexts and in the future. Following this qualitative and comprehensive approach, the targeted population included individuals with at least one friend living at a LD—because either they or their friend had left the country of origin. The sample (or corpus) is qualitative, involves multiple cases, and is constructed on the basis of its internal homogeneity (Pires 1997:73): all individuals shared the common characteristic of living (at least one) friendship at a LD. For the purpose of an initial exploratory approach to the subject, 15 online interviews were conducted, via email. This final sample was achieved through sending the interview questions to a mailing list composed mainly of the researcher’s professional and personal network, and added to via the snowball method. The respondents are between 30 and 44 years of age, 12 are women and 3 men, living in Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the UK. All have therefore a Western cultural background, as well as a high mobility profile, travelling and changing their place of residence often. Education and employment were among the key factors for relocation.

The interview focused on six particular questions, regarding the meanings of friendship, the context and length of separation, the practices for maintaining friendship, the ups and downs of friendship, the role of ICT, and the role of meaningful objects in the process of maintaining friendship. Participants were asked to think of their closest friends who currently lived at a LD and to choose the one they considered

the most intimate to refer to in their answers. All questions were answered by participants, either in English or Portuguese, and sent back to the researcher, via email, during November 2013. They varied in length and depth: some participants wrote longer and more reflexive statements, with an analytical style; others preferred a shorter, sharper, more synthetic style. However, all reflected a high commitment to the research and its subject, evidenced by the level of detail and the complexity of the stories told. They were also asked about their willingness to continue to participate in the study, and all responded positively.

The qualitative data that resulted from the email interviews were subjected to thematic content analysis that followed a semi-inductive approach: the majority of themes were suggested by the material itself (e.g., face-to-face encounters), while a few were inspired by previous knowledge (e.g., the role of ICT). The analysis focused particularly on the questions regarding the *meanings* and *practices* of friendship. A total of 40 thematic categories were constructed, covering many of the meanings previously identified in the scientific literature regarding close distance friends. This kind of semi-inductive analysis enabled exploratory new insights into the topic of LDFs.

Collecting data via email turned out to be an insightful experience in itself as it reflected the ways in which respondents communicated with their LD friends. Therefore, the method reproduced in part the conditions of the communicative context and relationship they were invited to write about. Moreover, the fact that they had to write their answers enhanced reflexivity over a subject which is, in itself, looked at as a very reflexive practice (friends “talk about them-

selves” and, by this process, “become what they are”). Some respondents mentioned explicitly the pleasure of being able to “dive into” the introspective waters of affection and memory. Another important aspect was that, having no face-to-face contact with the researcher, respondents were more at ease in expressing the negative sides of these relationships. As a whole, the method proved quite heuristic, providing illuminating information to grasp the multiple and subjective experiences of LDF.

Findings and Discussion

Not So Much of a Difference: Meanings of Intimacy Within LDFs

The analysis of the collected exploratory data shows that meanings given to intimacy within friendship do not differ much from the definitions already identified in the literature. This does not necessarily mean that those features are developed in LDFs as much and in the same way as in geographically close friendships. In fact, in all cases, intimacy had been constructed *before* relocation, the challenge being to maintain it as *intimate*, to guarantee the conditions for intimacy, *despite* the distance. The time of separation ranged from 1 year to 15 years, 10 out of 15 participants being separated for more than 5 years at the time of the survey. Maybe due to this relative homogeneity of the sample, differences in the time of separation did not suggest differences regarding the meanings and practices of friendship at a LD.

Time

Time seems to be a property attributed to intimate friends in two major ways: the duration, past ex-

perience, and memory of the friendship; and “time spent together.” The first puts intimacy in the context of (long) duration. Collected data suggested that an intimate friendship emerged as one where *length of time* and *depth* were key factors. Intimate friends are usually those who have known each other for many years, since childhood, adolescence, or another important stage of the life course, within which there was already enough time to share important events and experiences. In this way, time as a catalyzer of intimacy overlaps with the sharing of experiences and important transitions in life.

She is one of my oldest friends with whom I keep regular contact and update about my life, projects, problems, happy events. [Int1, F, 38, PT]

He is an intimate friend since we have known each other for a long time, we have accompanied each other’s growth, the entrance in adulthood, and we have shared many experiences. [Int5, F, 30, PT]

This person is my intimate friend because she walks with me for many years, we have passed through adolescence together, which is a time in life in which friends assume a very important role in our life, in which our availability to relationships is huge. [Int14, F, 40, PT]

As for “time spent together,” this factor places intimacy in the context of (shared) practices. Here, *meanings* and *practices* of friendship intersect, as major dimensions of LDFs. Intimate friends are those who have the privilege of giving to one another one of the scarcest resources in contemporary life: time. Also here, time overlaps with the sharing of experiences.

We spent many evenings together, talking about many different issues (also personal, intimate things that are not shared with many people, or only between us). [Int6, M, 30, NL]

Sharing

In accordance with what has been referred to in international literature and studies, *sharing* is an outstanding feature of the meanings given to friendship. The differentiation factor here is that LD does not seem to be represented as having affected the properties that made these friendships *intimate*. Sharing, though it may have occurred in the past, provides a very important resource for LDFs, a memory and a heritage on which LD friends can rely and feel reassured that the friendship will endure, *in spite of* the distance. This means that the basic aspects of intimacy were built in geographically close, face-to-face relationships, and that LD is a test that these friendships must face and overcome. Physical proximity, even though less possible due to geographical distance, was indispensable to the building up of intimacy, prior to the separation.

“Sharing” takes different forms. Intimacy is made out of sharing everyday life and routines; special life events and experiences; difficult moments in life; important life transitions in the life course (adolescence, adulthood, parenthood); memories and the past; personal belief systems.

Mainly during secondary school, between the 10th and 12th grades, we were together daily, we used to go and come back from school together, we attended the same class, spent free time together, with the same friends. We shared those significant experiences, like

the loss of virginity, romantic setbacks, the choice of the university degree, parents’ divorce, death of family and friends, et cetera. [Int5, F, 30, PT]

My friend is an intimate friend because he is someone with whom I can share (and I do share) my life, from the most routine event to the most significant ones... Even though we are distant and having less contact with each other, when we get together, we still share the same complicity, the same affection, the same interests and ways of seeing the world. [Int15, F, 35, PT]

Sharing life. Talking about our life, worries, joys, and challenges, and we know that on the other side there’s sincerity. I know that even though we are not so [physically] close and we don’t talk so often, nothing changes and the friendship is always there. With other people, even physically closer, I don’t have this feeling of friendship as guaranteed, but with this one I do. [Int14, F, 30, PT]

Trust

Another major aspect of intimacy that stands out in these discourses is the importance of *trust*, in line with the main findings reported in the scientific literature. Trust may be referred to in general terms, but mainly it is about total *self-disclosure*, trusting that person enough to tell them everything about oneself, without being afraid of moral judgments, as well as trusting that he/she will tell us the truth, no matter how hard it is to hear. In this sense, trust implies reflexivity, as well as reciprocity, since it is this open-hearted dialogue that enables fuller self-knowledge, but it can only happen if it goes both ways. Mutual in-depth knowledge, understanding,

and identification are also very relevant aspects of intimacy, arising directly out of trust.

The first can be considered as an intimate friend because she knows many things about me, my past, my present, and because we understand each other, as well as because even though she might not always agree with me, she is an unconditional friend...The second intimate friend can be considered intimate because I know some important matters concerning her affective life, just as she also knows about mine, and we share a mutual understanding, respect, and affects. [Int8, F, 34, PT, living in the UK]

He is a friend with whom I can speak about anything, without any limitations, and vice versa. He is one of the very few people who I could say knows me inside out. We identify with each other in many ways. [Int9, M, 44, UK, living in PT]

With him, there is no censorship, there is complete transparency, complete freedom to be (or not be), complete freedom to think. We’ve always been fully expressed with one another. And most importantly, I trust him and he trusts me. [Int15, M, 38, CA]

That person is an intimate friend because 1) we know each other so well; 2) we understand each other easily; 3) we are there for difficult times; 4) we are not afraid of telling each other things that are difficult to hear or that others may not feel at ease telling us. [Int7, F, 31, PT, living in IE]

The lack of moral judgment is represented as a condition for total disclosure and it may assume two different meanings: not being afraid to be judged

in one’s conduct; not being afraid to be judged as a friend, that is, trusting that the friend will not be judgmental and moralistic towards the friendship itself, and the way one behaves within it.

I didn’t feel that there was anything that I couldn’t say to her out loud. She was (still is) a very open-minded person and that absence of moral judgments is fundamental to me, in a friendship relation. In my personal history, that is especially relevant. The moralization of relationships (in friendship or other relations) is like rust. [Int3, F, 41, PT]

Other meanings of intimate friendships arise from the articulation of time, trust, shared experiences, reciprocity, in-depth knowledge, and understanding, such as freedom, humor, and “space,” as psychological and emotional dimensions.

She was an intimate friend because we had mental and emotional space to explore each other, I myself, her herself, in the company of each other. [Int3, F, 41, PT]

To sum up, the meanings of intimacy within LDFs do not differ substantially from those described in the literature with respect to geographically close friendships. In part, this may be explained by the fact that intimacy was built up while still in geographically close, face-to-face relationships, with the challenge in LDFs being to keep up the demanding standards of intimacy, a concept with many dimensions, some of which depend on physical proximity (spending time together, doing things together). We can therefore conclude that spatial proximity still matters, at least as far as intimacy building is concerned. Hence, how do individuals cope with

physical distance, managing to keep intimacy up to “acceptable” standards? What are the common practices developed by LD friends to keep their intimate relationships going?

Doing Friendship at a Distance: (Not) Everyday Life and Friendship Practices

Some of the practices individuals develop around LDFs are embedded in everyday life, and LDFs will endure insofar as friends can encompass the ups and downs of a daily routine which is no longer shared. Others are specifically oriented towards the “maintenance” of the friendship.

The “Hows”: Face-to-Face Encounters and ICT

Amongst the practices of friendships at a distance, the means of communication used are of utmost importance. One can distinguish between two major forms of keeping contact: face-to-face and through communication technologies (ICT, both “old,” like writing letters or talking over the telephone; and “new,” like email, Skype, and social media). However, while face-to-face meetings are reported as being one of the most important forms of nurturing intimacy, ICT provides a much less satisfactory means of bridging the gap of physical proximity. Therefore, the latter seems to still matter to LDFs, in fact, much more than popular knowledge and discourse would suggest, considering the hegemony of the “digital and technological culture.” This finding accords with John Urry’s (2002:259) thesis according to which virtual communication is unable to substitute completely for “co-present interaction,” in either one of its three significant bases: “face-to-face” (presence

with people), “face-the-place” (presence in places), and “face-the-moment” (presence at occasions and events). It seems that “co-present interaction is preferred and necessary across a wide range of tasks” (Urry 2002:259), and this also applies to LDFs.

If to Urry (2002) “corporeal proximity” seems to make “corporeal travel” necessary and desirable, face-to-face encounters seem to make LDFs at the same time possible and endurable. The occasional and contingent nature of co-presence pointed out by Urry thus emerges as a particular feature of LDFs. Regular face-to-face meetings, at least once a year, involving having dinner at each other’s homes, going out for a coffee, or just getting together “to talk,” are mentioned as some of the most important practices that help to keep LDFs alive. In the long run, they become part of a routine dictated by the calendar of visits of the distant friend to the home country. Sometimes these times of contact cannot hide changes in the nature and intensity of the relationship. It is one of the prices to pay for being at a distance, where intimacy can turn smoothly into a *nice relationship*.

Every time she comes back to Portugal, she comes over for dinner at my place, and during her stays, we always meet several times to talk about our life, projects, love life, exchange information about our work, contacts, et cetera. We have a nice relationship. [Int1, F, 38, PT]

This ritualized practice of getting together may happen either during the friend’s visits to the home country, or during a visit to the friend’s host country and foreign home. “Visiting” is a major way of telling how important that particular LDF still is: to keep it alive, individuals mobilize resources often

difficult to gather, such as time and money. It is usually a two-person event, which enables the re-enacting of intimacy.

I have already visited him in Berlin and he comes to Portugal at least once a year, to spend a few days. So, when he comes to Portugal, we always arrange a few meetings to catch up, face-to-face. When we meet, we do exactly the same we used to do before he left, we go to the movies, to a pub, or out for dinner. Most of all, we talk. [Int12, F, 35, PT]

This last summer, on our way back to Lisbon, we stopped for a week in Paris, where she lives. We stayed at her place, joined families. It was very good. We talked, as always. We were together. I was very much welcomed. [Int3, F, 41, PT]

A similar importance given to face-to-face episodic encounters is reported by Mason (2004) in relation to Pakistani families living in the UK. The regular visits to Pakistan emerge as a way not only of recognizing and maintaining bonds and ties among kin living at LDs but also of building a kinship narrative of the transnational family. Like Mason’s Pakistani families, the participants in this study also expected these face-to-face encounters to be a regular occurrence, thus guaranteeing a sequence that enables the construction of a shared friendship biography. It is something not only to be remembered (lived in the past) but also to be anticipated and looked forward to (lived in the future).

At other times, new stages in the life course and new actors in “the scene” of private life make it difficult for intimate friends to meet alone. The participation

of these new actors in “the scene of friendship” is not always clear. It may be seen as an addition to the already existing friendship that does not endanger its privileged intimate nature (see: former quote, Int12). It can also be presented casually, with the meanings and implications for intimacy between friends not being clear. For instance, does it happen because there is no other possibility? Or rather because they want to share their loved ones and bring them into “the friendship scene?” The ways in which these new relations and contexts hamper intimacy must be further explored.

Whenever he comes to Portugal (or, at least, whenever it is possible), we meet. We do it just the two of us, as well as with his girlfriend, now his wife, or with other friends, at dinner parties, going out at night, et cetera. [Int5, F, 30, PT]

However, this contingent and rare physical proximity often underlines the persistence of physical distance that stands between friends, in real life. Face-to-face encounters become symbolic spaces of “doing friendship,” metaphors of what intimacy should continue to be, even at a LD.

Whenever my friend comes to Portugal, we try to get together, even if it is only for 5 minutes...Not always is it possible to meet, but we try, even if it is only for that short time. Sometimes it is a symbolic encounter, I feel that, but it’s worth it! [Int11, F, 30, PT]

While these practices of “gathering” and “meeting” relate more to ways of reproducing the routines of daily life, which can no longer be shared every day, other practices are more connected to special events

in the annual (social and personal) calendar, such as festivities (New Year’s Eve, birthdays) or scheduled breaks in the work routine (holidays). Spending holidays together becomes an important way of keeping alive the feeling of shared intimacy and daily routines. Concentrated in time and place, holidays are a privileged locus for re-enacting everyday life practices and sharing experiences. They are also the exceptional experience to the rule of a not-anymore-shared daily life.

We have spent holidays together; often covering great distances and paying for each other’s travel costs if needed. [Int9, M, 44, UK, living in PT]

We even spent holidays together, and New Year’s Eves, for instance. I think it’s what’s possible, given the context. [Int5, F, 30, PT]

When a face-to-face contact and meetings are not possible, that is, for the great majority of time during a regular year, “old,” as well as “new” forms of LD communication are used. Email contact is the most cited means of communication, substituting for telephone calls and writing letters, in the long run. As time passes, telephone calls become reserved for special occasions, or to when something serious happens, something that requires immediate attention. These results are in line with those of Wilding (2006), who showed how ICT contributes to improving the quality and quantity of contact and communication; of Wang and Wellman (2010), who underlined the role of ICT in enhancing social connectivity and increases in number of friends; or Utz (2007), who demonstrated the way ICT makes it easier to maintain relationships over distances.

We mainly talk through the Internet, plus phone calls and texts when we want it to be special; birthdays. [Int2, F, 33, PT]

We keep regular contact, though we don’t speak by Skype as often as we would like to. But, if something important comes up, we talk. Also by email and Facebook. [Int4, F, 31, PT]

Skype and social media (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp) are also mentioned. Sometimes they stand as specific new forms of communication, while at other times they replace older forms of communication.

We used to regularly write (very long) letters to each other, then we began exchanging correspondence in the form of lengthy cassette recordings, finally we adapted to email. [Int9, M, 44, UK, living in PT]

We write each other long emails (about the topics we used to talk about during evenings we met), and stay in touch with WhatsApp. [Int6, M, 30, NL]

However, contact is often irregular and mentioned as not being enough, or being a weak substitute for face-to-face, in the presence of the other, contact. Thus, these exploratory data suggest that spatial and physical distance still matters to LDFs. Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that we are talking about intimate friendships which go a long way back in the individual’s personal history, with intimacy having been built upon many years of mutual physical presence. While this paper is not focused on understanding the specificities of friendships built mainly on the basis of ICT from the beginning, other studies have extensively explored the

topic (e.g., see: Boase et al. 2006; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Bryant and Marmo 2012).

Common to both major means of keeping contact (face-to-face and ICT), *talk* is a determining feature of LDFs. As mentioned above, *sharing* (experiences, feelings, emotions, and time) is an important dimension of intimacy. It is therefore not surprising that the content of talks with LD friends is also structured around this issue. Talk has the purpose of keeping that sharing experience alive, and therefore becomes a major feature of LDF practices. Often, this act of talking is self-referential, in the sense that friends talk about (and share) the friendship itself. The meaning of this tautological practice is uncertain and must be further explored, specifically when LDs are concerned. However, it can be advanced that part of its role is to restate the special status of the friendship, as built upon particular intimate ties, thus reassuring both parties involved in the face of the “threat” of distance. This seems to emerge as a particular feature of LDFs.

We usually discuss our lives and the lives of the people close to us, how we are feeling, what we plan for the future. [Int2, F, 33, PT]

The pretexts and subjects differ, but they are always related to our life (mainly internal life), problems that each one of us are facing at the moment, things that we wish to think through with someone of trust, advice we want to ask for. We talk a lot about life, friendship, romantic relationships, work, ourselves; of the things we want to change, of the obstacles, but also of successes. [Int10, F, 40, PT, living in CA]

The burden of distance is then managed through the mastering of the use of talk and time, trying to condense all relevant slices of life into confined moments. This seems to be another specific feature of LDFs: the capacity to generate inventive ways of keeping a relationship going with less frequent (though not necessarily less intense) contact. The extent to which close distance friends use the same kind of strategies is to be further explored, but one can expect that they may be less of a resource, to the extent that physical proximity erases the need for exceptional acts and moments.

The “Whys”: “Catching Up,” “Be There When Necessary,” and “No Reason in Particular”

A second important dimension of friendship practices is related to the reasons pointed out by individuals for maintaining contact with their LD friends. Three main reasons stand out as particularly relevant in describing the content of these friendship practices: “catching up,” affective and emotional support, and the absence of a need for particular reasons to enter into contact. All of these are very much based on dialogue, as “talking” to friends becomes the easiest way of keeping updated on important issues and events, either in person or through ICT.

“Catching up” thus seems to be an overdeveloped practice in LDFs: it is almost as if with geographically closer friends it becomes more difficult to justify such a practice, made redundant by the constancy of physical presence. Which means that, ironically, LD friends may be more up to date with certain kinds of information about each other than close distance ones, since the latter may not feel the same need to explicitly “catch up.”

Regular emails with a lot of catching up on our daily lives (maybe monthly?); regular visits; catching up in person as often as possible (every 4 months). Quality of catching up generally is very good. [Int7, F, 31, PT, living in IE]

We try to keep up-to-date with each other's lives and spirits and state of mind. We make a special effort to be in touch when we know the other is going through a significant moment in life. [Int9, M, 44, UK, living in PT]

Emotional support, being present when important things happen in each other's lives, is also an important preoccupation of LD friends. As if distance automatically impairs the ability of friends to provide the necessary support in times of need, LD friends spend extra energy on reassuring themselves (and their friends) that, despite distance, they are still able to provide assistance, even if on different terms and mostly of an emotional kind.

We try to talk as much as possible and keep updated in relation to each other's life, share things, ask for advice, et cetera. We also get in contact often when we need some advice or help related to work. [Int5, F, 30, PT]

This connects partially with what Mason (2004) found in her study of Pakistani transnational families paying visits to kin in Pakistan, as well as Urry's definition of co-presence as “face-the-moment,” with travel being a means of attending and experiencing special moments. The difference, however, is that while Mason (2004:425) highlights mainly special family events (weddings, deaths, funerals) or religious ones, and Urry (2002:262) mentions “political, artistic, celebratory, academic, or sporting occasions,” emphasizing a collective dimension, LD

friends tend to focus on special “internal” moments or events in life, related to emotional well-being, self-reflexivity, and personal development.

She really likes to talk to me about troubles, nice things she has with guys she spent time with, talk about her family, et cetera. It's very intimate contact, and we maintain that contact via extensive emails and WhatsApp. A few weeks ago she had issues with a guy she slept with, and I could comfort her via WhatsApp and email (it also helps her if she can write down what she experiences and how she feels about it). [Int6, M, 30, NL]

The need for permanent reinforcement or restatement of the special status of LDFs is also visible in the way LD friends stress that they do not need any particular pretext to get in touch with each other. The statement is that friendship is, in itself, a sufficient “pretext” to make contact, in spite of the LD. However, behind this “bright side of everlasting friendship,” that does not seem to need specific routines, a darker side emerges: frequency of contact is reported as irregular, raising the shadows of friendships eroding and fading away. And although individuals are quick to explicitly declare that such irregular (or almost non-existent) contact does not affect the friendship, it is something that requires further exploration.

I can't indicate a precise frequency of contact. We can stay for a month or two without talking, and after that we can talk every day. It depends on our lives, whether we have or not news in our lives we wish to tell and share, or just if only we miss each other and feel the urge of knowing about each other. Therefore, there is no particular motif or subject. [Int12, F, 35, PT]

The Impacts of Distance

None of the participants in this study explicitly mentioned the positive impacts of LD on their friendships. Rather, they developed an ambivalent discourse, both denying major negative impacts and referring to eventual negative or neutral impacts. In fact, saying that LD may not be fatal to a friendship is different from saying that people think positively about living a long way from each other. It is possible that the participants in this study see LD as something that may even benefit a friendship, whilst still missing their LD friends and preferring to live closer. The general concern was to underline that LD had not negatively impacted on the *quality* and *nature* of the bond.

I don't think we have a space and time distance between us. What we have/are is just the same. [Int3, F, 41, PT]

The contact is not very regular though from both sides (mine and theirs), but that does not make me feel less close to them. [Int8, F, 34, PT, living in the UK]

In tandem with these declarations contradictory feelings emerged regarding *time* (considered as not being “enough”). Confronted with the need to deal with the insurmountable distance, friends try to adjust their expectations in regard to the quality of their bonds, as well as the frequency of contact. Lack of a shared daily life, common experiences, and time spent together emerge as major obstacles to keeping intimate friendships as they “used to be.” LD friends then tend to rely on memory (past shared experiences) and the belief that common values will endure. However, as social science studies

have shown, common values emerge from common experiences, therefore making it difficult for friends who develop very different lifestyles to keep their intimacy other than on the basis of *past* and *memory* (Adams 1998; Adams and Graham 1998).

We have a nice relationship, but I should say that it is difficult to have the same quality relationship that we had when we were students and we met in the coffee shop every weekend. I believe it is because we have different careers and we live in different places, we do not share so many experiences as before. Though I believe we still share a lot of common values and goals and those old shared experiences (memories now). [Int1, F, 38, PT]

This feeling of imminent danger or loss haunts the discourses of LD friends and is indirectly mentioned in terms of regret for the lower frequency of contacts. The counterpart to this, as mentioned above, is that distance also provides the justification for regular “catch ups” that keep friends up to date.

Nevertheless, the fact that all contacts must now be “condensed,” in the sense that friends must be able to catch up on each other's important events and daily life in (very) few encounters, is also regretted. Physical contact is also missed, as a form of interpersonal exchange that involves emotional investment and return.

I feel that we end up by telling things in a more accelerated way because there's no time to go deep into many subjects and because, as there isn't a more daily contact, we end up by not sharing our daily life, but rather the most important things that happen to us. [Int11, F, 30, PT]

It is also when asked about the “ups and downs” of these friendships that the importance of distance arises as an obstacle, as something that brings more complexity to the already difficult process of managing conflicts within LDFs. LD is seen as aggravating misunderstandings, given the impossibility of being closer and more attentive to the other’s well-being. This happens despite the fact that LDFs provide far less opportunity for minor bickering and the kind of grating on each other that can come from very frequent contact. Moreover, distance also becomes an obstacle when there are happy moments to share. Even though friends try to adjust to what they describe as the “new state” of their friendship, these critical turning points make more salient the need for physical intimate contact, such as hugs, verbal and non-verbal contact (such as gaze), or simply the constant presence of the other. Through all these means friends validate each other’s experiences, in a dialectical and reflexive process. Since certain turning points are critical to the personal life course and identity formation, involving multiple readjustments to social roles (parental, professional, conjugal, etc.), LD intimate friends are particularly missed in the reflexivity process that is then embarked upon. These are certainly aspects that deserve further exploration.

About the downturns, I will be “egocentric” and talk about the special events in my life: the birth of my children and the fact that my friend was not in Portugal for neither of them. How I missed sharing with her, live, individually, each one of the births. Of course, I have sent her photos, we spoke on the phone, but I missed very much her hug, her gaze to them. Then, it was a time of discovery, for me, and sharing came

as a natural thing...but it was not possible to write her entire emails about each one of my children’s deeds. Besides, that is not our kind of friendship. I miss her company and her presence. [Int13, F, 40, PT]

Final Remarks

Within this paper I have discussed the implications of LD for intimate friendships, from a sociological qualitative perspective. Two dimensions of this subject have been explored: the meanings individuals give to intimacy in the context of their LDFs, and the friendship practices they develop in coping with distance to (re)construct intimacy. Qualitative data were analyzed with the purpose of bringing heuristic insights to the topic and adding to the definitions of intimacy already identified in the scientific literature, such as the importance of *time* spent together, *trust*, *self-disclosure*, and *sharing experiences*. One important point is that, amongst the friendships reported, intimacy had always been constructed prior to the critical moment of physical separation and increased geographical distance. Thus, time also referred to the fact that these friendships went back a long way in personal history and involved a memory of shared past experiences, which played a key role both in defining these relationships as intimate, and investing different kinds of resources in maintaining them.

Practices of LDF are deeply rooted in the expectations friends develop in relation to each other and how they readjust to the experience of living at a distance. One of the major contributions of this paper is related to the persistence of the importance of co-presence, face-to-face meetings, contacts and interactions, to “catching up” intimacy. This seems

to be a particular feature of LDFs: in spite of the frequency of use of ICT, and the acknowledgement of their importance in bridging the gap of physical proximity, face-to-face meetings are reported as crucial for re-enacting and nurturing intimacy. A result that agrees with authors such as Urry (2002:259), according to whom “co-present interaction is preferred and necessary across a wide range of tasks.” Despite the fact that LD media are very much used, namely, those made possible by technology such as telephone, emails, chat programs, Skype, only when friends “get together” do they feel that their intimacy has been completely re-enacted. As one of the participants stated, “a Skype chat can never replace the real deal.” Significant differences are therefore perceived between face-to-face contacts and technologically mediated ones, when it comes to sharing routines and daily lives, but mainly when it comes to managing and solving conflict. Moreover, with face-to-face contact being perceived as so essential in maintaining levels of intimacy and commitment within LDFs, and with those contacts being so limited in time (often once a year or less), friends develop multiple strategies to cope with the restrictions imposed by distance, among which is the “contraction” of interaction in episodic events or meetings, that condense the essentials of “being an intimate friend.” In this sense, LDF practices are closer to rituals than routines, since they carry an important symbolic dimension and involve an affective commitment that contributes to maintaining the identity of the group (Fiese 2006) or the dyad.

Another contribution of this paper is to highlight the importance of talk as a specific friendship practice, particularly within LDFs. The mastery of talk

that concentrates relevant slices of life in confined moments is a particular strategy for “catching up” intimacy among LD friends. Talk is a self-referential act: friends talk about (and share) the friendship itself. When LD friends talk, they do it in a particular way, covering mainly bigger issues, as well as the friendship itself, in a self-reflexive and somewhat compensatory practice that contributes to maintaining the relationship. These discourses may become more demonstrative and are marked by high levels of self-disclosure, suggesting a *performative practice of friendship* that avoids the dangers of drained personal memory and affections due to geographical mobility and distance.

Another strategy used to cope with distance is related to extraordinary events by which everyday life practices and sharing of experiences are re-enacted, such as spending holidays together, organizing special dinner parties, or spending Christmas or New Year’s Eve together. Through these extraordinary events, friends *display* (Finch 2007) their relationships, thus re-enacting and confirming their special and intimate status. This is another contribution of this paper: the relevance of looking at friendship from the point of view not only of practices (what friends *do*) but also of display (what friends convey about their friendships). This insight adds to the literature about friendship in general, and LDFs in particular, adding insights from the sociology of the family. As Finch (2007) claimed with respect to families, friendships also have to be “displayed,” as well as “done,” with displaying meaning that friends’ actions have to be both conveyed to and understood by relevant others. LDFs thus seem to have a particular capacity to generate inventive ways of keeping

a relationship going with less frequent (though not necessarily less intense) contact.

The reasons attributed to the contact they sustain at a LD are closely related to the meanings given to intimacy. Contact is oriented towards giving and receiving emotional support, sharing experiences, and, most of all, “catching up” on each other’s lives. Also, LD friends tend to rate their relationships as “being the same as before,” with their nature not being affected by distance. Therefore, they tend to get in touch “for no reason at all,” just because they feel the urge, no “excuses” needed, “just get in touch because we remember each other, because we miss each other, and because some times are good for both of us to talk.” This is rooted in a process of the *naturalization of friendship*, as an ever-lasting, reciprocal, personal, and non-instrumental kind of relationship. However, this bright and easy-going side of LDFs, derived from its naturalization (in spite of the intense reflexivity that surrounds it), hides a darker one, that begins to emerge when talking about difficult moments lived throughout the relationship. The memory of those turning points brings to the surface the need for physical contact, non-verbal communication (eye contact), or simply of a face-to-face talk to resolve problems and conflicts.

One of the limitations of this study is the homogeneity of its sample in terms of social and cultural background, being mainly composed of highly educated, white, urban, and western individuals. Future studies should enlarge the scope of the empirical material, both regarding the characteristics of the sample, and the items covered by the interview questions. Diversity regarding age, gender, social

and educational background, ethnicity, or stage of the life course should be explored in the future.

Future directions for the study of LDFs should also include the relevance of gender to build and display LDFs, namely, the relationship between gender and self-disclosure. This topic has been widely explored in quantitative studies, but nevertheless still lacks the richness of meaning that a qualitative approach may bring. Other than differences, commonalities between men’s and women’s perceptions and practices in relation to LDFs should be explored, with respect to changes in gender roles in post-industrial societies. The collected data also suggested other important aspects of LDFs that deserve to be explored in future research, such as conflict resolution, the role of (shared) memory in managing relations, the role of material culture (e.g., objects), the effects on, and of, the contexts that surround those relations, or the ways they evolve across their own trajectory (with “ups and downs”). Finally, another important aspect to develop in the future would be the “extreme cases” perspective. For instance, considering those for whom silence and distance tune harmoniously to entail better friendships, and how this relates to memory and its role in the reassurance of the self. The nature of such diversity in ways of living intimacy at a distance is discussed by one of the participants in this study:

[Since separation] I have done nothing more than calling him once every one or two years. That’s all I’ve done. Physical contact is now very limited, but contact through memories never stopped and is still very vivid. Ups and downs never happened since we were separated, ups and downs used to happen when we were clos-

er, in contact with one another. Since we’ve split, things have always been great between us. Never had any issue, never had a disagreement, no ups, no downs, just the sweetness of fantastic memories. [Int14, M, 38, CA]

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***Matachines* in the Midwest: Religion and Identity in the American Heartland**

Abstract This article examines how a community of recent Mexican migrants and their families use popular religious practices to sustain a sense of ethnic Mexican identity in a predominantly White rural Catholic Church where their growing presence and influence are changing how Catholicism is practiced. In this rural setting, participation in a *Matachines* dance tradition functions to bring the Mexican community together, place before them a common tradition uniquely their own, and build up distinctive emotions in them around ritual traditions which in turn serve as a pillar of strength for maintaining their ethnic identity through the perpetuation of religious practices and symbols. More specifically, two dimensions are of central focus in this article: tensions arising from ethnic expressions through the institutional Church and the contested meanings of specific rituals and religious symbols such as *Matachines* and *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork, this research presents evidence of a modern transformation of U.S. religious practices as a result of immigration from Mexico into the Midwestern United States.

Keywords Identity; Religion; Immigration; Ethnicity; *Matachines*

Stephen R. Christ is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Truman State University. In his research, Stephen examines the everyday experiences of Mexican immigrants in the United States that contribute to Mexican-American identity formation. More specifically, how Mexican-Americans experience daily life at home, at work, in public life and in how these experiences impact their sense of personal identity, their relationships with natives, their interactions with their families and community, and the identity work that goes into producing such categories and social worlds.

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This article contributes to the growing body of research on the social impacts of immigrant Latino/as on U.S. culture and religious identity. Much of this existing research focuses on religious practices, organizations, and beliefs of immigrant Latino/as in the Southwestern Borderlands. These scholars have noted the difficulties of maintaining religious values, beliefs, and practices when congruently adapting to new surroundings in the United States. These findings are of particular note due to the growing numbers of immigrant Latino/as in the United States. Moreover, these findings concerning the culture shock and resulting clash which frames

most immigrant-native interactions leave out a significant portion of the U.S. Latino/as population, those living in the many new destinations in the Midwestern United States.

The influence of the Mexican immigrant population is beginning to reshape the social, political, and demographic landscape of the United States outside of the Southwestern Borderlands (Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Zuniga and Hernandez-Leon 2005; Saenz, Cready, and Morales 2007). However, over the last twenty years, little has been written about the experiences, group identities, assimilation, and social integration of immigrant Latino/as, particularly in the Midwest (Waters and Jimenez 2005). Most ethnographic research on Mexicans in the United States has focused on the communities of the Southwestern Borderlands (Macias 2004; Massey and Sanchez 2006; Gomez 2007). There is no question that studies of the Borderlands are relevant to Mexican-American immigrant settlement, but there is clear evidence that migration patterns and immigrant experiences have drastically changed over the past two decades, which requires scholarly focus in order to properly understand contemporary Mexican immigration to the United States (Durand, Massey, and Charvet 2000; Kandel and Cromartie 2004).

For example, in 1910, 95% of Mexican-Americans lived in the Southwest; in 1990, that percentage had reduced to 83%, and in 2000, it decreased to 75% (Guzman 2001; Saenz, Cready, and Morales 2007), leaving 25% of Mexicans spread throughout other regions of the United States. The most recent estimates of Mexican-Americans place the population at roughly thirty million individuals (Tafoya 2004-

2005). According to these figures, this accounts for roughly seven and a half million Mexican-Americans living in areas which previously had little to no Mexican immigration such as the Midwest. The availability of jobs in construction, agriculture, and animal processing plants is commonly attributed with the increase of outward migration from the Southwest and the development of communities in rural areas (Kandel and Gibbs 2005).

Continuing with the trend of new immigrant gateways, 21% of Mexican immigrants have begun to settle in rural settings (Arreola 2004; Lichter et al. 2007). Such migration of Mexican immigrants to rural areas in the Midwest has not occurred without opposition. Similar to the plight of African-Americans during the Great Migration, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans across the Midwestern states have been subjected to segregation, isolation, and physical violence (Fuhlhage 2007; Lichter et al. 2007). In rural areas where some immigrant Mexican communities are settling, this same opposition is occurring to this day. Faced with this reality, immigrant populations oftentimes create tight-knit, closely connected communities by which they structure their lives and attempt to maintain a sense of normalcy.

One of the major institutional foundations which remains consistent in Mexican immigrant transition to the U.S. is the Roman Catholic Church. Noting this phenomenon in her own research, Maria Arbelaez (2002) writes,

Deeply embedded in Mexicans is their affiliation to popular religiosity, in particular their devotion to the

Virgin of Guadalupe, religious drama, and to the memorial of the Day of the Dead. These celebrations have crossed the border without the formality of a visa, ventured ever further north, and have surfaced in the Heartland of America. [p. 14]

Mexican-Americans maintain their ethnic identity through religious practice despite being thousands of miles away from their homeland. In this sense, religion plays multiple roles in the lives of immigrants struggling to maintain an ethnic identity. In particular, this article will theoretically analyze the political, social, and religious integration of a small group of rural Mexican immigrants into a rural and predominantly White Catholic Church in the Midwestern United States. Special emphasis is placed on the responses of White natives to changes in local organizational religious practices, including language of prayer, days of celebration, and involvement in the church leadership hierarchy. Furthermore, two dimensions are of central interest: tensions arising from ethnic expressions through the institutional Church and the contested meanings of specific rituals and religious symbols such as *Matachines* and *La Virgen de Guadalupe* in the lives of immigrants and Natives.

Catholicism as an Ethnic Marker

Previous studies of new immigrant communities (Menjívar 1999; Yang and Ebaugh 2001) have found that religion serves as a major source of immigrant ethnic identity preservation. When describing the link between religion and ethnicity, some scholars (Stout 1975) go so far as to describe the association as “ethnoreligion.” Immigrant proclivity to join re-

ligious communities can be attributed to a range of motivations. Desire for religious and spiritual support, the ability to spend time with other ethnics, and the development of social networks all serve as pull factors by local congregations (Yang and Ebaugh 2001; Cadge and Ecklund 2006). Some ethnic groups (Amish, Jews, etc.) emphasize religion as the core determinant of identity (Gordis and Ben-Horin 1991). Others use religion, as Yang and Ebaugh (2001) suggest, as a means of preserving cultural traditions and ethnic boundaries. This is to say that religious fervor in immigrant communities serves two purposes: the first being an actual devotion to the religious symbols and rituals, and secondly, to create a cultural support system for immigrants by filtering external influences of mainstream American culture in order to preserve communal solidarity in an ethnic immigrant community.

Phillip Hammond and Kee Warner’s (1993) development of “religious ethnicity” may best describe the intertwining of Mexican ethnicity and religious faith. Mexican immigrants often situate themselves under the umbrella of the Catholic Church. Religion and spirituality have enabled Mexican-Americans to create a distinct marker of ethnic identity. However, as Irene Blea (1988) points out, the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church alone cannot be attributed to the development of this group identity. In order to understand religious devotion among Mexican immigrants, elements of indigenous religions and other cultural influences must be included. It is here where *Matachines* traditions and public devotion to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* distinguishes Mexican immigrants from all other groups, including American Catholics. It is the practice of this “ethnoreligion”

which maintains a unified immigrant community and allows for the perpetuation of ethnicity by the synthesis of religious practices and doctrine and religious needs.

La Virgen de Guadalupe and Matachines Traditions

Matachines are religious dancers who perform in predominantly Mexican and Mexican-American Roman Catholic ceremonies on the December 12th feast day of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. Through traditional dance, the drama of Montezuma, an Aztec king, and La Malinche, an infamous historical figure in Mexico heralded by some as a heroine and others as a traitor to her people, is presented. The dance group is a very organized unit with each member playing an important role in the overall presentation of the dance. The dance is an account of good (Montezuma and La Malinche) versus bad (Hernán Cortés) with the good side prevailing.

The dances are always performed with an image of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* present. One aspect of the dance that remains unknown is its exact origin. Similarly, the history of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is another hotly debated topic. According to some historians, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* was represented as a Christianized Tonantzin, a major goddess of the Aztecs, to convert the indigenous populations to Catholicism. Emphasizing this argument, Jacques Lafaye (1976:214) wrote in *Quezacoatl and Guadalupe*, “as the Christians built their first churches with the rubble and the columns of the ancient pagan temples, so they often borrowed pagan customs for their own cult purposes.” According to Catholic tradition,

Juan Diego, an indigenous laborer and Christian convert, was on his way to church to celebrate the Holy Mass on December 9th, 1531. On his way, he passed Tepeyac hill, a region associated with the Aztec goddess, Tonantzin. It was there that he heard wonderful music and saw the most beautiful women he had ever seen. She had dark skin, as did Juan and other indigenous peoples of the region, and was radiating light all around her as she introduced herself to him as the Blessed Virgin Mary. The color of her skin was an important symbol in itself. White skin was associated with the Spaniards and carried with it a connotation of a superior class. By having brown skin, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* was associating herself with the indigenous peoples and showing that they were just as important in God’s eyes. Due to this, the *Matachines* dance is both symbolically and institutionally now rooted in the Roman Catholic Church even though its roots were clearly linked to indigenous, pagan sources, as well as rooted in European dance traditions. It now reflects fundamental aspects of Mexican culture and identity.

In general, most scholars agree that the *Matachines* derives from a genre of medieval European folk dramas symbolizing conflict between Christians and Moors, brought to the New World by the Spaniards as a vehicle for Christianizing the Indians (Kurath 1949; Delgado 2007; Rodriguez 2007). Iberian elements merged with aboriginal forms in central Mexico, and the syncretic complex was transmitted to Indians farther north, including the Rio Grande Pueblos, probably via Mexican Indians who accompanied the Spanish colonizers (Rodriguez 2007). As the elements began to merge, the tradition of *Matachines* dancing as it is understood

today began to form. Over time the traditions underwent gradual changes. Ethnic studies scholars (Kelly and Karner 1994) argue that ethnic groups at times invent traditions like this to reinforce their group identity. The *Matachines* dance group in this study would serve as a representative example of this “invented tradition.” The dancers, in a way, are history teachers providing what they believe to be the history of their people. Although no empirical or historical data support their claims of the origin of the tradition, the *Matachines* traditions in this rural community serve an integral function. They bring the Mexican community together, place before them a common tradition uniquely their own, and build up distinctive emotions in them around those ritual traditions which in turn serve as a pillar of strength for maintaining their ethnic identity through the perpetuation of religious practices and symbols.

Data and Methods

To investigate the social, political, and religious integration of a small group of Mexican immigrants in the rural Midwest, an ethnographic study consisting of 30 interviews and two years of participant observation at a rural Midwestern Catholic Church was conducted. Given the focus on new immigrant integration and *Matachines* traditions, I consciously sought out potential respondents who met the following criteria. First, all were first generation immigrants from Mexico. Second, all respondents were practicing Catholics in the parish sponsoring the *Matachines* traditions. This lead to slight complications in the data collection process as some participants and observers of the *Matachines* celebrations were not Catholics but fol-

lowers of various other protestant denominations. While not pursuing participation in the *Matachines* traditions for religious reasons, these participants often cited a desire for a familiar cultural experience and opportunity to interact with fellow immigrants as their main determinant for joining the dance group, highlighting the dual function of the dance group as a means of achieving religious/spiritual fulfillment and social networking possibilities. Finally, all respondents were active members of the church *Matachines* dance group who had performed at the annual feast day celebration of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* in the past year.

Participant observation was a vital tool for producing an accurate representation of the integration of the new immigrant community. Over the two year time span of this study, I immersed myself in the local community and befriended several of the respondents. I believe it was my acceptance into this tight-knit and more or less closed community that greatly impacted the data I was able to be exposed to and gather. Through my attendance at weekly *Matachines* dance practices and semi-monthly performances at both religious ceremonies, and in one case, a second grade child of a dancer’s special show-and-tell day at school, as well as various church celebrations, bible study sessions, and various other Hispanic Ministry group meetings, I was able to observe firsthand the integration experiences of Mexican immigrants. In general, the audience for such performances was predominantly composed of Mexican immigrants and their families. A trend of tensions between religious ritual synchronization involving mainstream Midwestern Catholic traditions and Mexican migrant Catholic

traditions often led to segregated audiences and limited performance venue opportunities in the Church.

Sample

The *Matachines* dance group is composed of roughly forty adult full-time members. Many children of dancers are themselves participants, but participate on a less frequent basis, often preferring to play sports with friends across the church gymnasium from dance practice. All members who participated in this study were practicing Catholics. None of the men interviewed possessed a college degree. Almost all were manual laborers in one form or another, working as gardeners, construction workers, and butchers. The women interviewed were no different from the men when it comes to education as again none possessed a college degree. The women worked primarily as homemakers, with only a small minority in the labor force working in the service industry as maids, waitresses, and seamstresses. I found that all respondents lived working class lives and possessed little economic capital, but instead relied heavily on their social capital within the small immigrant community for support. However, respondents never complained about lack of money or hardships associated with jobs or finances. These dancers were proud of their Mexican heritage and identity and were confident of their religious values as being the most important factor in their lives. Spanish was the preferred language of most respondents as almost half were unable to speak English.

The rural *Matachines* dance group is located in the Midwest. The site was selected for this study be-

cause of the rural nature of the new immigrant destination. As I learned through my interviews, the community is relatively new with most Mexican immigration to the area occurring within the last ten years. Situated one hour away from a major city and Mexican population, the respondents in this study answer are relatively isolated from contact with Mexican immigrants outside of their small community. In their local church, St. Stephen’s, the Mexican immigrants constitute a tiny fraction of the congregation of roughly 800 parishioners, of which approximately 95% are White.

The testimonies provided by respondents in this study are not academic discourse; rather, they are personal accounts and perceptions of the individuals at hand. The data produced by this study lend themselves to diverse interpretations as to the significance of immigrant Mexican status in the Midwestern United States, the role of Catholic Church in assimilation of immigrants, and the agency of immigrants in shaping their “American” experience. However, this study is not intended to represent any particular immigrant population, nationality, or religious community. The purpose of this study was not to create a holistic generalization of the Midwestern Mexican immigrant experience. Instead, the data highlight one particular context of Mexican immigrant integration in the rural Midwest and reflect issues relevant to the respondents in this study.

Results

The findings in this study represent the integration of a rural Mexican immigrant community into mainstream local religious culture. Religion, ethnic

traditions, language, and work all proved to be common factors which united the rural community and allowed for the perpetuation of Mexican norms and traditions despite the vast distance between the respondents, other Mexican immigrant communities in the Midwest, and their homeland. Participation in *Matachines* dance traditions as both a dancer and observer functioned to transmit traditional Mexican cultural and religious ideologies of U.S. born children of Mexican migrants, reinforce traditional customs and norms of behavior, and in many ways served to maintain a sense of normalcy for Mexican migrants so far from home. All of these positive functions represent the benefit of participating in *Matachines* traditions in order to facilitate cohesion within the new immigrant community and to produce religious and spiritual fulfillment.

Religious Identities

Religion was of primary importance to the Mexican immigrants in their new congregation. An overwhelming consensus of respondents cited their religious values as a pillar of Mexican identity. Indeed, the dancers in the *Matachines* dance group participated in the dance group because they felt it is the best way they could possibly venerate *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and “be Mexican” and thus “good ethnics” (Waters 1990; Macias 2004). The respondents were proud of their heritage and historical connections to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and repeatedly cited Her as the basis of their faith and values. While the dance performances were often within the confines of a Catholic Church, the connection to indigenous pagan religions is ever present. This once again reflects the synchronization of religious beliefs and

cultural practices. In this case, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* served not only as a source of inspiration for the dancers but also as a symbol of ethnic pride. Many Mexican-Americans attempt to learn about their ancestral past through their devotion to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and practice of Catholicism (Macias 2004). However, this surge of public displays of religiosity is rather recent to the rural parish in this study. According to a brief history of the St. Stephen’s Catholic Church’s Hispanic Ministry’s development provided on the church website, starting in September of 2000, various parishioners began to make a conscious effort to include the growing Latino/a population, particularly Mexican immigrants, who have been arriving in the Midwest for various reasons mentioned in interviews, including: work, family, and security. The church website provides a detailed description of the process by which they assessed the need to integrate Latino/as into the parish. They began going door-to-door where they knew there were Hispanic families. They created a survey with some questions including: Are you Catholic? Would you like to have a Mass in Spanish? There is a Catholic Church here, St. Stephen’s, and the priest is willing to let us have Mass in Spanish. How many members are in your family? This group obtained the addresses and phone numbers of individuals in the area wanting a Mass in Spanish. In about two weeks they had compiled a list of roughly one hundred families from the surrounding area interested in having Mass in Spanish.

The common theme that existed between all interviewees is the sense of religious identity that they feel *La Virgen de Guadalupe* fulfills in them. One respondent, Rogelio, commented, “*La Virgen* helps me.

She watches to make sure I am okay.” This respondent receives a sense of security from his devotion. Throughout the interview he commonly would go into long stories to help emphasize his points. It seems as if every time he is in need of something, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* provides it for him. “I don’t know if you know, but *La Virgen* is the patron saint of Mexico. She is the protector of all Latinos, especially Mexicans. She came to us and showed us the way.” This respondent identifies completely with *La Virgen*. When asked for the source of this deep devotion and faith, he responded, “*La Virgen* gave me everything I have, so I pray the rosary every day to thank her. You have to give thanks.” This attitude transcended almost all interviews. Respondent after respondent gave thanks to *La Virgen* and attributed their blessings to her help. Statements such as, *La Virgen me trajo a Jesucristo* [“*La Virgen* brought me to Jesus”] and *La Virgen es la madre de todos los Latino/as* [“*La Virgen* is the mother of all Latino/as”] were very common among respondents in the dance group.

Having been immersed in this rural, predominantly White Catholic church for two years, I was able to investigate the actual daily and weekly practice of Catholicism among parishioners. This yielded interesting differences between Mexicans and Whites. When asked if they have noticed any differences in the Catholic traditions practiced between Mexican and Whites, one respondent, Luis, stated,

When they come, they sit, they don’t do anything. When it is time to cross themselves, they move their hand, but they don’t have the same emotion we do. We are there to celebrate and give thanks. Sometimes I don’t know why they come.

I must note that none of the respondents felt any hostility towards parishioners who did this. All felt that the emotion was lacking, but at no point was the faith of any parishioner in question. This proclivity to connect emotion with religiosity resembles that of the African-American community Du Bois (1899) observed. For the respondents in the study, the *Matachines* dance group is a vital outlet for this emotional form of practicing religion.

This is not to say that there is a “right” way and a “wrong” way to be Catholic in rural America. Ethnic identities drive religious traditions and even create different practices. There is not one single Catholic identity. History, culture, and the environment in which people find themselves all shape their religious character and identity. In this study, devotion to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* was very much a Mexican phenomenon. A devout following of *Guadalupanos* held their patron in their consciousness in all parts of their lives. Mexican immigrants maintain strong ties with their heritage through devotion to *La Virgen* despite nationality and geographic location. This practice links them to their past, their families, and their communities. Durkheim (1915) suggested that religion functioned as a marker of social identity which provides individuals with membership to a social group. Regular attendance at Catholic masses and participation in *Matachines* rituals and public veneration to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* are almost a prerequisite to gaining access to the Mexican immigrant community. This is to say that in order to be “marked” as a member of the community, individuals must present themselves in accordance with these accepted roles and religiosity.

***Matachines* Traditions and Ethnic Identities**

The participants in this study are modern day examples of the synchronization of religions that began many years ago upon the arrival of the Spaniards in what is now modern day Mexico and began imposing Catholicism. Through traditional dance, the Mexican immigrants are simultaneously expressing their uniquely Mexican past and present religious devotion. This quest for affirmation of culture and identity may perhaps serve as a reason for the success of the *Matachines* dance group. In the seven years since the development of the *Matachines* dance group, it has gained over thirty members. This would suggest that the *Matachines* tradition is very much an integral part of the Mexican identity in this rural area.

A new member to the dance group, Julio, was motivated to join the dance group because of his desire for membership in the Mexican immigrant community. He stated, “I see everybody, all the people I know talking about *Matachines* for the event in December and I think I want to be part of that. My wife say to join, too, so I join last year.” The cohesiveness of the group was evident in small everyday acts that the group members would help each other with. For example, one interview subject was late to our scheduled interview time because he volunteered to take his friend, a member of the dance group, to the store to get groceries. This act is even more important to the group because the person being helped was not a legal U.S. citizen and did not speak English. When asked about what motivated him to help, the dancer, Miguel, just said, *A veces todos necesitamos ayuda* [“We all need help some-

times”]. This attitude embodied the overall attitude of the *Matachines* dance group. The significance of the dance group crossed the spiritual lines which it was based on and had a strong impact on the individual lives of the dancers.

The maintenance of Mexican ethnicity was a common theme that emerged from interviews with the *Matachines* dance group. Many respondents, in particular women, commented that, for one reason or another, they did not want to immigrate to the Midwest at first, but are now comfortable with their surroundings. This may, in part, be due to the community formed through the Catholic Church, and even more specifically, the *Matachines* dance group. In this sense, membership in the group affords multiple rewards beyond religious fulfillment. A common sense of unity was very evident in observations of conversations between dance members, respondents’ willingness to introduce me to their friends for interview purposes, and, most clearly, their interview responses. At one point in the search for interviewees, I was lead around by Magdalena and introduced to all her friends. Despite my insistence that I was only interested in talking to Mexican dance group members, she had me talk with all of her friends, most of whom did not meet the interview criteria.

All of the group members relied on each other for support, guidance, and friendship. The community of Mexican-Americans in the dance group was extremely reliant on the support given to each other. It was often the case that the dancers did not know the *Matachines* dances they were performing before joining the dance group. This theme resurfaced commonly with several respondents admitting that

they had never seen or danced the *Matachines* dances before joining the group at church. Franco, who had been dancing at the church for seven years, said, “When I move here, I did not know there is Catholic church. After six years we find out and then we come. I see one time the *Matachines* dancing and I go talk to the man in charge and he say I can join. I learn how to dance at the practices.” Franco, who had been born and raised in Chihuahua, Mexico, was unaware of this tradition. Now, in the rural American Midwest, dancing in the *Matachines* dance group allows Franco, and his fellow dancers, to maintain a connection to their culture and ethnic identity. Although Franco was unable to explain the exact meanings or origins of the dances, he felt they connected him to who he was and thus gained a strong sense of pride from his involvement and is now, six years later, the head dancer, *El Monarca*.

Carmen reinforces this idea with one of her responses. When asked how life at home is different for her now relative to how it was in the past, she responded,

Yo como de todo. Pues, como de alla y aca. Tengo mis tradiciones pero he vivido muchos anos aquí. Me gusta aquí y de lo mio. Mis costumbres los traigo. Aquí en los Estados Unidos hay de todo. Pero, lo que vivi, ya lo vivi. Me retiro mucho de esas cosas.

[I eat all types of food, from here and from there (home in Mexico). I have my traditions, but I’ve lived here for many years. I like what’s here and what’s mine (Mexican traditions). I bring my customs with me. Here, in the United States, there is everything. But, what I’ve lived, I’ve lived. I don’t do those things as much anymore]

In this response, Carmen has demonstrated the complexity of life for many rural immigrants. She mentions her pride in her heritage and also her desire to be part of the American way of life. Her life has become a synchronization of two cultures much like the religious synchronization which occurred so many years ago. Carmen, like the other *Matachines* dancers in this study, exhibits a slow integration into Midwestern American culture and practices.

Observations of group activities and interviews also confirmed the role that language plays in producing solidarity. One dancer, Felipe, reflected on his personal preference of Spanish by stating:

If I am with someone who don’t speak Spanish, but when I am with Mexican people, my friends, we all speak Spanish. It feels weird if I try to talk to my friends in English. Sometimes someone say, an American guy will be with us and he will hear us speaking Spanish and he knows we speak English and he will say, why don’t you speak English? You both speak English. Well, yes, but we feel weird.

Language, in this case, Spanish, proves to be a symbolic form of social capital which binds immigrants in the local community and preserves a sense of normalcy.

The Mexican-American Family System

The themes and data that emerged through the interviews and observations have close ties with previous work in the study of Mexican-American identity and the role of family in the development of identity (Telles and Ortis 2009; Jimenez 2010).

Family-first ideologies were perhaps the most common trait shared amongst the Mexican immigrants in this religious community. Interestingly, while all of the dancers interviewed expressed a profound belief in the importance of their families in their lives, it quickly became clear that the respondents had a very traditional ideology of family structure and dynamics. Women are expected to submit to their husbands and sacrifice their own desires for the betterment of the family much like gendered historical accounts of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. All of the women interviewed agreed that family is to come first before anything else. One mother, Jimena, stated in an interview, *Mi familia es mi vida. No puedo ser sin mis hijos o esposo. Como trabajo en casa, hago todo para ayudar a mi familia* [“My family is my life. I cannot live without my children or my husband. Since I work at home, I do everything possible to help my family”]. A similar response was given by Jaime when asked about the importance of family in his life. Jaime responded, *No tengo muchas cosas en mi vida, pero si tengo mis hijos. Trabajo y trabajo, y mi esposa también para que tengan mejor vida que nosotros cuando éramos chiquitos* [“I don’t have a lot of things in my life, but I do have my children. I work and work, and my wife does, too, so that they (kids) can have a better life than us when we were little”]. The search for jobs and a better life for children was perhaps the most common link that all respondents shared most consistently. Many of the members of the community in this study have similar stories as to their reason to migrating to the Midwest. The availability of jobs in gardening and construction was the overwhelming response for most dancers when asked about their reasons for settling in the rural Midwest. A consensus of work-

ing towards a better life and brighter future for the dancers’ children was clearly evident among both the men and the women of the dance group. One dancer, Carmen, when asked what brought her to the area, described her journey to rural Midwest as the following,

Bueno, dos cosas, trabajo y familia. Mi familia empezó a mudar a los Estados Unidos cuando yo era joven. Primero una tía y un tío. Nos invitaron pero no queríamos. Cuando me mudé, No me gusto. Prefiero mi país. Pero encontre a mi esposo. Toda mi familia esta aqui ahora. [Well, two things, work and family. My family started to move to the United States when I was very young. First an aunt, then an uncle. They invited us, but we didn’t want to go. When I did move, I didn’t like it. But, I found my husband and all my family is here now]

This response supports the literature which suggests migration flow is heavily influenced by familial influences. Sarah Harbison (1981:226) writes that the family “is the structural and functional context within which motivations and values are shaped, human capital is accrued, information is received and interpreted, and decisions are put into operation.” In her case, Carmen felt the move to the region would benefit her because of the support she would receive from having family so nearby. Support came in many forms within the immigrant, and more specifically, the *Matachines* community.

Durkheim (1915) suggested religious practice was a means of socialization. This is to say religion unites people through the indoctrination of norms, values, and expectations. *Matachines* and *Guadalupanos* affirm their beliefs in the central values of

Mexican ethnicity and Catholicism through commitment to these specific religious practices. Religion has generated (and continues to maintain) the collective conscience of the rural Mexican immigrants in this rural setting. For example, it was found that the children of the Mexican immigrants who have not lived in Mexico and have no knowledge of its culture are forced by their parents to participate in the *Matachines* dance group. Thus, the role of the dance group goes beyond a religious practice. Parents look to these rituals and symbols as a means of socializing their children into their culture in order to maintain ethnic ties to their ancestral homeland. Durkheim (1915) argued that religion formed a moral community in society where members were socialized into accepting appropriate patterns of behavior. Most *Matachines* dancers tie their religious and ethnic identities and thus their values and beliefs to the Catholic Church at the institutional level and then to their dance group at the sub-institutional level. Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann (2007) offer a possible explanation for this phenomenon of the role of *Matachines* traditions as a means of socializing individuals of the community. They write,

This observation is important for understanding identity construction. It underlines the point that the making of a collective identity is not, generally speaking, a process through which unconnected, isolated individuals come together and gain a consciousness of themselves as constituting a group. [Cornell and Hartmann 2007:212]

This is to say that these religious symbols and rituals represent a pillar of Mexican ethnicity and are used

in the communal maintenance and construction of identity. In the case of this rural context, the *Matachines* dance group is the vehicle which enables the Mexican immigrant community to maintain an ethnic and religious identity and to integrate their religious values and perspectives into the local church.

The integration process into mainstream American culture is becoming increasingly complicated and difficult as the children of respondents are beginning to be exposed to more diversity outside of this tight-knit community while attending elementary, middle, and high school and beginning to intermingle with people of various races and ethnicities, something their parents do not frequently do. When asked about raising children and its difficulties in such an isolated region of the Midwest, Paulina described the uphill battle she faces. She stated,

Pues, es difícil, no. Quiero que mis hijos sepan de nuestra cultura y de mi familia pero no estan interesados. Salgan con sus amigos y no se que hacen. Los domingos cuando vamos a la misa y vemos a nuestro pueblo es cuando me siento bien y que mis hijos no van a perder sus culturas.

[Well, it’s hard, you know? I want my children to know about our culture and my family, but they’re not interested. They go out with their friends to do I don’t know what. On Sunday’s when we go to mass and see our people is when I feel good and that my children are not going to lose their culture]

This same sentiment echoed in other interviews with mothers of the group. Lola and Gabriela were two very close friends with the same predicament. They felt their children’s lack of interest in their culture was a sign of the American influence on them.

Lola described the situation with these words, *No dudo que es mayor criar mis hijos aqui* [in the United States] *pero a veces no entiendo sus acciones. Es como no son mis hijos* ["I don't doubt that it is better to raise my children here (in the United States)], but sometimes I just don't understand what they do. It's like they aren't even my children"]. It was her friend Gabriela who suggested to her that she get her kids involved in the Hispanic ministry at the church. It was through this involvement that her children came to be involved in the *Matachines* dance group and thus were exposed to the culture of their parents and family. Gabriela spoke of this suggestion with pride. She exclaimed, *Sus hijos no van a perder su cultura* [laughs] *porque yo no voy a permitir eso!* ["Her children aren't going to lose their culture (laughs) because I won't let it happen!"]. In this case, Lola was receiving support from another woman in her community to ensure that she passes down the correct values and culture to her children. Community and its influences proved to be an important theme in this research. The maintenance of culture was very much reliant on others and the knowledge and experience they were able to pass on and learn from each other.

Conclusions and Discussion

In this study, Mexican immigrants living in the rural Midwest were relatively isolated from any large Mexican population. Faced with this reality, members of the community turned to a local Catholic Church and a *Matachines* dance group in particular, as a strategy for maintaining their culture and values uniquely associated with their Mexican ethnicity and integrating their religious values into

the local organizational church. By connecting with a group of peers, the dancers are able to maintain a form of normalcy in their lives and are better able to balance the various external forces to assimilate to mainstream Midwestern culture and practices. As more and more immigrants continue to enter this rural community, the *Matachines* dance group is fully expected to continue to grow. As it grows, the transmission of values pertaining to ethnic expressions of the family, the institutional church, and religious symbols will undoubtedly maintain their strong presence.

The *Matachines* dance group in this study has struggled to maintain a concrete Mexican identity. However, research participants displayed their ethnic pride, as well as their hope in the American dream. The interplay of external assimilatory social forces on everyday life was a large obstacle in daily lives. Involvement in a moderate-sized *Matachines* dance group had a profound impact on the Mexican-American community members' ability to construct and maintain their identity in such an isolated region of the country. The Roman Catholic Church fulfilled two major needs for the dancers. First, it served as a means for networking among other Mexican-Americans in the area. Second, it also allowed for the continuation of traditional practice of faith for the Mexican-Americans who were able to attend mass in Spanish and participate in the *Matachines* dance group. The dance group allowed the Mexican-American community to come together around one very important aspect of Mexican-American culture. For most respondents, the origin and meanings of the dances were not clear. Most of the dancers learned about and were able to get in touch with

their own culture and past as they began to dance and follow the *Matachines* traditions. Invented tradition or not, the powerful impact of the dance on the dancers' lives was unmistakable. The parents of the dance group used the practices almost like a history class where their children could learn about their ancestry and continue to transmit their culture to future generations. The dancers were very proud of their *Matachines* traditions and wanted to show everyone who they were. Exclaiming this point with pride, *El Monarca* of the dance group stated, "It's in our blood!" By participating in this dance group, the *Matachines* dancers, their children, and the surrounding Mexican-American community are making sure their culture, values, and ideologies stay "in their blood" and continue to be passed on to future generations.

The *Matachines* dance group became of central importance to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans because of the rural area in which it was located. The Mexican-American community came together around the religious and cultural traditions they shared. Future research could explore the role of gender in this Mexican-American community as it relates to the *Matachines* dance group. Do the danc-

ers take on this gender neutral stance to demonstrate their assimilation to mainstream American culture? Or, could it be as simple that the dancers are instructed by the leaders of the church to ensure equality? Future research could also explore the prevalence of *Matachines* traditions outside the Roman Catholic Church to examine the power dynamics between ethnic and religious identities.

Previous research (Waters 1990; Jimenez 2010) suggests that without a continuous flow of immigrants to replenish the identities of previous immigrants, the immigrant communities in question are more likely to be on a trajectory towards fully assimilating into mainstream American society. In my research, a continuous flow of Mexican immigrants has "replenished" the ethnicities of the locals who have been there for a period of time ranging from a couple to several years. The new immigrants motivated the continuity of cultural practices and traditions, such as public devotion to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and *Matachines* dances. Future research may revisit the rural community in this study to examine the flow (legal and illegal) of immigrants to the rural area and its impact on the ethnic resilience of the immigrant community.

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Healthcare Innovation—The Epital: A Living Lab in the Intersection Between the Informal and Formal Structures

Abstract This study explores an alternative healthcare innovation project in its making using ethnographic research methods. The project is a confined space—a living lab—that cannot fully be described or explained in the same way we normally understand set-ups for healthcare innovation. By creating its own space, in the intersection between formal and informal structures, it draws our attention to a new way of organizing healthcare innovation.

Taking an ethnographic research approach, it is suggested how a concept of a bubble can be used to describe the nature of the living lab as a partial and flexible object that constitutes multiple future possibilities. The concept of the bubble challenges the notion of the living lab as a cheese bell, which is the term used by the field participants, inspired by Clayton Christensen. Bringing in theoretical points from Bruno Latour regarding laboratories, this study explores the materiality of the laboratory and its political nature.

The study contributes to the debate on innovation in healthcare and especially fuses to the discussion of how to organize healthcare innovation. It argues that we need to pay attention to new kinds of living labs—like the one introduced in this study.

Keywords Healthcare; Healthcare Innovation; Living Labs; Laboratory; Epital

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An ongoing discussion, both from an empirical and a theoretical point of view, is whether innovation best takes place outside or inside an organization.

A theoretically and empirically based model has been proposed by Professor Clayton Christensen, who developed, on the basis of observations of large U.S. companies, the theory of disruptive or market creating innovations. The theory explains how large enterprises will be disrupted by smaller and more agile companies and how large enterprises can respond to this challenge by establishing new divisions outside the enterprise instead of inside.

According to Christensen, a disruptive innovation is an innovation that replaces costly and complex products designed for specialized narrow markets and makes new affordable products available for larger markets (e.g., the shift from mini computers to personal computers). Christensen has highlighted not only the nature of these kinds of (disruptive) innovations but also the challenges related to the development of these innovations. He has termed the tension occurring in the space between inside/outside the *innovator's dilemma* (Christensen 2003; 2009). The innovator's dilemma is that disruptive innovations meet resistance in the beginning because they question the existing way of doing things and because the innovator cannot prove the value of the innovation as it builds upon something disruptive—something radically new that cannot be explained, valued, or evaluated within the existing system and procedures for doing so. Therefore, new companies will arise outside existing organizations if existing organizations do not allow disruptive processes to

take place inside them (e.g., Intel's development of an RISC processor).

Another aspect of the discussion of whether innovation best takes place inside or outside organizations is illustrated by the story of VistA and the Hardhats (Timson n.d.).

The project started inside the system as an office established to work on a standard for computer assisted systems in 1977. The people involved developed within the organization an intra-organizational network across the U.S. The people in the network, although unauthorized to do so, worked to develop a more efficient and coherent program to suit the needs of the hospitals and doctors. As the development was in conflict with the existing systems, those involved had to hide, work undercover, or work from outside the organization. In 1982, the new system was in a form that could be presented to clinicians. From their response, the management realized that the solution was precisely what was needed, and within a few months it became an integrated part of VA (Timson n.d.).

This discussion of where radical innovations best take place is of particular interest in relation to the healthcare sector, where there is a call for redesigns (eHealth Task Force 2012). Further studies of innovation processes in this context are urgently needed. We have taken a unique opportunity to study a health innovation project in its making, during its constitution and positioning as a confined space (laboratory). The project cannot be fully described or explained the way we normally understand innovation in healthcare environments. The space

(laboratory) is named the *Epital* and those who are involved in the project are named *the Epitalists*. The laboratory of the Epitalists creates its own space, which is neither fully inside nor fully outside the formal organization of the Danish healthcare system, as it is based in a municipality. In Denmark, municipalities are not providers of hospital and specialized healthcare services, but they are responsible for health promotion and disease prevention (Kierkegaard 2013). What makes this case so interesting is precisely that it is at the intersection of inside/outside. The debate and discussion, both from an empirical and a theoretical point of view, tend to focus on whether innovation best takes place inside or outside the existing structure—be it an organization, industry, or sector. This article will focus on the construction of a certain kind of laboratory and, inspired by Bruno Latour (1983), argues that we need to pay attention to new ways of organizing healthcare innovation by focusing on the construction and position of a laboratory within a “societal milieu.” As Latour argues, the distinction between inside and outside is actually what laboratories are destabilizing.

Introduction to the Epital Project

In 2011, a project group gathered to develop the ideas of the Virtual Hospital project (Phanareth et al. 2013) into a whole system approach to assisting people with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and those with other chronic conditions to cope with the condition on a daily basis and during exacerbations. Participants in the project came from the healthcare service sector, private companies, universities, and patient associations. In

2011, the project emerged as an informal inter-organizational network (IION), which planned a proof-of-concept that took place in the summer of 2012. In January 2013, the project initiated a pilot study, which by mid-2014 had 50 COPD patients enrolled.

In the emerging phase of the project, which is described in this article, more than 100 individuals coming from, but not necessarily representing more than 20 organizations, have participated for shorter or longer periods in the planning and development of ICT and organizational solutions, including ways to improve people’s self-management and empowerment.

Research Method: Entering the Laboratory of the Epitalists

In November 2011, the first author of this article, Louise Hesselald (LH), entered the laboratory of the Epitalists in order to explore the emerging project and network in practice from within the network itself. The observer entered the field of *the Epitalists* as participatory observer and followed the daily practice at the Frederiksberg Hospital, Section of Telemedicine Research (STR).

When the observer entered the laboratory of the Epitalists, she quickly realized that she was in a field where everything was in the making and there was no clear boundary between inside/outside the laboratory. The Epitalists were working just as much inside the laboratory as outside. They were interacting with politicians, investors, and research foundations and with technological equipment, algorithms, and clinical data. Similarly, even though the Epitalists had an identity in terms of a name,

it was hard to find out in practice who they actually were. There was no clear boundary between who was included and who was not included in the project. In practice, the STR, the physical gathering place and laboratory of the Epitalists, functioned on a daily basis as a revolving door for people coming in and out of the door.

It quickly became a methodological challenge: Where do you start when there is no solid ground since it is all in the making? How do you study an organization when the “group” you are trying to follow is more a revolving door than something stable? How do you study organization in practice when this does not have a tangible form and is not geographically defined?

Following the Actors

The methodological challenges and practical issues that arose when the observer entered the field were partly solved with inspiration from Latour’s work, *Reassembling the Social* (2005), which is an introduction to actor-network theory (the ANT). The starting point is not theoretical explanation perspectives on the social but practice and how to follow the connections to the social (Latour 2005). Latour argues for following the actors rather than starting the study of the social in pre-defined sociological explanation perspectives. The actors make the work, so to speak, in their work on establishing the social or in their work on organizing themselves. The role of the observer is simply to “follow the actors” (Latour 2005) and the connections they are making, and to do so with patience—the observer must simply just “follow the actors.”

Taking her point of departure in Latour’s theoretical and methodological principles to just “follow the actors,” the observer found that it is a matter of letting the field categorizations, boundaries, and definitions be stronger than sociological explanations, which Latour refers as *social aggregates*. Whether the Epitalists are working on establishing a laboratory or establishing a network (in terms of an IION), the starting point is the connection work needed in order to establish “The Epital” project. Further, focus is on group formation rather than established groups: “No group, only group formation” (Latour 2005:27-43). It is about studying the process of organizing rather than the organization itself. This approach opens up for considering disorder and instability as productive—as research objects themselves—that can bring something interesting and new to the social. They become prerequisites for the study rather than problems.

The theoretical outset in Latour (1983; 1987; 1988; 2005; 2008) has shaped the way the observer has observed—and also the way she has analyzed the observations and the following presentations. The observer has included theoretical concepts to open up the analysis and to add to the empirical observations. The concepts have emerged rather than been forced onto the setting. In practice, this means that the observer has continuously found new theories and literature as an outcome from the interaction with the field and the observations. Analytical concepts are included in order to open the analysis of the observed. These concepts are both purely theoretical concepts, primarily from Steven Brown’s (2002; 2013) reading of Michel Serres and Bruno Latour (1983), but also concepts in terms of metaphors

developed and introduced by the observer based on the interaction with the field.

Multi-Site Ethnography

The ethnographic field study was chosen as the primary method to acquire data, as the objective was to study the dynamics of the emerging project and network in practice. For the very same reason, the ethnographic interview rather than the structured interview has been used in order to ask questions about practice (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995:19). The ethnographic interview is a long conversation, rather than a one-time interview, which allows more in-depth knowledge to emerge about the studied field.

Entering into the social context and daily practice of the Epitalists enabled the observer to observe practice and processes from within. The observer carried out all observations, which formed the basis for the subsequent analysis, while writing her Master's thesis in 2011-2012. During the field study, the observer participated in a wide range of meetings both formal and informal, including coordination meetings, strategy meetings, progress meetings, briefings, "testing technology" meetings, and crisis meetings. Moreover, the observer also joined informal conversations and observed the daily routines and dynamics in the network as she participated in the daily work of the Epitalists.

The observer-researcher was aware during the field study of how she might influence the field she was studying when she participated in the daily activities of the Epitalists, such as attending meetings and

joining formal, as well as informal conversations. The challenge is always to be informative about the research as it proceeds and develops. However, as the researcher became an integrated part of the network for almost 11 months, the ongoing dialogue about the field and the field study itself was an integrated part of the formal and informal dialogues with the Epitalists. The observer-researcher revealed herself to all participants on the first contact with STR and when new people entered the network. LH always informed the participants that observations and conversations would be gathered for research purposes in an anonymous form. All participants agreed to this.

Since the laboratory was not limited to STR, the "field" could not be limited to the physical laboratory at STR. In order to capture the emergent nature of the object of study—the emerging network in practice—*multi-site ethnography* was chosen. The multi-site perspective opens up for a new understanding of what the field is and how this field can be examined. As George E. Marcus (1995) puts it, multi-site ethnography is a mobile method, which allows the study to travel across locations and boundaries:

This mobile ethnography takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity. [p. 96]

In order to capture the emergence and dynamics of the network, the observer did not limit the field study to the physical site of STR but extended the observations beyond the walls of STR by following the actors when they acted "outside" STR, for example, giving lectures or attending meetings in other networks.

However, the extension of the field concept was not limited to moving from working inside to working outside the physical space but also involved moving into the non-physical space. The observer also read literature related to the network on topics such as "open source software" and "management literature" and followed as well the ongoing debate about telemedicine in Denmark. These sources of information were not purely background knowledge but an integrated part of the field study itself.

Moreover, the field study also took place in the partly digital space, where the actors communicated through emails and shared documents in a *Dropbox* folder. The observer was included in the email list and had access to the *Dropbox* folder, which allowed her to observe the network in front of her computer in the late evening when she received emails and pop-up (update) notifications, indicating that new documents had been added or modified in the folder. In addition, the expansion of the network became visible when new members were added to the email list. Thus, the observer had to turn her gaze to different sites to explore different aspects of the object of analysis: the emergence and dynamics of the Epital project.

The Desktop as the Second Field

All the sites described above constitute the field study and the empirical basis for the analysis. The observer has systematically and continuously recorded all observations from the "visited sites" in logbooks and transcribed these observations into field notes. However, the transcription of field notes has only been one part of the fieldwork; the subse-

quent practice of analyzing and reworking the field notes into analytical field descriptions has been an equally large—and essential—part of the fieldwork. The practice of writing has not been something outside the fieldwork, but instead an integrated part of the fieldwork itself. The anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1999) formulates the practice of writing as "the second field" (Hansen 2011), where the two fields are partly connected:

The relationship between the two fields can thus be described as "complex" in that each is an order of engagement, which partly inhabits or touches upon, but does not encompass the other. Indeed, either may seem to spin off on its own trajectory. [Strathern 1999:2]

The observer also experienced how the analytical descriptions were created in the interplay between the two fields. In front of the computer, the observer recalled additional observations and insights from the field study, which were not included in the written field notes. Instead, these insights emerged in the interplay/interlink between the field notes and the work behind the desk. In front of the computer, the field was "replayed," so to speak, but at a temporal distance from the concrete observations from the "first field" and without the physical presence of all of the actors (e.g., technology, doctors, contracts, expectations, IT architects). The work of writing the field descriptions—transforming the observations and notes into analytical descriptions—was a part of the work equally important to the hours spent in the "field."

The unique position of the observer—within the network and the field—enabled her to continuously

jump between the two fields, instead of separating the two fields temporarily. From the beginning, the observer spent much time in front of the desk in order to write, and right up to the end of the study, the observer returned to the field in order to gain new insights into it. As Strathern (1999) points out, it is “time” rather than “place” that sets the limits for fieldwork. This is precisely the point of this analysis: it is a snapshot from a certain period in time. The project and network evolved after the observer walked out of the door and turned off the computer.

During the fieldwork, the observation, and the structuring and analysis of the data, two distinct and important results emerged. The first was the development of a confined unique environment, which can best be understood as a dynamic living lab. The second was the formation and dynamics of an informal inter-organizational network, which is reported in our second article (“Healthcare Innovation—The Epital: An Ethnographic Study of a Unique Way of Organizing Healthcare Innovation [in this issue of QSR]).

The following study builds upon field observations, which were conducted as part of the ethnographic field study that took place from November 2011 to September 2012. The study is divided into three sections:

1. The cheese bell
2. The living lab
3. The bubble

Section 1, *the cheese bell*, introduces the laboratory of the Epitalists from the perspective of the Epitalists themselves. This presents the case and serves as

a starting point for the subsequent analysis of the laboratory in its making, which will be presented by introducing Bruno Latour’s story of Louis Pasteur. The story of Pasteur is introduced as an analogy in order partly to introduce the laboratory and partly to question the notion of the laboratory as a “cheese bell,” which is the term used by the Epitalists themselves.

Section 2, *the living lab*, studies the dynamics between the laboratory and the surroundings. The purpose is to show how the laboratory is much more than an isolated cheese bell; in practice, the laboratory is a living lab reaching far into society. By bringing in some theoretical points from Bruno Latour regarding laboratories, including the concept of “piggyback strategies,” this section explores the materiality of the laboratory and its relation to the “outside,” as well as the political nature of the laboratory.

Section 3, *the bubble*, introduces the notion of the Epitalists’ laboratory from the perspective of the observer. The observer, on the basis of her field observations, develops the metaphor of the bubble. The observer argues that the bubble metaphor captures the nature of the laboratory as a partial and flexible object that constitutes multiple future possibilities and that also ties together multiple actors due to its partial and flexible nature. The Epitalists’ laboratory is not a static and isolated cheese bell; it is a living lab reaching far into society, but also a living lab that, due to its flexibility and partial nature, can float to various places and take various forms. The concept of “bubble” is introduced in order to explain the nature of the laboratory as a particular construction.

The Cheese Bell

Early in the process the Epital project in the municipality was called a cheese bell by the Epitalists to signalize an independence from formal structures and to invite participants to join an innovative and disruptive process without any known constraints from the existing formal structures of the Danish healthcare system. As described in the project protocol, cited below (Phanareth K., personal communication), the nature of the project makes it necessary to establish a well-defined space (within the existing system):

The breadth of the project’s ambition challenges, of course, the existing structures and frameworks, including legislative and legal matters, ways of settling accounts, management and organizational structures, power balances, culture, and attitudes; virtually, all of the concepts that define healthcare today. The formation of a cheese bell is therefore necessary, in part to create an experimental space that unleashes all components and breaks down all barriers and in part, to enable a kind of future pocket in the present that can expose the potential opportunities that the technology-driven service transformations of the future can offer. [translated by the authors]

From this, it appears that, due to its nature, the project needed to create an experimental space, without any interruptions or distractions from the established system. To understand the Epitalists’ perspective, it is relevant to introduce their theoretical inspiration.

Inspired by Clayton Christensen (2003; 2009), the Epitalists see the cheese bell as an experimental and

necessary space—a kind of future pocket—where it is possible in the present to experiment with the future. Thereby, the cheese bell becomes a metaphor for the workplace of a new concept—the metaphor for the isolated and confined space needed in order to establish a disruptive innovation, namely, the Epital. From the perspective of the Epitalists, the Epital is seen as disruptive in the sense that the concept challenges many of the existing institutions in Danish society: legislation, financial accounting models, and organizational structures. From the perspective of the Epitalists, the challenge is to create a radical market creating innovation—as highlighted by Clayton Christensen—and at the same time be able to interact with patients who are still part of the existing healthcare system, participating in activities such as visits to general practitioners and outpatient clinics. The solution was therefore to establish a cheese bell in the intersection between existing services and alternative solutions in order to demonstrate a new concept and build a business case. In other words, the laboratory of the Epitalists is much more than just a laboratory. Let us take a closer look at the laboratory of the Epitalists.

Give Me a Laboratory and I Will Change the Healthcare System

Bruno Latour (1983) has highlighted how science and innovation take place in the intersection between inside and outside the laboratory, as he exemplifies by proclaiming, “Give me a laboratory and I will raise the world.” A lot has happened with regard to laboratories since Latour wrote this in 1983. The boundaries between inside/outside have become blurry; indeed, breaking them down has become an ideal in

research politics (DEA 2013).¹ Nevertheless, Latour proposes a line of enquiry that is highly relevant today and for this case in particular: we should not focus on the laboratory itself but on the construction of the laboratory and its position in the societal milieu (Latour 1983:258).

The Epitalists' laboratory is particularly interesting as the laboratory itself is constructed in the intersection between established boundaries and ways of doing and organizing healthcare innovation. It is a special construction: a kind of living lab in the intersection between formal and informal structures, as it is neither fully inside nor outside the Danish healthcare system since it is based in a municipality (see: the introductory part of the article).

To illustrate Bruno Latour's point about the lab as a special materiality, it is relevant to consider Latour's story about microbiologist Louis Pasteur (1822-1895). This serves as an introduction to the laboratory and the Epitalists as the object of research and is the entry point to the subsequent analysis of the particular materiality of the laboratory.

Today, Louis Pasteur is acknowledged as one of the most prominent French scientists and a hero, since he has been recognized as the developer of vaccines in 1881 that became crucial to public health. He also developed the *pasteurization method*, which is used to kill pathogenic microbes in, for example, milk and

wine (Blok and Jensen 2009:70). However, Bruno Latour does not support the above *diffusionistic* explanation that it was Louis Pasteur's brilliant ideas and scientific methods that were subsequently spread to the community. According to Latour, the success of *pasteurization* was due to the translation process through which a number of actors were mobilized and contributed to spreading the pasteurization method. Thus, 1) the success of the method was not due to Pasteur alone but also to the network around Pasteur; that is, he was one important actor among many others, and 2) Pasteur's success was linked to the fact that his laboratory was extended to society—thanks to the network. Let us introduce the story about Louis Pasteur.

In the French society, an epidemic was ruling as a killing anthrax roamed throughout society. The milt fire was of great concern to the agricultural society as animals died and it was also a concern for the rest of society, for whom animals had an interest. The microbiologist Louis Pasteur began studying the epidemic. To do so, he needed a specific object of research, for without this, his laboratory, including all its instruments, apparatuses, and scientists, was of no use. Therefore, Pasteur left his research laboratory at the École Normale Supérieure and established a temporary laboratory on a farm in the countryside. Out in the field, he could gain knowledge of the conditions in the country. After some time, he returned to his research laboratory, bringing back not the entire farm or the field, but only a single object of study, namely, a microorganism.

In the laboratory, Pasteur was able to isolate and control the object, so it became visible and tangible.

Thereby, he was able to grasp the epidemic, which was eluding the farmers and veterinarians and killing the animals. In the laboratory, the invisible and elusive became visible and tangible. Out in society, the epidemic only came to light when it beat animals to death.

However, Louis Pasteur did not only make the invisible visible in his laboratory; he also developed the "pasteurization" method, which allowed him to control the object, the microbe, and made it predictable (Latour 1983). However, he needed to prove that the pasteurization method also worked outside the laboratory—as the epidemic was an issue outside in society, not inside his laboratory. Louis Pasteur was strong inside his laboratory, where he could control the object, but weak in society. To become strong outside his laboratory, he had to extend his laboratory by setting up the same conditions for success out in the community as he had inside his laboratory. If he did not succeed in extending his laboratory, the pasteurization methods could not be reproduced. In other words, his laboratory needed to be extended to a societal laboratory.

After numerous experiments in the laboratory, Pasteur staged the *Pouilly le Fort* trial, which took place on a selected farm in the French town of Pouilly le Fort. The experiment was carefully organized and had transformed the small French farm after Louis Pasteur's scientific prescriptions and instructions. All the right conditions were installed on the farm, so it was possible to extend the laboratory or rather, the pasteurization method. The trial was going to be the proof of the method: if it worked on this farm, it might also work on other farms. The recipe

for success was simply to follow the procedure and instructions as prescribed: disinfection → cleanliness → grafting → timing → registration. The trial was staged as "the proof" not just by Louis Pasteur, but aided by the media, which were there to shed light on what they described as "the divination of Pasteur" (Latour 1983).

The story of Louis Pasteur is relevant for the case of the Epital as it shows why the laboratory is essential for creating change. The Epitalists want to drive change—they want to *epitalize* the Danish healthcare system. Their project is not just about building technology but also about influencing the future healthcare system in general. The Epitalists are not just building technology; they are building a new infrastructure for the potential future healthcare system. The project is indeed *politics pursued by other means* (Latour 1983:273).

With this introduction in mind, let us turn to the object of the Epitalists and their laboratory—or more precisely, their living lab.

The Object of the Epitalists

For Louis Pasteur, the microbe was crucial, since it was the important object he took with him back to his laboratory. It was his grip on this object that enabled him to control an otherwise uncontrollable epidemic. It was around this object that the continuous change between scales took place: from laboratory to society and the other way around.

Unlike Louis Pasteur, the Epitalists do not have a microbe and they cannot just find one out in the

¹ The mantra of "From Science to Invoice" has influenced the last decade of science politics in Denmark. The mantra is linked to the political plan of action, which was initiated by the former government (VK alliance) in 2003. The purpose was to increase the interplay between public and private science and to commercialize the work of the universities.

field, as they need to construct it themselves. The Epitalists have been out in the “Danish healthcare field” for many years as many of them have worked within the healthcare system and gained experience of how to do things—or perhaps more precisely, how *not* do things, as their point of departure is that the existing system does not work.

For the very same reason, they need to construct their object. In other words, the object of the Epitalists—the telemedicine platform—is an object in the making. It exists as fragmented sub-elements—building blocks—that need to be developed and connected to create a coherent telemedicine technological platform. These sub-elements include, among others: 1) *hardware*: a screen, a tablet, a server to store patient data, a telephone connection, and monitoring instruments, such as heart rate and oxygen meters and pulmonary function measurers, and 2) *software*: a stratification algorithm, software to coordinate interactions between the patient and the healthcare professional, and server software exchange of patient data between systems. These sub-elements must be connected and work together before the Epitalists have a tangible object. Despite the fact that the Epitalists do not have a telemedicine platform, they have already established the social organization that is going to embrace the technology and make it part of their practice: the municipality of Lyngby-Taarbæk has found the first test patients and appointed the healthcare professionals who will bring the technology to life. The municipality has also bought the tablets and monitoring devices that will be installed in the homes of the patients. At STR, located at Frederiksberg Hospital, the “Epi Call Centre” has been established, with the

monitors and computers that the healthcare professionals will use to “treat” patients in the Epital.

Thus, there are patients and healthcare professionals who are just waiting for the technology to be brought into play, there are tablets and monitoring devices ready to be unpacked, and there are monitors and computer screens ready to be turned on.

The object—the telemedicine platform—is an object in the making. It exists as different constituent elements, but does not yet exist as a coherent telemedicine platform that is ready for demonstration. Before the platform is ready for demonstration, it must be a “socio-material arrangement” that works in practice. Interestingly, a social organization was in place—ready to bring the technology into play—a long time before the technology took shape. This tells us that the distinction between development and implementation does not make sense in practice. What it also tells us is that building technology and doing healthcare innovation is not just about building technology and infrastructure. It is also about building strong networks that can carry forward the technology and speak on behalf of its existence.

The Danish STS researcher Casper Bruun Jensen (2010) has written about these types of objects that have not yet reached the status of facts (black boxes) since it has not yet been acknowledged what exactly they are and what they do. He introduces the term *partial existing object* for such objects and highlights how the unstable nature of such objects gives them a special status:

Partially existing objects; not black boxes, but translucent boxes with highly diffuse and ephemeral con-

tent. This property of vagueness enables their flexible distribution and adoption in widely variable material and discursive circumstances. For this reason, they are also so crucially related to processes of creating expectations and envisioning the future. [Jensen 2010:35]

Partially existing objects are objects that have not yet achieved the status of a matter of fact. Interestingly, partially existing objects create a kind of flexibility, as they have different expectations attributed to them—both in terms of what they are supposed to become in the future, but also in terms of how the objects are supposed to be used in the future.

Similarly, the object of the Epitalists—the telemedicine platform—is a partially existing object. The partial existing nature creates a space for expectations for the future and for the finished product. The Epitalists share a common idea that something needs to be changed and they also share the idea that the *Epital* is part of the solution. However, none of them know exactly what the object is and what it is going to be in the future. Nevertheless, this emerging object is a placeholder for expectations—to an object and to a change in the healthcare system.

Let us now turn to the laboratory. When there is only a partially existing object, it becomes crucial to have a laboratory.

The Laboratory of the Epitalists

Just as the laboratory was crucial for Louis Pasteur, the cheese bell is also crucial for the Epitalists. The cheese bell is the isolated and confined environ-

ment where the Epitalists can experiment with an alternative organization of the healthcare system—just as the Epital concept prescribes. In order for the Epital to be more than just a vision and dream materialized in a concept on a piece of paper, the Epitalists first need to prove that it is possible to organize the healthcare system in an alternative way. Second, they need to prove not just that it is possible to organize differently, but also that the re-organization can lead to an accessible, affordable, and modern healthcare system. In other words, they must demonstrate their business case.

As one of the Epitalists puts it, the cheese bell is crucial as it visualizes an alternative:

One thing is for sure—the cheese bell is the prime mover. The cheese bell visualizes that there might be an alternative to how things are organized today. [Epitalist, meeting April 2012]

The cheese bell is the laboratory of the Epitalists and the cheese bell is intended to visualize what is not visible outside in the community: an alternative way of organizing the Danish healthcare system. Note that the intention is not just to visualize a technological telemedicine platform but also to visualize an alternative organization of healthcare system. The laboratory is not just building a future health technology but also gathering ammunition for an alternative organization of the healthcare system. The laboratory of the Epitalist is a political laboratory—*politics pursued by other means* (Latour 1983:273).

Constructing an alternative healthcare system requires strong arguments. Much ammunition is

needed to challenge one of Danish society's most firmly established institutions. Bruno Latour (1991) has studied how the so-called *fact builders*, that is, scientists and innovators, gather ammunition to strengthen their scientific and innovative statements. In order to succeed, a statement must be loaded literally: it must be loaded with ammunition, so they cannot be avoided, opposed, or ignored (Latour 1991). In the same manner, the Epitalists need to gather strong ammunition by loading their statement: *Epital is a glimpse of the future healthcare system, and telemedicine in general is the solution to the challenges of the current healthcare system*. As long as their statement is merely a claim, it can easily be challenged by other statements like: *The future healthcare system is all about building new super-hospitals where telemedicine is just one element among many others*.

The Epitalists are aware of this, and they have therefore built the concept for the future healthcare community. It is not just about building new technologies but about building new infrastructure and processes. They have developed a detailed description of the telemedicine platform and its infrastructure, organization, actors, technology, and values, all of which have been materialized into a concept—the *Epital*. This concept is a living document among actors and is being distributed by email when critical voices disturb the statement of the Epitalists by questioning the project: *Well it's nice that you have an idea, but how will you realize it?* Think, how often a discussion, where different arguments are flying around, is settled when one of the parties throw a report, a graph, a contract, prototype, or ID cards on the table, as the conclusive proof or demonstration of the truth of a certain statement. However, a con-

cept materialized on a piece of paper is not enough for the Epitalists to convince the proponents of the existing healthcare system: they need to prove in practice that their concept is just as promising as it is on paper.

Therefore, the cheese bell is of high importance. The cheese bell is their laboratory, where they are going to create a mini healthcare system in a controlled environment. Like Louis Pasteur, they need to stay inside their laboratory until they have gathered enough strength and resilience to meet the critical community outside the cheese bell. As one Epitalist puts it:

We have created this cheese bell and it has to be bulletproof...We must first and foremost be able to show that we can build a mini-system up and get it running. We need to ensure peace to consolidate the cheese bell now. [Epitalist, meeting March 2012]

The Epitalists are strong inside their laboratory, but weak outside, as long as they cannot prove their claims. Therefore, the Epitalists must stay inside until the project is bulletproof. It is natural to ask: When is the cheese bell bulletproof? How long are they supposed to keep it isolated? And finally: When are the Epitalists ready for their *Pouilly le Fort* trial?

For the Epitalists, the cheese bell will be bulletproof when they enter into the "proof of concept" (POC) phase. POC is the term the Epitalists use in their daily work to refer to their key milestone—the demonstration. In practice, the POC is defined as that point in time when they have gathered all the technological elements into a telemedicine plat-

form and have enrolled and mobilized the first six patients as the Epital concept prescribes: with the help of the technology, they must measure and report data, so it is possible to act upon these on the other side of the screen—in the "Epi Call Center," where healthcare professionals are ready to treat the patient—if needed.

When this is in place, they will be able to go out and show the first demonstration film or give the first physical demonstration of STR and say: *See for yourself, it is possible, and it is not just us saying so; the patients are also saying so*.

It is crucial to get the patients enrolled and mobilized so they can speak on behalf of the Epital concept's existence. In this way, they can contribute to bringing into play, or at least putting on the public and political agenda, not just the telemedicine platform but also an alternative healthcare system.

The POC demonstration is just as important for the Epitalists as the "Pouilly le Fort" demonstration was for Louis Pasteur. The Pouilly le Fort demonstration was a staged experiment to convince the investor—in terms of confidence and later in money—that the translation made by Pasteur was a fair contract (Latour 1983:264). Equally, the POC is essential for the Epitalists, since it is a demonstration that is intended to convince the public and investors that the Epital is a promising investment. Thereby, POC is an important prerequisite in order to mobilize the interests of a wider network outside the cheese bell—a network that includes private and public investors and research institutions, politicians, and the general public. It is crucial that the demonstra-

tion is able to meet some of the expectations created by the Epitalists and at the same time establish new expectations: *There is much more than what you can see, this is only the beginning...*

The Living Lab

The Epitalists are not just working inside their laboratory; they are working just as much outside as inside their laboratory. The laboratory of the Epitalists is not merely an isolated laboratory or cheese bell; it is a living lab reaching far into society.

These continuous leaps between inside and outside are crucial to the Epitalists—not just for extending the laboratory into society but also for maintaining the laboratory. Interestingly, while Louis Pasteur had a physical laboratory with research assistants and equipment, the living lab of the Epitalists is something that must be created. It is not merely the object that is in the making—the same goes for the living lab itself. This is also why the Epitalists' laboratory is of interest in itself: it is much more than a laboratory. It is a living lab that destabilizes well-known distinctions such as development/implementation and inside/outside.

Interestingly, it is not just the partially existing object that could arouse enthusiasm among different interests and actors on the "outside"; the living lab itself—the experimental space in between—could, too. For the very same reason, the Epitalists have engaged with several different actors: they have held meetings with politicians, policy makers, and private companies and they have written research applications. In other words, the Epitalists have

sought various *piggyback rides* in order to maintain their laboratory and extend it into society. The concept of piggyback rides (strategies) is introduced by Bruno Latour (1987):

The easiest means to enroll people in the construction of facts is to let oneself be enrolled by them! By pushing their explicit interests, you will also further yours. The advantage of this piggyback strategy is that you need no other force to transform a claim in a fact: a weak contender can thus profit from a vastly stronger one. [p. 110]

As Latour highlights, it may be advantageous to enlist a stronger player by taking a piggyback ride. By riding on the back—or the wave—of a stronger player, you can borrow strength and put the wind in your sails.

Let us take a look at how the Epitalists have considered different piggyback strategies in order to maintain and extend their laboratory. To illustrate this, two specific strategies will be presented. This presentation is based on various episodes that took place in the spring of 2012, when the Epitalists engaged with various strong actors in the healthcare industry, including commercial and political actors.

Building a Commercial Network

In the late spring of 2012, the Epitalists were contacted by one of the big actors in the healthcare industry. The supplier was very interested in the Epital and the idea of service transformations in the healthcare system, for perhaps there would also be a position for the supplier in the future (re)organization of healthcare as outlined in the Epital concept.

The supplier expressed an interest in potentially investing in the project, making it possible to upscale the number of patients being enrolled. The Epitalists and the supplier decided to continue the dialogue about possible collaboration and they had both put their thinking caps on: it was time for both parties to think and calculate carefully.

From the perspective of the Epitalists, the advantages of cooperating with the private supplier were obvious: they would get massive financial support for the project, and the collaboration would also potentially open up opportunities to enter into the international healthcare market (The Promised Land). Getting a foothold in the international healthcare market was the dream of the Epitalists. The international healthcare market is much larger than the Danish one and it was “The Promised Healthcare Land” where they might be much more disruptive than in Denmark.

On the other hand, the risks of cooperation were just as obvious: they would undoubtedly lose ownership of the project, and it would be hard to preserve the values and organization that had been the basis of a grass roots movement and had carried the Epital forward. As one Epitalist explained, “The proposal for cooperation would not be an easy decision for the idealist, but perhaps a necessary decision, if you ask the realist.” If you asked the realist, financial resources were essential in order to be able to prove more than just a partially existing telemedicine platform or provide more than just a POC demonstration. To sum up, stabilizing the technology and increasing the number of patients would require more resources, but acquiring resources meant running

the risk of being devoured by commercial interests as the supplier undoubtedly would demand ownership in return for the financial investment. That is the downside of taking a piggyback ride: you lose control, and you cannot be sure of what your contribution will become when it falls into the hands of a stronger actor (Latour 1987).

Building a Political Network

As mentioned, the Epitalists did not only invite private actors partly inside the living lab; they also built relations to politicians and policy makers—those who knew about politics in full scale.

In the late spring of 2012, the Epitalists began to work on the idea of becoming part of the government’s annual budget. This would allow them to create the sector-neutral space needed, as outlined in the Epital concept. In this space, different sectors could be involved, but none of them could claim ownership of the project. The idea emerged from discussions with politicians and policy makers in the healthcare area. Telemedicine was of high interest among politicians from all sides of the Danish political landscape—so there might be an opportunity to gain broad support for an ambitious telemedicine project such as the Epital.

If the Epital became a political laboratory, the issues of lacking funding and institutional anchoring would be solved. However, the Epitalists would hardly be able to maintain the freedom and openness that had been the driving forces behind the network. A political laboratory would allow the needed sector-neutral space to emerge. However, the very

same anchoring would also make the laboratory in “partial full scale” and therefore in the spotlight—and would probably require the Epitalists to get out of the lab before they were ready for it.

In other words, a political laboratory would be in the firing line for criticism and opposition from all those who were “not invited” inside. Moreover, there would be a demanding employer, constantly working on maintaining political legitimacy and defending the tax-funded experimental (political) laboratory.

The observer left the field before any decisions regarding the above piggyback strategies were made. Nevertheless, whatever piggyback strategy the Epitalists may chose in the future, one thing is certain: the Epital will change accordingly. Taking a piggyback ride is not free; the Epitalists would need to adapt to the given actor and requirements. In this case, the innovator’s dilemma is how to maintain the independency and bottom-up, grass roots living lab while ensuring the maintenance of the living lab and the progress of the “disruptive innovation.” That is why it is a difficult decision for the idealist, but a necessary decision for the realist. The Epitalists’ dilemma is to balance between being idealists and realists.

The Bubble

Let us return to Bruno Latour’s line of enquiry concerning laboratories, focusing on the construction of the laboratory and its position in the societal milieu (Latour 1983:258). The Epitalists themselves termed their laboratory “the cheese bell,” but as we have

seen, the laboratory of the Epitalist is not merely an isolated cheese bell, but rather a living lab reaching far into society.

From the observer's point of view, a *bubble metaphor* would be much more appropriate to capture the nature of the living lab: while a cheese bell points in the direction of something static and something that must be kept isolated and airtight, the bubble points in the direction of something that can float and move around freely in response to the blowing winds. The wind can blow it to new places—far from where it originally came from. Like a bubble, the living lab of the Epitalists is something temporary—something that eventually will either fly out into the world or burst.

Let us take a closer look at how the future would look from the perspective of the Epitalists by introducing extracts from a fieldwork episode. The episode took place in December 2011, when an actor/vendor from “outside” came by the laboratory to see what was going on inside. This episode shows how the Epitalists are working just as much with the future as with the present and just as much outside as inside the cheese bell. The episode is of particular interest as it shows 1) the potential future strategies for the cheese bell from the perspective of the Epitalists themselves and 2) the dilemma of the Epitalists: balancing idealism and realism.

After a short pause in the conversation, the vendor asked the Epitalists: “How have you planned to get off the ground with this cheese bell?” The Epitalists replied that they had discussed various possibilities: they could “move the cheese bell, crack it, or

expand it.” However, they did not yet know what to do and from their perspective, it was not the most important thing at this stage. That was the cheese bell, as well as the decisive driving force behind visualizing an alternative way of organizing the healthcare system.

When the Epitalists refer to the possibility of moving, cracking, or expanding the cheese bell, they are referring to different kinds of potential future strategies for the cheese bell on the other side of the POC: they could move it to other municipalities, regions, or countries. Alongside building technology, the Epitalists have also built a network of interested municipalities, which are waiting to get their own cheese bell. The Epitalists just need to prove that it works on one farm—just like Louis Pasteur did—namely, in the municipality of Lyngby-Taarbæk. From the perspective of the Epitalists, the growth model of the Epital—building the proof and extending it into society—is simple: if they can demonstrate that it works in the municipality of Lyngby-Taarbæk, it will also work in other municipalities in Denmark, as long as they follow the prescriptions of the Epital concept.

When the Epitalists refer to the possibility of expanding the cheese bell, they are referring to the possibility of up-scaling the project: moving it from a mini-scale cheese bell project to a large-scale project with a critical mass of patients included. While the cheese bell has been consolidated, a research network has also been formed: the network has been established and research applications, based on the idea of up-scaling the cheese bell, have been initiated. As Bruno Latour (1983:259) has highlight-

ed, “Science is one of the most convincing tools to persuade others of who they are and what they should want.” Up-scaling the project with a critical mass of patients would be crucial to mobilize the interest of a wider network—a network of private and public funds and investors, research institutions, politicians, and the general public.

Finally, when the Epitalists refer to *breaking the cheese bell* as a third option, they are referring to the possibility of lifting the cheese bell. In contrast to the two other options, this third possibility would imply that they have succeeded in *epitalizing* the existing healthcare system, or conversely, that they have modified and adapted the Epital concept so that it fits into the existing healthcare system.

Interestingly, the Epitalists are working on all of these potential future strategies alongside the process of building the object and maintaining their laboratory. The Epitalists are working just as much with the future as with the present—and they are working just as much outside as inside the cheese bell.

Let us turn back to the field episode in which the vendor also introduces an interesting point: that it takes more than a laboratory to change the healthcare system.

The vendor smiled and said after some hesitation that changes can happen quickly if there is political support behind them, but that it can be a long and difficult process if a change is modeled from the bottom up. The Epitalists quickly added that the network was the driving force: “It’s a grass roots movement.”

Notice that the vendor is referring to two different kinds of driving changes: you can go the long way and try to model the change from the bottom up, or you can take a shortcut by building political networks and alliances. The vendor is pointing to the fact that “it takes more than a laboratory” to change the healthcare system²: from the vendor's perspective, it takes political endorsement or a revolution from the bottom.

As we have seen, the Epitalists are well aware of the fact that it takes much more than a laboratory to change the healthcare system. That is exactly why they work just as much on the inside as the outside. They have held meetings with politicians, policy makers, and private companies and they have written research applications—alongside their work on building the telemedicine platform itself. This continuous leap between inside and outside has been crucial to the Epitalists—in order to maintain their laboratory and to extend the cheese bell into society. Note that the Epitalists refer to the process as being a “grass roots movement,” in reference to the revolutionary bottom-up process. However, at the same time, we have also seen how the Epitalists are exploring various piggyback strategies in order to borrow strength—political or financial—that can put the wind in their sails. Again, the dilemma of the Epitalists is balancing between being idealists and realists.

The observer left the field before any decisions were made with regards to piggyback rides or future strategies. So whether the Epitalists will take a piggyback

² Daniel Kleinman (2003:138) has written an article in response to Latour (1983): *It takes more than a laboratory to raise the world*. He highlights how money and the ability to get funds go beyond laboratories and research. His work is a critique of Latour and his focus on laboratories.

ride to put wind in their sails or they choose to go the long way, creating change from the bottom up, is beyond the observation period of this study.

Discussion and Conclusion

As this article shows, it takes more than a laboratory to change the healthcare system. This article argues that when it comes to healthcare innovation, we may need to pay more attention to new kinds of living labs rather than formal laboratories.

Bruno Latour reminds us that we need to pay attention to the construction of the laboratory and its position in the societal milieu rather than focusing on the laboratory itself. The laboratory of the Epitalists is a particular construction: it is a living lab created in the intersection of formal and informal structures—it is neither fully inside nor outside the Danish healthcare system as it is anchored in a municipality. This construction short-circuits the way we normally structure living labs in the Danish healthcare sector.

This article argues that we need to pay attention to new kinds of living labs—like the one introduced in this study—rather than simply looking at formal laboratories. These living labs can take multiple forms; this study has introduced one kind that is particularly interesting as it is a bottom-up living lab. It was founded by a handful of people who felt that something needed to be done differently and they therefore initiated a living lab in the intersection between the formal and informal structures.

Unlike Louis Pasteur, the Epitalists do not just have a laboratory; rather, they need to continuously in-

teract outside their lab in order to maintain the lab itself. We tend to take laboratories for granted and forget the political nature of the construction itself. The living lab of the Epitalists is indeed politics pursued by other means—these other means are to change the existing healthcare system in the name of disruptive innovation.

Bruno Latour also reminds us to consider laboratories as places where society and politics are renewed and transformed (Latour 1983). This study has shown an example of how this can look nowadays. Although the study does not show the potential impact on society and politics, it still shows an attempt to impact the wider healthcare system and health policy—in the name of enabling disruptive innovation. Thereby this study also contributes to our understanding of how health policy evolves in practice and shows an experimental set-up for policy development.

As we have seen, the Epitalists have actually managed to create a living lab in the intersection between the existing (inside) and the alternative (outside) environment. The living lab of the Epitalists has not, within the observation period, been able to release the full potential of “disruption.” Instead, more like the Hardhats, the Epitalists have been able to utilize knowledge from within the organization to create new solutions outside the organization that are presented to the existing healthcare sector. It shows how the laboratory of the Epitalists is a bubble reaching far into society rather than an isolated cheese bell.

The study has only included the considerations of various piggyback strategies and no decisions re-

garding specific piggyback strategies and alliances. However, the study shows that the decision on whether to take a piggyback ride is a dilemma between idealism and realism. The idealistic Epitalists and Clayton Christensen would argue—referring to the disruptive nature of innovations—that driving disruptive changes will always be a kind of grass roots movement since the nature of the innovation conflicts with the existing (healthcare) system. Eventually, it will change the (healthcare) system due to the geniality of the disruptive innovation. From the perspective of the realistic Epitalists, it might be better to take a piggyback ride in order to maintain the laboratory and extend it into society. The dream of *epitalizing* the existing healthcare system is an ambitious project and the question is whether it is best to take the revolutionary or evolutionary approach.

When the Epital concept signals being disruptive and an alternative to the existing healthcare system, very strong alliances must be established to succeed. In contrast, the approach of being at the intersection of the existing (formal) and the alternative (informal) systems may be a strategy that makes the Epital concept easier to accept as it, at first glance, will be considered a normalization process/evolution (May et al. 2009) rather than a disruptive/revolutionary and potentially threatening process.

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Ethics

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Healthcare Innovation—The Epital: An Ethnographic Study of a Unique Way of Organizing Healthcare Innovation

Abstract There is an ongoing debate about how best to organize healthcare innovation. This article introduces and illustrates an alternative way of doing so by studying an emerging informal and inter-organizational network (IION) in practice.

Taking an ethnographic research approach, the authors propose the concept of a *potluck feast* to describe the nature of an IION and the dynamics within it. The relationship between the project and the actors is explored by introducing Steven Brown's reading of Michel Serres' concept of the *parasite*. The unique way of organizing healthcare innovation studied in the article involves an open, sharing approach, where everyone makes themselves an open resource for the project and where the contribution is determined by the actors' own motivation rather than regulated by a formal setup and contracts.

The article argues that the ethnographic research approach is useful to explore the emergence and dynamics of IIONs. In this way, this article contributes to the field of healthcare innovation and how to organize it, and may inspire those who are already in or intend to study this field.

Keywords Healthcare Innovation; Informal and Inter-Organizational Network; Network; Innovation; Organization; Ethnography

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In *Inter-Organizational Networks: A Critical Review of the Literature to Inform Practice* (Popp et al. 2013), the authors reflect upon their six years of searching literature relevant to Informal Inter-Organizational Networks (IIONs) and conclude that this is problematic and messy, just like IIONs themselves: “the literature base and practice experience are wide ranging, diverse, and sometimes difficult to find” (Popp et al. 2013:84).

There is a need for more research within the area of IIONs. As argued by Isett and colleagues (2011), much of the public administration literature focuses on formal or mandated networks, leaving an important class of networks (i.e., emergent and informal networks) underexplored:

Despite the preponderance of informal networks... the gap between research and practice is wider for informal networks than formal networks. There is no distinct body of literature on informal networks. Consequently, there has been very little advancement of understanding of this pervasive mechanism of governance. [Isett et al. 2011:165]

With this article we hope to contribute to the understanding and discussion of how IIONs and their dynamics can be observed, described, and understood in relation to healthcare innovation. This is a particularly interesting field as innovation in healthcare requires redesign and involvement across boundaries (eHealth Task Force 2012). This study uses ethnographic methods and introduces the analytical concepts of the *potluck feast* and the *parasite*, and aims to inspire further investigation within the field.

This article presents an empirical case of an experimental project—The Epital; a living learning lab (see: “Healthcare Innovation—The Epital: A Living Lab in the Intersection Between the Informal and Formal Structures” [in this issue of QSR])—that cannot fully be categorized or explained the way we normally understand setups for healthcare innovation. This article explores the network around this project: an IION that is just as experimental as the project itself.

The point of departure is that we need to pay attention to this messiness as a study object itself rather than as something that needs to be put into order. Inspired by the philosopher Vinciane Despret (2005), this article argues that the study of informal networks can be interesting and can bring new perspectives to our understanding of their emergence and dynamics—if we allow them to be interesting.

Introduction to the Network

The project is not institutionally rooted in the existing healthcare sector (Phanareth K., personal communication) and the project has not been funded in any way. The actors in the IION have chosen to go their own way: they had an idea they believed in and they were willing to try to realize it without any public or private funding. Further, the project is not organized around a formalized setup or materialized in a project plan or a project agreement that outlines timelines, roles, and responsibilities. Likewise, there is no governing contract among the actors within the IION, which is quite remarkable in an era of public-private partnerships, where contracts usually regulate collaboration.

However, the actors in the IION do believe in collaborative efforts and they have some governing *values* for the collaboration, which are documented in the project protocol as a codex for the Epital group:

You share the vision.

You are proactive.

You are a part of the development process.

You contribute with knowledge, expertise, and resources where possible.

You are loyal.

You collaborate and share, whatever your capabilities and capacities are.

You accept that your name may be disclosed in relation to the project.

[Phanareth K., personal communication (translated by the authors)]

All actors in the IION have accepted the above-mentioned criteria as the common and governing rules and values in the established collaboration. Thus, values written on paper are one thing; how they work in practice is quite another.

Research Method

In November 2011, the first author of this article (Louise Hesseldal) entered the laboratory of the Epital where those who are involved are called *the Epitalists*. Inspired by Latour (1987), the aim was to study an emerging telemedicine project in the making by following the work of the Epitalists in their laboratory. As the background for the study was an interest in practice and “science in the making,” ethnographic fieldwork was chosen as the methodology (the methodology framework

is presented in “Healthcare Innovation—The Epital: A Living Lab in the Intersection Between the Informal and Formal Structures” [in this issue of QSR]). The theoretical basis was from the beginning Bruno Latour and the “Actor-Network Theory” (1987; 2005; 2008) in order to study the interaction between human and non-human actors in establishing an ambitious telemedicine project and the related challenges that occur. However, after some weeks in the field, it was clear that it was not just the object (the project in the form of the telemedicine platform) that was in the making; so, too, were the laboratory and the IION.

The observer realized that she was focusing too much on the technology in the making (the non-human actors)—and less on what was actually even more predominant in the fieldwork: the work on establishing a laboratory and an IION. In other words, when the observer started the fieldwork, she was taking the human actors (the Epitalists) and the laboratory for granted.

The observer concluded that the laboratory and the IION that constituted it were an even more interesting study object, and one that turned out to have multiple facets. In order to cover them, the field study has turned into two articles, of which this is the second. The first article focuses on the laboratory itself (see: “Healthcare Innovation—The Epital: A Living Lab in the Intersection Between the Informal and Formal Structures” [in this issue of QSR]), while this one focuses on the emerging IION and its dynamics in practice. The two articles might be read as one piece in order to capture the multi-facets of the study object.

The study is divided into three main sections:

1. The potluck feast
2. The concept of the parasite
3. Every feast has an end

Each section represents an analytical point regarding the IION and its dynamics. The study builds upon field observations that were conducted as part of the ethnographic field study that took place from November 2011 to September 2012.

Section 1, *the potluck feast*, studies the organization around the IION by introducing the potluck feast metaphor, which is a concept developed by the observer during the coding process. Thereby, the concept of the potluck feast is the analytical conclusion of the characterization of the IION. The observer has chosen the concept as a way to open up the analysis of the observed rather than just characterizing it as an “informal” organization or labeling the observed with other pre-defined organizational categorizations that would have closed the analysis.

Section 2, *the parasite*, studies the relationship between the project, the actors, and the dynamics within the IION, using the theoretical concept of *the parasite* as introduced by Steven Brown (2002; 2013) in his reading of Michel Serres. This theoretical concept is introduced in order to open up the study of the potluck organization and to further explore the relationship between the project and the actors, as well as the dynamics within the IION. Based on observations and the following coding process, the observer chose this theoretical concept. Even though the potluck feast was the analytical concept

that emerged as part of the analytical process, it did not capture the interesting relationship between the project and the actors within the IION, neither did it capture all dimensions of the dynamics within the IION. The observer found the concept of the parasite relevant first, to explain the nature of the relationship between the project and the actors, and second, to shed light on the dark side of the organization, which emerged during the analytical process.

Section 3, *every feast has an end*, studies the potential end or boundary of this endless network, and thereby also of the unique organization, by introducing Marilyn Strathern’s theoretical concept of *cutting the network* (1996). This study builds upon sections 1 and 2 and summarizes the study.

Section 1: The Potluck Feast

From the observer’s point of view, a potluck feast is an appropriate metaphor to describe the environment around the living learning lab and the nature of the IION itself. A potluck feast is a special event—a special kind of organization—where the host is not stuck with all the hassle and the costs associated with a usual feast. Further, a potluck feast can be a cost-efficient alternative for those without money.

The organization around the IION can be likened to a potluck feast, where all the guests bring what they want and are able to bring. The IION is organized around the solidarity principal that people contribute within their capabilities.

As the project has no funding, the actors involved constitute the resources in the project by bringing

what they can to the table, so to speak. Those who are involved contribute individually to the “common goal”: the realization of the experimental telemedicine demonstration project. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) provide the labor hours to develop the technological telemedicine platform in terms of both hardware and software. Patient association consultants and SMEs contribute with new health services that create empowerment. Lyngby-Taarbæk municipality provides access to the citizens/patients and allocates staff to be included in the project. The staff at Section of Telemedicine Research (STR), Frederiksberg Hospital, supports the project as part of their jobs. The University of Copenhagen provides a server for applications and for storage of patient data. Qualified specialists, including healthcare professionals employed in the region and self-employed consultants, make themselves available for the project in their spare time. Also, the patient associations and researchers provide support through their knowledge and their mandate to speak on behalf of the patients’ needs.

This is not an exhaustive list of the actors who constitute the project and thereby the IION. Nevertheless, it illustrates two important points about the IION:

1. It is constructed across sectors and industries (IION and public-private innovation [PPI]) and all actors involved contribute with their own capabilities and expertise.
2. There are many ways in which you can contribute to the project: with labor, materials, technology or publications, knowledge and skills, and personal network connections.

The Open Door

The potluck feast is not a closed feast. As the Epitalists put it, “all positive forces and resources are needed in order for the project to succeed.” In practice, this means that everyone is welcome to become part of the IION as long as they respect the ground rules and contribute actively to the project. The IION can be characterized as an open network where everyone who shares the mission and accepts the rules of the game is welcome.

In practice, this openness is reflected in the fact that the STR as a physical gathering place for the project on a daily basis is a revolving door of people entering or exiting. Some of those who enter come for a quick visit and do not return. Some enter several times a week, while others enter just once a month. There are also those who withdraw from the project for a short period, but return again after a while. And finally, there are those who enter almost every day. These are the people who initiated the project and have been part of it ever since. They name themselves “the Epitalists.” Actually, everyone involved, regardless of the extent, is named an “Epitalist,” but it is those who enter very often who began using the term in reference to the IION. To begin with, “the Epitalists” was used casually as a way of establishing the social community of the IION. Eventually, it also became part of the written communication and practice when emails and documents were circulated within the IION: “Dear Epitalists” or, when speaking on behalf of the entire IION: “On behalf of the Epitalists.”

As we have seen, one of the ground rules—in writing and in practice—is that all actors must con-

tribute actively to be part of the network and that there are many ways to contribute. As we have also seen, the degree of involvement varies: some provide a server, while others, all of whom have day jobs in addition to the Epital commitments, contribute with all of their spare time. That is how a potluck feast works: someone brings homemade roast beef while others provide bread and butter. Nobody comes empty-handed to a potluck feast: you simply do not eat what others have brought to the table if you have not brought anything yourself. Moreover, there would not be a feast at all if everyone showed up empty-handed: it is a joint effort. The same goes for the IION: you can join as long as you contribute actively; that is the name of the game. The project can only be kept alive as long as there are voluntary resources contributing to it.

The nature of the IION may sound anarchic—as a never-ending swing-door—and it is actually also what it is. This open and anarchistic organization of the IION is interesting as it constitutes a network that continually creates new connections when new actors and interests enter the project. All actors bring their own resources and perspectives to the project and shape the project in their own particular way.

Thereby, the IION constitutes its own special mini-ecosystem where there is consistency—in terms of a project and a network—because it does not work like other projects and networks: when an actor retires, a new one comes into play instead. Although the new actor does not always continue with what the retired actor has passed on, the actor still constitutes a resource in the project, bringing

something new and creating value by keeping the project and the IION alive.

When the new actor enters, it brings something new to the project and becomes a resource for the project. It is never known who will enter through the door and how long they will stay, and this uncertainty makes the project fragile. However, the anarchistic nature of the IION also makes the IION a dynamic living learning lab and a potluck feast that is manageable to participate in as the actors can decide themselves what they will bring and how long they will stay. They are not bound by contracts to deliver something specific within a certain time frame.

Open Source

The openness is not limited to the human actors who constitute the IION; it also applies to the technology that is brought to the table. The technology—the software—is a crucial part of the project. It is being developed in open source code. To understand why this is important to the ecosystem of the IION, we need to digress to understand the difference between open source and traditional software:

Open source is a term that comprises open standards, shared source code, and collaborative development of computer software. Per the general terms of open source licenses, operating code that is licensed under an open source contact is available for later modification and redistribution, as long as the same licensing terms are made available to later participants. [Einhorn 2004:169]

The term open source is in contrast to the traditional software industry software license structures and

intellectual property (IP) rights. This type of software (e.g., Microsoft products), which is known as proprietary software, is legally protected by the IP rights of the company that has paid for its development. The source code is protected, since the company earns money by selling licenses to it, whereby the customer/user buys the right to use the product. It is thus essential to the business and therefore important to own. In contrast, open source software (OSS) is characterized by general use of the product, which cannot be held through IP rights. The crucial difference is therefore that the source code of open source products is a free and open resource (e.g., Open Office in contrast to Microsoft Office). As one of the Epitalists, who is also an open source supplier, puts it:

It is a reverse IP in the sense that to use it, you should comply with one requirement: you need to share what you are developing. You cannot close the code. You must share it freely within the open source community. There it is a kind of reverse IP: you are welcome to use it and redistribute it to others, but you cannot close it. [Epitalist & open source supplier, meeting June 2012]

Interestingly, openness is the fundamental principle of open source communities, where a group of loosely connected actors in a given network contributes to the development of a code/product. It is thus what allows the system to be an ecosystem rather than a cyclical system. The whole idea is that “one must contribute actively” and “you must give back” in order to maintain the ecosystem. The ecosystem works as long as there are volunteers in terms of developers around the world, developing and improving the code/product.

It should be noted that the ecosystems that characterize open source networks/communities in many ways are similar to the ecosystem of the IION. This also explains why open source technology is essential for maintaining the ecosystem of the IION. If the IION were locked by IP rights and licensing agreements (using proprietary software), the openness and flexibility of the network would be limited—it would simply not be an open potluck feast. If the software were not OSS, it would be attached to the actor providing the software, and if the actor withdrew, the software would also be withdrawn. With open source, the software would stay even if the contributing actor withdrew, and therefore the ecosystem could continue with a new open source actor entering the living learning lab.

As we have seen, openness is at the center of this living lab and an essential driver for the maintenance of the ecosystem:

1. All actors commit themselves to contribute actively and be an open source for the project by sharing knowledge, time, labor, and technology freely and transparently within the IION. The collaboration is not bound or regulated by contracts or formalized papers outlining roles and responsibilities
2. At the same time, the project is also an open knowledge source—a non-committal living learning lab—in which the actors can join as long as they find it relevant.

This first section has presented the IION as constituting its own unique ecosystem around “open-

ness,” both in terms of being open to anyone who is interested in being part of the IION and contributing actively to the project, and in terms of the open knowledge source: it is a non-committal living learning lab where everyone shares openly. This open, temporary, and non-committal network constitutes a certain resource in the project and further constitutes a unique ecosystem where the project and network reinvents itself every time a new actor enters the network.

Section 2: The Concept of the Parasite

Above the IION has been described as an open potluck feast—open for all who are willing to contribute to the project. In the following section, the theoretical concept of the *parasite* will be introduced as a way to open up the analysis of the dynamics within the IION and of the openness as something unique that, nonetheless, has a flipside.

The concept of the parasite was developed by the philosopher Michel Serres (1982). The following section builds primarily on the social psychologist Steve Brown’s (2002; 2013) reading of Serres’ work. Brown (2002; 2013) introduces how the concepts of Serres’ work can be used to describe social relations and the dark side of them. His approach is interesting as it opens up for an analysis and exploration of the transformation and dynamics of the IION as a social system: its openness and uniqueness, but also its dark side.

What characterizes the parasite is that it lives to consume resources without giving anything back. As Serres points out, the parasitic relationship is al-

ways specific: there must be a host—something or someone that is being consumed (Brown 2002; 2013). However, as Brown points out, it is not entirely true that the parasite takes without giving anything in return:

Although the parasite appears to take without giving back, this is not strictly accurate in most cases. Consider the uninvited guest who draws up their chair to the dinner table. They “pay” for their meal not with coins, but rather with their conviviality and fine storytelling—“he obtains the roast and pays for it with stories.” [Serres 1982:36]

This is an exchange of sorts, albeit an apparently unequal one. This raises the obvious question of why a host would tolerate such a deal? Serres explains this by making a distinction between production and information. Unlike predators, who consume their prey whole, the parasite does not exhaust production. [Brown 2013:89]

Unless it is an unbalanced exchange, where storytelling pays for food, it is an exchange of sorts. Serres illustrates his point further with the story about a meeting between a disabled man and a blind husband.

A paralyzed man crawls on his hands and knees. He spies a blind man. The blind man stumbles over every obstacle and seems in all likelihood to be liable to injure or kill himself by accident. The paralyzed man offers him a deal: carry me on your shoulders and I will be your guide. Together, Serres states, the two make a new kind of whole. The paralyzed man provides information, the blind man provides force.

Each parasite is then highly specific, dependent upon a particular kind of host. [Brown 2002:15-16]

Here, information is exchanged for energy in terms of manpower, and together they create a new system. This story illustrates the specific nature of the exchange, since it depends on a particular host: the paralyzed man needs energy and legs, not information and guidance. The paralyzed man, who is basically the parasite, does not drain the blind man of energy. Instead, he changes the way energy is produced and moves it in a new direction favorable to himself and the blind man. Although it is the paralyzed man who spots a potential resource in the blind man, he still provides information that benefits the blind man, as well.

This leads to another important point about the parasite, as Brown (2002) also observed in his reading of Serres. The parasite creates renewal as it invents a new logic that transforms relationships between systems. To illustrate this point further, we need to introduce another of Serres' stories. In this tale, a poor and starving man passes the kitchen door of a restaurant and smells the food inside, which sates his hunger somewhat. In the midst of this act, an angry kitchen hand shows up and demands payment from "the uninvited guest" who is consuming his food. At the same moment, a third person shows up, and introduces a (new) solution to the conflict that has arisen:

Give me a coin, he said. The wretch did so, frowning. He put the coin down on the sidewalk and with the heel of his shoe made it ring a bit. This noise, he said, giving his decision, is pay enough for the aroma of the tasty dishes. [Serres 1982:34-35 as cited in Brown 2002:16]

Note that in this exchange coins are transformed into sounds, which are exchanged for food transformed into smell. Although it is an unbalanced exchange in a system where food is usually exchanged for money, it is still an exchange. The parasite has thus introduced a new system and a new type of exchange, which was not previously possible.

The parasite invents something new. Since he does not eat like everyone else, he invents a new logic. He crosses the exchange, makes it into a diagonal. He does not barter; he exchanges money. He wants to give his voice for matter, (hot) air for solid. [Serres 1982:35 as cited in Brown 2002:16]

The parasite is, in other words, a catalyst for renewal, innovation, and creativity, since it does not eat like everyone else.

In the following section, the relation between the actors within the IION and the project will be analyzed. Other relations could have been chosen. However, as the purpose is to illustrate a certain kind of organization—and its dynamics and boundaries—this specific relation has been chosen.

The Parasite That Creates Renewal

Let us return to the project and the relationship between the project and the actors who constitute the IION. As described earlier, one of the basic rules is that everyone contributes actively and voluntarily brings their capabilities to the table. This is not just a ground rule on paper but also a ground rule which is carried out in practice—in order to maintain the ecosystem of the IION. All of the actors make them-

selves open resources for the project: they provide their time, knowledge, skills, labor, and their image without any guarantee that they will ever get anything in return, as the collaboration is simply not governed by contracts.

Although the project can be viewed as a parasite—eating voluntary resources—it does actually pay the actors back with learning and experiences and, most importantly, the potential of being part of something innovative that may bring change, renewal, business potential, and acknowledgement. It is no doubt an unequal exchange, where the *smell* of a ground-breaking and disruptive telemedicine platform pays for the free knowledge, skills, and labor that are brought to the table. The actors in the IION can *smell* the potential—the potential telemedicine success—and they are all eager to do something differently when it comes to healthcare innovation, but none of them knows how the project will actually evolve. This is the price of being part of an innovative and experimental project. In the IION, it is the sound of the coin that pays for the *smell*, so to speak. It is the *smell* that brings volunteer resources into the project. Even though the level of engagement varies among the actors in the IION, this does not drain the project as long as everyone contributes to some extent and a balance between retiring and new resources is maintained.

From this perspective, the project constitutes a particular kind of parasite, namely, a parasite that nurtures creativity and ensures renewal. The project draws our attention to a different kind of organization because it cannot be explained by referring to the well-known forms of organization and

mechanisms, such as formalized public-private partnership setups (including their financial and contractual settings). The uniqueness of the project is exactly that no money, contracts, or formal structures are involved. These are all well-known organizational mechanisms, which usually bring order to things by drawing boundaries between who is in/out and who owns / does not own and by defining the positions of and expectations towards the members of a given network. This informal network, where the actors are neither fully inside nor fully outside, constructs its own space *in between* and is thereby able to short-circuit the existing mechanisms and ways of organizing projects. The project introduces a new logic of organizing healthcare innovation by experimenting with new kinds of resources and relationships, and in this way crosses the boundaries for how things are usually done. Instead of securing the individual actors within the IION through formalized cooperation materialized in contracts and project descriptions, the focus is on experimenting and developing the project and ensuring that the project is kept alive in the name of reaching a common goal. It is an experiment in between space—a certain kind of living learning lab—where the focus is on experimenting in order to create something unique. This parasitic system invents something new—a new way of organizing healthcare innovation.

The Fear of the Parasite Is the Parasite

The open organization also has a dark side: there is always the risk of a parasite sitting at the table. The unique ecosystem can only be maintained as long as everyone contributes actively and accepts

being part of this parasitic system, where they make themselves an open source for the project in the name of developing something that is potentially ground-breaking.

The fear of the parasite is that another parasite will replace it (Brown 2002). Of concern for the project are those actors who are just part of the network in order to gain knowledge that can be used elsewhere or actors who are just trying to jump directly to the table. To further illustrate this point, two field extracts will be presented. The following two extracts shed light on the dark side of the organization and at the same time on why the parasitic relationship between the project and the actors is so unique.

The Fear That There Is a Parasite at the Table

In the following, an extract from a field episode will be presented. The field episode took place in December 2011 when the Epitalists met with an actor, more specifically a potential vendor, who was interested in being part of the project. The actor had a product that could be integrated into the Epital solution. In other words, the actor could bring the product to the table and thereby be part of the project. The field episode is particularly interesting as it illustrates the concerns of one of the actors who was actually inside the IION for a short while, but left again.

“Let’s just put it on the table.” The actor went straight to the point: it was the non-existing competition clauses that were the concern. He continued, “We would like to offer our product, but we

would like some kind of security for doing so.” The actor stressed that it was general practice to create some kind of competition clause when parties enter into a partnership. The competition clause was an assurance, he emphasized. As a solution, the actor suggested that all actors within the IION could sign a binding document in which they committed themselves to *not* share knowledge and experiences beyond the IION. In other words, what was shared and created within the IION should be kept there and not cross the boundaries of the living learning lab.

It was the unequal exchange that was an issue for the actor. He stressed that by entering into the network and contributing actively, he would be sharing a great deal of knowledge and experience he had gained from all the “teething problems” encountered in creating a unique product. Further, the actor emphasized that the organization he represented was a small player and had a lot at stake: “It might be swallowed up by a larger player.”

This episode provides an example of resistance against the organization and sheds some light on the concerns of one of the actors who came and left again shortly after. The actor was concerned about not having any security or guarantees, but what is even more interesting is why: 1) the knowledge and experiences might travel beyond the boundaries of the living learning lab and 2) his organization might be swallowed up by a bigger player in the IION. In other words, he was reluctant to make himself an open resource for the parasite (the project) and even more concerned about other potential parasites that sit around the table—ready to absorb the knowl-

edge and apply it outside the living learning lab. In this connection, he was worried about the lack of formalized contracts, which meant that the actors’ positions were not fixed. In other words, there is always the risk of a parasite sitting around the table, and the potential risk of a larger player absorbing a smaller player.

The Parasite That Tried to Jump Directly to the Table

The only fear of a parasite is the one (parasite) who can replace him in his position of parasite (Brown 2002). There is always a risk of uninvited guests trying to jump directly to the table and reap the rewards of all the resources that have collectively been brought to it.

Serres (1982 as cited in Brown 2002) calls this “to stand last in the chain,” a notion that is related to his concept of *parasitic chains*. The tapeworm can illustrate Serres’ point. The tapeworm is the last in the chain as it can benefit from a long chain of resources, without giving anything in return. In a parasitic chain, it is all about being the last one:

The game they play is to always come last, to be in the last position in the parasitic chain. And thus to stand, open mouthed, ready to absorb all of what flows down the chain. The last in line collects all. [Brown 2002:15]

The advantage of standing at the end of the chain is that one can consume resources without giving something in return. The risk for the ecosystem—and thereby the project—is if the project itself becomes a resource for an expanding parasite.

To illustrate this point, an extract from another field episode will be presented. This episode occurred when a curious supplier from a hardware and software company visited the Epitalists in December 2011. The supplier could *smell* the potential success of the project. However, as we will see, he was not willing to play the game of the IION. This field episode is interesting as it further illustrates the dark side of openness.

The supplier kicked off the meeting by talking about all the telemedicine projects he had been involved in over the years, not just in Denmark but also abroad. The Epitalists were well aware of what was happening outside their living learning lab and the parties quickly came to the conclusion that there was a lack of ambitious telemedicine projects and the Epital project was one of the few promising projects that stood out from the crowd. In other words, the parties indeed shared interests.

After a short conversation, the supplier asked how the Epitalists intended to move the living learning lab into society. He was eager to learn more about the project and the future plans. The Epitalists replied briefly that they had discussed various possibilities, but they did not know yet and it was not the main focus at that point in time. It was evident that the Epitalists did not want to talk in detail about the subject. Instead, they invited the supplier to become an active part of the network (IION). In the same sentence, they emphasized the ground rules of the IION about everyone contributing actively and openly sharing knowledge and resources within the IION.

One of the Epitalists went straight to the point and asked the supplier: “What is your interest in this?” and “What can you contribute?” (Epitalist, meeting December 2011). Obviously, they wanted to know what the supplier could bring to the table before they shared more. In other words, they would not accept small talk in return for knowledge.

The supplier responded hesitantly that he was involved in other projects around the country and he could try to pull some of these in the same direction as the Epital and thereby extend the ideas and values behind the Epital concept to a wider network outside the living learning lab of the IION.

One of the Epitalists interrupted the supplier and asked directly, “Why aren’t you interested in being more directly involved in the project?” (Epitalist, meeting December 2011).

The supplier responded promptly, “Because we don’t run a philanthropic business” (Hardware and software supplier, meeting December 2011).

The supplier thereby made it clear that he represented a company whose purpose was to make money. He was not willing to make himself—and the company he represented—an open and voluntary resource for the project without some kind of guarantee of what he would get in return. The supplier was interested in neither a partial existing object nor in being part of an anarchistic network. Apparently, he was interested in an equal exchange and some form of contractual arrangement to ensure a return on investment.

Section 2 has shown a parasitic relationship between the project and the actors that constitute the IION. It introduces a new logic to organizing healthcare innovation by experimenting with new kinds of resources and relationships, thereby crossing the boundaries for how things are usually done. Instead of securing the participation of individual actors in the IION through formalized cooperation, focus is on developing the project and securing that the project is kept alive—in the name of reaching a common goal. It is argued that the parasitic system invents something new: a new way of organizing the IION and healthcare innovation. On the other hand, this section has also shown that the unique openness of the organization has a flipside. The concept of the parasite opens up for studying the dark side of openness, namely, that also it attracts actors that try to get a seat at the table without contributing to the project and the common goal.

Section 3: Every Feast Comes to an End

From time to time, some of those who came through the door frequently and who uploaded documents to the Dropbox folder in the late evening began to worry. This worry lurked below the surface and occasionally surfaced, as it did at a meeting between some of the Epitalists and a lawyer that took place in December 2011. The lawyer was a close friend of one of the Epitalists and he had been invited to an informal meeting as the Epitalists began to realize that they had something unique with great potential that they did not want to lose.

In the following section, extracts from this meeting will be presented. This field episode is inter-

esting to consider as it illustrates the paradox of the anarchistic and open organization around the IION: it constitutes at one and the same time the possibilities and limitations of the IION and the project.

The lawyer could hardly believe his ears when he was told that there was not one single contract in place between the actors in the IION. Completely baffled, he asked, “Well, you must at least have some kind of confidentiality statement/agreement?” (Lawyer, meeting December 2011).

The Epitalists explained that it might sound a bit naive from a legal perspective, but “equality” and “openness” had been the basic rules from the beginning, and these ground rules had been the driving forces behind the project. They explained that these principles were actually what made the project unique: an environment where no one is legally bound. As one of them put it, “We wouldn’t be where we are today if we had not done it the way we did—they have been the drivers” (i.e., openness and equality) (Epitalist, meeting December 2011).

When referring to the lack of contracts as the driving force for the project, it points to the fact that due to the legal openness, the project has been in a contractual “no man’s land” where the actors have not been bound via contracts and they thereby have not had any formalized position in the IION. Even though this openness has involved the risk of parasites entering through the door, the open organization has been seen as an opportunity rather than a threat.

Interestingly, as the meeting proceeds, the Epitalists indicate that they are beginning to doubt their basic principles. From defending the ideology of equality and openness, they raise concerns about whether the very same openness could be the end of the IION and the project. As one of the Epitalists puts it:

Proof of concept has been driven by idealism, but we must figure out what we will do when we get to the next stage...we risk someone stealing what we have fought so hard for. [Epitalist, meeting December 2011]

This shift is interesting as it illustrates something essential about the nature of the project. The project is in the making, as is the technology. The risk of moving from being in the making to something more tangible is that the object becomes a materiality and not just an idea on paper. The openness of the project makes it possible for someone to steal not just the idea but also the concept/technology, since it is developed in open source.

This episode shows that the perception of risk—the risk of someone reaping the rewards of the efforts made within the IION—increases as the project proceeds. In other words, the Epitalists began to fear that an uninvited guest could enter through the back door and be the one who stands last in the chain.

The lawyer ended the meeting by saying:

It’s easier to get these formalities in place while you are all friends; it will become more difficult the (potential) day when you are no longer friends. [Lawyer, meeting December 2011]

This episode shows a paradox of the open organization: the project would never have come as far as it has if it had not been organized openly, and it is doubtful that it would have been possible to create a unique object if the project had been governed by contracts. As a partial existing object—and a legally unfixed object—the Epital has created a network and friendships. The perception of equality and openness has created this never-ending anarchistic network of actors who all *smell* the potential and justly claim a position in this open community. However, the episode also points to the potential end or boundary of this never-ending network and thereby the boundary of the unique organization of this IION.

Whereas this article has mainly focused on the creation and emergence of a certain kind of network, the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1996) has focused much more on the issue of *cutting networks*. She has addressed how ownership in terms of patents and IP rights cuts endless networks, drawing the boundary between who is in/out and who owns / does not own. She stresses her point in the following:

The extent of a homogeneous network...appears to be bound by the definition of who belongs to it. However, the divide, created for the purposes of the patent, between those who did and those who did not belong, is established not by some cessation of the flow of community but by a quite extraneous factor: the commercial potential of the work that turned a discovery into a patentable invention. We could say that the prospect of ownership cut into the network. The claim to have done the research that

solved “the problem” justified a deliberate act of hybridization: co-operative or competitive, the scientists’ prior work could now be evaluated by criteria from a different world altogether: that of commerce. [Strathern 1996:524]

Interestingly, Strathern draws our attention to a certain aspect of this network: all actors within the IION have a position within the network—and they can claim so—as they all contribute actively. Thereby, they can all claim ownership. At this stage, nobody needs to claim ownership because there is nothing to own. However, as indicated in the field extract above, one day contracts might be brought to the table to cut the endless network in the name of protecting the object from parasites. In other words, it would be the end of the potluck feast. The boundary of this never-ending network might be its own success.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study has not been to show an example of the best practice in organizing healthcare innovation; instead, it has been to show an alternative way of doing so. The study shows an emerging IION and its dynamics and points to a unique ecosystem and living learning lab constituted by openness.

The observer joined the IION and the project in its emerging phase, when the IION was establishing the living learning lab and building the object: the telemedicine project. However, this process started a long time before the observer joined the IION and continued after the observer left the field and

turned off her computer. One could argue that the study offers a snapshot of a project and the network around it in a certain phase of its life cycle. This might be true, but it is not the interesting part. What is interesting is to see how the success of the object (the telemedicine network) might be the boundary of the IION itself. As we have seen, the Epitalists are considering introducing contracts in order to protect the object and the resources that have been brought to the table.

Contracts would not necessarily mean the death of the IION, but they would transform the IION into something more formalized. Some researchers have argued that networks tend to emerge informally and then over time become more formal (Popp et al. 2013:27), just as others have argued that grass roots movements become more formalized over time, moving from playing the game from the outside to playing the game from the inside or partly inside (Bonde 2012). This may also be true, but it is not the interesting part. What is interesting is this in between space—temporary or permanent—which fuses new inspiration on how to organize innovation and points to a unique way of doing so. This study shows an organization that is built on openness and temporality; it is a unique ecosystem that reinvents itself every time a new actor enters the project. This is captured in the concept of the potluck feast—this anarchistic organization that constitutes a living learning lab, where the individual actors decide themselves what they will bring and how long they will stay, as long as they contribute to the IION and the project. The ecosystem is kept alive as long as everyone contributes actively, which

makes everyone an open resource for the project. This parasitic relationship between the project and the actors draws our attention to another kind of organization that is not organized around contracts and equal exchanges: the actors openly bring resources to the table and therefore always run the risk of a parasite trying to get a seat at the table. The potluck feast continues as long as the project remains the only parasite.

Further, the purpose of the study has been to introduce an alternative way of studying the IION, which allows it to be more interesting. The study shows how the IION and its dynamics can be studied using ethnographic methods and by introducing the analytical concepts of the potluck feast and the parasite to open up the analysis rather than close it down. In this study, the methodological starting point is complexity, mess, and disorder rather than order and simplicity. It is argued that we need to allow the IION to be messy and to acknowledge the messiness as the research object itself and not as something that needs to be disciplined as a starting point. If we want to understand informal and experimental networks and their nature and dynamics, we need to go beyond the focus on dividing them into explanatory categories (e.g., formal structures, forms of governance). Rather, we need to focus on the messiness and the dynamics of disorder/order—just like this article does with the potluck concept. Also, we need to go beyond explanatory categories when describing the dynamics within these informal networks. For instance, “trust” is often highlighted as an important factor in the growth and development of networks and it has also long been described as critical for successful collaboration (Popp

et al. 2013). This article has also touched upon trust, without using the actual word. The ethnographic approach taken in this article sheds light on the informal process and allows us to go beyond explanatory categories such as trust and instead explore practice and how trust and distrust are played out in practice.

This article showcases the usefulness of ethnographic research in analyzing these kinds of emerging informal networks and understanding some of their underlying mechanisms. In particular, this approach is relevant when the study object—like the IION—is a network that cannot be explained in other common ways. However, the approach might also be used to study more formal network formation and dynamics, including research networks that are in the intersection of formal and informal networks. As pointed out by philosopher Vinciane Despret (2005), interesting research is research into the conditions that make something interesting and that make someone or something else capable of becoming interesting. Her point is that those who study and observe the social should allow the study object to add something new to our understanding, that is, allow the social to be interesting—instead of predetermining the social. As she asks: “Do we prefer the predictable object or the object that surprises us and that adds other definitions to what ‘being social’ means” (Despret 2005:367). This detour around Despret is relevant as it points out why it might also be relevant to adopt an ethnographic method when studying more “formal networks.” Maybe the more formal networks are just as interesting as the messier and informal networks—if we allow them to be.

In summary, we can learn from these kinds of untraditional and informal inter-organizational networks if we allow them to exist and emerge in an interesting way. Their existence is linked to whether we, as a society, allow these independent innovation spaces—living learning labs—and untraditional IIONs to emerge in the intersection between existing ways of organizing healthcare innovation across sectors and other organizational boundaries. Whether or not they are interesting is linked to whether we as researchers allow these kinds of networks to appear as interesting study objects instead of forcing them to be like the other networks we are familiar with. This study has developed a new analytical concept: a potluck feast to introduce a new kind of organization. This IION and project are interesting and unique, but even the most interesting and unique case can become boring and predictable if we do not allow the field to be interesting.

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Social Marking in Memory Entrepreneurship: The Battle Over Zapata's Legacy

Abstract Disputes over historical representations often revolve around competing narratives about the past, but the processes through which these narratives are constructed are often neglected. In this paper, we extend the concept of *collective memory* using Brekhus' notion of *social marking* to investigate the creation and maintenance of collective representations of the Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata. We analyze the claims made in speeches and communiqués produced by two opposing groups—the Mexican government and the Zapatista movement—in a decades-long dispute over land and indigenous rights. Moreover, we argue that processes of social marking can further explain the selective nature of collective memory, that is, how certain parts of the past are remembered and emphasized while others are de-emphasized and forgotten. Also, in our analysis of social marking, we identify a naturalization process that is utilized by actors in mnemonic battles to recast their constructed representations of the past as natural, pure, and true. We close with a discussion of how understanding the naturalization process as outlined here can shed light on current political and historical disputes.

Keywords Social Marking; Memory Entrepreneurship; Naturalization Process; Collective Memory; Emiliano Zapata

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Historical representations exist in a state of perpetual vulnerability. They illuminate the ways in which memory is an ongoing process in need of periodic maintenance, alterations, updates, and erasure. They also frequently serve as fodder for contemporary political debates. In this paper, we extend the concept of *collective memory* using Brekhus' notion of *social marking* to investigate the creation and maintenance of collective representations of the Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata. We focus on documents produced by two opposing groups—the Mexican government and the Zapatista movement—in a decades-long dispute over land and indigenous rights. Moreover, we argue that processes of social marking can further explain the selective nature of collective memory, that is, how certain parts of the past are remembered and emphasized while others are de-emphasized and forgotten. While the social marking of identity helps us understand how identities are assigned and maintained (Brekhus 1996), we hope to show how the social marking of the past can help us understand how memories can be (re)created and (re)constructed for contemporary purposes.

The mnemonic battle over the legacy of the (in)famous Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata is among the most contentious current disputes over historical representation. The process began immediately following Zapata's murder in 1919 and has continued up to the present. In recent decades, the dispute has garnered increased attention and inspired militant action. Significantly, following Zapata's death, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI) formed and began a more than 70-year occupation

of the national palace where they strove to institutionalize Zapata's legacy. The Zapatista movement of the twentieth century emerged in large part as a response to the PRI's attempts at claiming Zapata. The PRI were eventually voted out of office in 2000, but after twelve years, Enrique Peña Nieto, the PRI candidate, won the 2012 Mexican presidential election, which could potentially intensify the dispute over Zapata's legacy. We begin with a brief history of the Zapatista movement.

Zapatista Emergence

The Zapatistas, or the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN is the acronym in Spanish), are a radical social movement organization that emerged from the jungles of Chiapas, Mexico, on January 01, 1994 (see: Freeman and Johnson 1999). The timing was strategic and symbolic as it was the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was intended to unite Canada, the United States, and Mexico in a free-trade union, was set to go into effect. NAFTA, however, was seen by the Zapatistas as simply the most recent in a century-long series of federal actions threatening indigenous Mexican farmers' ways of life. They officially declared war on the Mexican government in response to former Mexican President Carlos Salinas' modifications to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution—an agrarian reform plan passed in 1917 that promised a redistribution of land to the indigenous Mayan people and peasants throughout Mexico—and the subsequent passing of a new regulatory agrarian law, both of which eliminated the possibility of land redistribution (Harvey 1998). Donning ski masks and wielding firearms (many of which were actually

wooden sticks made to resemble guns), the Zapatistas took control of seven townships in the Mexican state of Chiapas, including several presidential palaces (Ramírez 2008). A twelve-day shootout ensued in which prisoners were taken by each side. At the same time, a protest involving more than 100,000 people took place in the Mexico City Zócalo (main plaza), and aerial bombings were carried out by the Mexican government, eventually resulting in a cease-fire with them agreeing to negotiate with the rebels (Chiapas Support Committee 2007).

The Zapatistas' spokesperson, Subcommander Marcos, called Salinas' modifications to Article 27 and the implementation of NAFTA "nothing more than a death sentence to the indigenous ethnicities of Mexico, who are perfectly dispensable in the modernization program of Salinas de Gortari" (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional [EZLN] 1995a:57). Meanwhile, NAFTA led to lower prices, and lower profits, for the corn the farmers produced (Chiapas Support Committee 2007). In an attempt to resolve this dispute, the Zapatistas scheduled a conference in January of 1996 to write what came to be known as the San Andres Accords. In attendance were 500 delegates from 32 indigenous ethnic groups, with the intention of writing up a list of demands for the Mexican government (Higgins 2001; Ramírez 2008).

Since the government's policies concerning the Zapatistas also affected other non-Chiapan groups, the Zapatistas invited these groups as well in an attempt to provide an open forum for all indigenous Mexicans to voice their concerns. The fundamental demands coming out of the meeting were for the right to self-determination through autonomy, rec-

ognition of the community as a public entity with political representation, and the restoration of Article 27 to redistribute land and resources to indigenous farmers (see: Higgins 2001; Chiapas Support Committee 2007).

Repeated failed negotiation attempts ultimately resulted in the Zapatistas withdrawing from talks in January of 1997. At around the same time, the Zapatistas encountered sporadic fits of violence from pro-government, armed civilians, culminating in the death of 45 unarmed Zapatista soldiers on December 22, 1997 (Human Rights Watch 1999; Higgins 2001). Also in 1997, Zapatista delegations visited Madrid, Spain, and Venice, Italy, addressing audiences of 3,000 and 30,000 respectively (Higgins 2001). International exposure led to an increase in human rights groups visiting and reporting on the conflict zone in Chiapas, as well as support from the United Nations, Pope John Paul II, French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, and the European Union (Higgins 2001; Ramírez 2008). Despite global attention, however, the Mexican government failed to provide the Zapatistas with protection against the paramilitary groups.

After a period of peaceful response to the Mexican government's low-intensity warfare, the Zapatistas reemerged in 2001 to march on Mexico City with the support of 200,000 people. A delegation met with the Mexican Congress to discuss their concerns. One month later the government issued a heavily revised version of the Law for Indigenous Rights and Culture—the first of six San Andreas Accords agreements that was signed in 1996, but never codified—which the Zapatistas denounced as more restrictive

than their current situation (Higgins 2001). For the next four years the Zapatistas remained relatively inactive, while occasionally releasing communiqués voicing their discontent with the political climate in Mexico and the lack of difference between the major political parties' positions on indigenous rights.

In 2005, the Zapatistas released a statement outlining a plan to rally other groups similarly affected by globalization and neoliberal policies. Their goal was to alter the political process, but not start a new political party. They called this new initiative "the Other Campaign." Comprised primarily of Zapatista delegates, the Other Campaign went on a tour of Mexico that lasted for most of 2006 and representatives met with nearly every group of indigenous peoples living in the country (Ramírez 2008). Since the close of the tour, the Zapatistas have focused their energy on sharing their experiences of exploitation and oppression with other communities around the globe. Their strong opposition to neoliberal politics and globalization led them to look in new directions for help in their struggle, hosting the International Indigenous Encounter in Northwestern Mexico in late 2007. They argued that, "just as there is a neoliberal globalization, there is a globalization of rebellion" (Ramírez 2008:322). Accordingly, they have become increasingly active in voicing their opinions regarding indigenous struggles internationally, most recently expressing support for the Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation.

In recent years, the government and the Zapatistas have settled nearly nothing in their negotiations. There were several attempts in 2010 to codify laws that the government proposed and the Zapatistas

rejected, but the two sides have not reached a mutual agreement on any of the issues regarding indigenous rights or land reform. The future of the dispute is unclear, and the recent election of Enrique Peña Nieto (from the PRI) casts even more uncertainty on its outcome.

Collective Memory

Since studies of collective memory have addressed a variety of issues in different ways, we begin here by articulating what we mean by collective memory. We adopt a collectivist approach, focusing on public discourses about the past, instead of examining what individuals remember and view as significant or how they put publically available symbols and rituals to use (Olick 1999). Additionally, our approach is informed by an instrumentalist understanding of presentism. Presentism refers to the general notion that the past is largely a social construction shaped by concerns for the present (Mead 1929; 1959; Schwartz 1991; 1996; Halbwachs 1992; Schudson 1992; Olick and Robbins 1998; Polletta 1998). Instrumentalist presentists emphasize "memory entrepreneurship" as a *purposeful* manipulation of the past in order to support present issues, narratives, and ideologies (Olick and Robbins 1998). From this perspective collective memories must be simultaneously malleable and persistent, consistent yet changeable.

In this paper, we focus on a subfield of collective memory interested in how groups commemorate pasts that are sources of controversy (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991; Fine 2001). We are concerned with a specific "mnemonic battle" over how

to commemorate a difficult past, and the tactics employed by the “memory entrepreneurs” from opposing “mnemonic communities” (Zerubavel 1996). Groups engage in mnemonic battles, but individual actors are the memory entrepreneurs. For the Mexican government, the president and the speechwriters are behind the entrepreneurial actions. On the Zapatista side, Subcommander Marcos, the movement's spokesperson—and arguably most well-known member to outsiders—guides the entrepreneurship. The Zapatistas wear ski masks and bandanas over their faces, both for anonymity and as symbols of egalitarianism, so Marcos' identity is unclear. The Mexican government, however, insists that Marcos is really Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, a college professor educated in liberation theology and Marxism. If the Mexican government is right about his identity, unlike most other Zapatistas, Marcos is of Spanish, not Mayan, descent.

While we recognize that all memories are selective, the Zapatistas and the Mexican government's conflicting representations are not merely the unbiased, inevitable result of their different cultural frameworks. Rather, the two groups are actively, and consciously, engaged in memory entrepreneurship in an attempt to establish their respective positions as the rightful heir to Zapata's legacy, thereby justifying their current position on agrarian reform. Drawing selectively from historical facts, both sides construct competing versions of Zapata's reputation (Fine 2001) and then pose the question, “What would Zapata do?” While some argue the malleability of the past is limited by historical “facts” (Bromberg and Fine 2002), that the past resists reconstruction

at will (Schudson 1992), the Zapatista movement is challenging a century of this very sort of revisionary history work by the Mexican government.

Collective Imagination and Knowledge Bases

Collective imagination is part fantasy and part investment (Borer 2010). While the notion of reputation is inherently past oriented, situated in the realm of collective memory, a legacy is something that combines past, present, and future—the realm of collective imagination. With both the Mexican government and the Zapatista movement seeking to situate themselves as the true heirs of Zapata's legacy, they are competing not only over how to remember Zapata but also over how to handle agrarian reform right now, and both of these debates are rooted, we argue, in differing visions or collective imaginations of the future. While both sides of the debate in Mexico have different “fantasies” about the future, they also have a lot invested in their respective visions of that future. The indigenous people supported by the Zapatista movement have their entire way of life on the line, and the Mexican government is facing a potential restructuring of their agrarian policies in particular, and a radical change in their relationship with the indigenous population in general.

Building on a line of research in the sociology of culture and the sociology of knowledge, we also examine how this battle to define Zapata's legacy, and as a result what is seen as the best course of action in agrarian reform, is mediated by the two groups' relationships to knowledge and power. More specifically, we explore how having less social authority

than the Mexican government affects the memory entrepreneurship of the Zapatista movement. Scholars in the sociology of knowledge have called attention to not just elite knowledge producers but also to claims made and acted upon by laypersons—informal or subjugated knowledge (Foucault 1972; Swidler and Ardit 1994). We examine how the Zapatista movement's distance from formal institutions affects its members' ability to use their “organic” knowledge (Gramsci 1971) to reject and counter the claims made by the traditional, elite knowledge producers inside the Mexican government.

Social Marking

We employ Brekhus's (1996) concept of social marking to further investigate how different social actors in Mexico approach the Zapatista-Mexican government dispute. Brekhus borrows the concept of markedness from the structuralist linguists Nikolai Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson, who developed it while studying phoneme pairs (Brekhus 1996). In their research, Trubetzkoy and Jakobson discovered that one part of a pair is “actively highlighted with a mark while the other remains passively defined by its absence of a mark” (Brekhus 1998:35). In studying sexual identity construction, Brekhus applies this concept to social interactions by pointing out the ways social actors perceive certain parts of a sexual identity as “significant” or “salient” while ignoring other parts as “mundane,” “natural,” or “epistemologically unproblematic” (Brekhus 1996:500). He goes on to describe the properties of social marking: (1) the unmarked is unarticulated while the marked is heavily articulated; (2) the significance of the marked is exaggerated due to its heavy articulation;

(3) the marked element receives more attention than the unmarked despite the fact that the unmarked may exist in greater size and frequency; (4) in-group differences within the marked are ignored, giving the impression that they are more homogeneous than the unmarked; and (5) attributes of the marked element are seen as homogeneous within the group, but non-existent outside the group, while characteristics of an unmarked element are seen as “idiosyncratic to the individual” or as natural human behavior (Brekhus 1998:36).

Brekhus further articulates the concept of social marking by noting that it is not synonymous with social value, which focuses on distinctions between positive and negative statuses. Instead, markedness focuses on distinctions between marked groups that are given a social value and unmarked groups seen as having no social value (Brekhus 1996). Like Durkheim's (2001) famous dichotomy between the sacred and profane, where the sacred is defined as that which is not profane, the unmarked is defined by its absence of a mark, and of social value, rendering it invisible or eclipsed by the marked.

While our analysis highlights the content of speeches and communiqués, we do so in order to flesh out the *forms* that mnemonic entrepreneurs use to create historical representations. Focusing on the *structure* of remembering (and forgetting) can help us better understand how memory entrepreneurship works *in vivo* (Zerubavel 2003). Instead of assessing the success or failure of the claims made by the Mexican government and the Zapatistas, we instead use their mnemonic battle as a case from which to glean the structure of mnemonic entrepreneurial claims.

By adopting an instrumentalist perspective and acknowledging that entrepreneurship, that is, social marking, is intentional, purposeful, and goal-oriented as opposed to “an inevitable consequence of the fact that we interpret the world—including the past—on the basis of our own experience and within cultural frameworks” (Olick and Robbins 1998:128), we hope to highlight how processes of social marking operate in memory entrepreneurship.

Method

In order to examine how the two groups represented the memory of Zapata, we collected documents commemorating him by both groups. The day of the year on which this most frequently occurs is April 10, the anniversary of Zapata's assassination in 1919. The two groups produce different types of texts for the occasion. While the government is able to hold large commemorations in cities where Zapata grew up, frequented, or died, the Zapatistas do not have that luxury, and instead produce communiqués and letters that flow through a variety of media outlets via an “ever resourceful chain of couriers” (Ross 1994).

We examined three official speeches delivered by Mexican presidents in this window of time and ten, much shorter, documents released by the Zapatista movement to commemorate Zapata's death. While the number of documents we analyzed for each group at first appears lopsided, if one looks at the number of pages, it becomes more balanced: 33 pages of government commemoration and 35 pages of Zapatista commemoration. Many of the Zapatista's documents were published in *La Jornada*, a major

Mexican news outlet, which served a broad and more diverse portion of the national population than other newspapers.¹ *La Jornada* also served as a megaphone to the international community, broadcasting the rebellion, including the Zapatistas' communiqués, to millions worldwide.² The specific documents we chose to analyze were selected because they were either published (in the case of the Zapatistas³) or delivered (in the case of speech transcripts) on April 10 between the years of 1994 and 2000.⁴ We analyzed the only three commemorative speeches delivered by Mexican presidents, and located the transcripts on official Mexican government websites. The fact that the texts were produced in order to commemorate Zapata resulted in what we believe to be the richest data for analyzing how the groups wanted Zapata to be remembered.

We employed aspects of the grounded theory approach to data coding and analysis as outlined by

¹ In the early nineties, *La Jornada* was among the top three Mexican newspapers in terms of number of copies issued (Canclini 2003) and its readership represents the widest range of people than any other in Mexico (Piccini 1991).

² According to *La Jornada's* website, in the early nineties, it was part of World Media, which meant that its stories went to Madrid, Paris, Dublin, Tokyo, Geneva, Vienna, Río de Janeiro, Lisbon, Zurich, Boston, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Montevideo, Munich, Rome, and Cairo (*La Jornada* 2011).

³ The publication date is not always April 10 (see references), but they were all written on April 10, with the meaningfulness of the date in mind.

⁴ These dates mark the emergence of the Zapatista movement in 1994 and the temporary fall of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 2000. The Zapatistas issued far fewer communiqués beginning in 2000 as well, and none have been disseminated on subsequent anniversaries of Zapata's death. The voting out of the PRI is significant because they had been in power since 1929 and the Zapatista movement's emergence was largely a response to their past, present, and potential future actions. Moreover, due to their explicit claim to being the revolution institutionalized, the reign of the PRI was in part predicated on their continued efforts to claim the revolution as their own and to make decisions *as* revolutionaries (see: Jensen 2007).

Charmaz (2006).⁵ We began with what she calls initial coding, reading each document line by line, taking note of Zapata's identity traits and the revolutionary goals that the Zapatistas and the government highlighted, or marked. We then compiled a list of these traits and goals, and placed them into categories based on the type of person Zapata was according to the two groups and the type of future each claimed he envisioned. For example, the Zapatistas portrayed Zapata as stubborn and unwilling to accept limited reform, whereas the Mexican government highlighted his alleged willingness to compromise in order to achieve meaningful legislation. Another example of the two groups' contrasting representations of Zapata revolved around the contrasting linguistic strategies each employed. While the government used adjectives that focused on abstract qualities of his character, the Zapatistas emphasized verbs to describe him in terms of concrete actions. We then returned to the data and, with the traits and actions both groups marked in mind, engaged in focused coding (Charmaz 2006), examining how each described and framed their own actions. In other words, we compared how the groups marked Zapata with how they marked themselves. Not surprisingly, each attempted to

⁵ Charmaz (2006) outlines a multistage process of data analysis. It starts with initial coding in which processes are described and minimally interpreted in order to avoid projection of preconceived notions onto the data while constantly comparing any codes that emerge. Next, researchers engage in focused coding, which is a sorting process wherein the most commonly occurring codes and those that best represent the data are used to help interpret larger segments of the data. We went a step further and employed what Strauss and Corbin (1998) call axial coding, which entails relating categories to subcategories in the data and exploring how they are related. Thus, initial coding carves distinct codes out of the data, focused coding refines the most salient ones, and axial coding strings them back together into a coherent whole.

highlight the same traits in themselves as those they emphasized in Zapata.

With these and other categorical differences in mind, we then re-read the documents and examined the political positions supported by the two groups. It was during this third, axial, stage of coding (Charmaz 2006) that evidence of what we call a naturalization process emerged, where both groups attempted to recast their constructed representations of Zapata as natural, pure, and true. Once we identified this process, we went back over the data to better understand which features were central to these and how they were related to one another. At this point we also employed Brekhus' social marking technique to identify what parts of Zapata's identity were being explicitly and implicitly marked or left unmarked, or regarded as meaningful or epistemologically unproblematic.

Early Memory Entrepreneurship

On April 10, 1919, Emiliano Zapata met with a colonel from the newly established government, who he thought was considering defection to Zapata's army. As it turned out, the man, Colonel Jesus Guajardo, was taking advantage of Zapata's desperation for new recruits, in the hope of coaxing Zapata out of hiding. Carranza was fed up with Zapata and tasked General Pablo González with stopping the rebel's rabble rousing. González in turn blackmailed Guajardo into orchestrating a fake defection in order to set up the revolutionary. Zapata agreed to a meeting, and upon his arrival was shot multiple times and mortally wounded.

Important for the purposes of this project is the fact that both Zapata and Carranza were generals in the revolution against President Porfirio Diaz. While the two men and their respective followers had different goals for the revolution (especially significant for this study is their differing positions on the aforementioned Article 27 of the constitution), it is crucial to note that they both viewed themselves, and were viewed by others, as revolutionaries.⁶ After Carranza was elected president in 1917, he began to institutionalize his version of the revolution, which downplayed the land reform for which Zapata and the original Zapatistas fought. Subsequent presidents followed in Carranza’s footsteps, claiming that the government was carrying out the revolution, thus eliminating the need for any further uprising. By attempting to align itself with the revolutionaries, the government also was arguing that it, too, was a victim of the previous, unjust regime.

Immediately following the murder of Zapata, newspapers that supported Carranza ran headlines celebrating the death of “the famous Attila,” and the “bloodthirsty ringleader,” at the hand of González, the “prestigious military man,” who was deserving of “enthusiastic congratulations” (Womack 1968:327). While at the time of his death Zapata was being framed by the government as a dangerous person who was bad for Mexico, in subsequent years, in order to maintain their position as the torchbearers of the revolution, the government has embraced Zapata as a revolutionary

⁶ For a comprehensive review of the Mexican Revolution, see: Benjamin (2000). For an in-depth examination of Zapata’s role and influence on the Revolution, see: Womack (1968).

hero, albeit in ways that stripped him of his radical edge (see: Brunk 2008).

In 1994, when the new Zapatistas emerged from the jungles of Chiapas, it was in reaction to the then President Salinas’ agrarian policies, the signing of NAFTA, and the effects of neoliberalism on rural Mexican farmers, but it was also a response to the distorted version of the revolution that had been espoused by the government for over 70 years. In the following, we will demonstrate how the late twentieth century Zapatistas and the Mexican government present different depictions of Zapata, and by extension the revolution, and how those depictions support their respective stances on current policies concerning agrarian reform and indigenous rights.

Who Was Emiliano Zapata?

The mnemonic battle between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government is one in which elite memory and subjugated memory fight for influence over popular memory. Table 1 describes the contrasting strategies used by each group to accomplish essentially the same objective—establishing a dominant conception of the past.

Based on multiple rounds of coding, several themes emerged that signify how the two groups differently approached similar processes. First, they not only focused on different traits of Zapata, but also emphasized different kinds of traits. Specifically, the Mexican government used adjectives to describe character traits of Zapata, while the Zapatistas were much more likely to employ verbs, focusing on Zapata’s

Table 1. Methods of Memory Entrepreneurship.

	MEXICAN GOVERNMENT		ZAPATISTAS	
Who was Zapata?	Adjectives / Abstract	Selfless Clear-headed Committed	Verbs / Concrete	Resist Attack Struggle
Rationale for claim to heirship	The Mexican government institutionalized the revolutionary ideals that influenced the Mexican Revolution.		Zapata’s revolutionary aims were never seen to fruition. The struggle to achieve his goals has never ended and they are the contemporary torchbearers.	
View of neoliberalism	Neoliberalism is necessary for Mexico’s progress. Helps Mexico compete in a global economy and allows rural citizens to participate in the expanding global economy.		Neoliberalism is merely the newest stage in the ongoing exploitation of indigenous people in Mexico. Now, instead of Mexican haciendas, there are foreign companies financing farming and taking land from the indigenous.	
How to carry Zapata’s legacy into the future	Zapatistas should align with the Government.		Resist. Do not accept abbreviated reform. Settle only for complete fulfillment of demands.	

Source: Self-elaboration.

actions. Second, while both asserted that their positions on land reform were the logical continuation of Zapata’s legacy, they had drastically different notions of what Zapata would have supported at the turn of the twenty first century. Third, both understood neoliberal politics as being at the heart of the dispute, but had drastically different assessments of what these policies mean for Zapata’s revolutionary legacy. Finally, both addressed the future in their respective documents, and again had very different ideas about how Zapata would envision agrarian issues moving forward.

“¡Tierra y Libertad!”

The Zapatistas made a point in nearly every communiqué to use Zapata’s military title, General, in order to draw attention to the fact that he was not merely a revolutionary, but the leader of a revolutionary army. They also pointedly referred to his death as a “betrayal” and an “assassination.” Other characteristics of Zapata such as humility, courage, and determination were emphasized, but more than listing his admirable traits, the Zapatistas told stories of what he did. They referred to his actions

during the Mexican Revolution as “struggling,” and highlighted how Zapata “attacked” cities and “lifted up his armed hand for land and liberty.”

In addition to describing Zapata's character and his actions, the Zapatistas continually referred to what they termed his “warrior cry,” *tierra y libertad* (land and freedom). This phrase became a sort of chorus in Zapatistas' communiqués. While Zapata may have never used this phrase as a rallying cry (Brunk 1998), the Zapatistas have encapsulated his cause in these three short words and used them to define their struggle. The phrase has also been used (posthumously) to describe the demands Zapata made in the Plan of Ayala, a document he signed in 1911 that denounced Francisco Madero, a fellow revolutionary who gained temporary power during the revolution, for not supporting the land reform that the southern revolutionaries demanded. The slogan Zapata himself used to describe the Plan of Ayala was “Liberty, Justice, and Law” (Brunk 2008). The Zapatistas' choice to use a different slogan emphasizes how they refer to specific actions and demands of Zapata like demands for land instead of more abstract goals and guiding principles.

Social Justice

Whereas the Zapatistas used the qualifier “General” to describe Zapata almost every time they used his name (it was even used as a replacement of his name in some instances), the Mexican government used it only once. Similarly, while the Zapatistas repeatedly highlighted Zapata's “betrayal” and “assassination,” the government referred simply to his “death” or how he “offered his life,” when they

mentioned the event for which the day is commemorated. They also focused on more abstract ideas, which they claimed guided his actions, emphasizing his “commitment to social justice,” “clarity” of vision, and overall “commitment,” as *a great man of the Mexican countryside, an exceptional Morelense* [he was from Morelos, Mexico]. These rhetorical moves, as well as their conflation of Zapata with other, less radical players in the Mexican Revolution, may be seen as an attempt to obliterate the memory that Zapata was murdered by people with whom he previously fought alongside. Furthermore, when the government relates Zapata to the more conservative Francisco Madero, they delete, through omission, the fact that Zapata's Plan of Ayala accused Madero of betraying the revolutionary ideals on which Zapata claimed they once agreed:

Like Francisco Madero gave the revolution its democratic and libertarian sense, the agrarian claim of Zapata gave it its deeper social dimension. [Zedillo 1996]

Finally, it is also worth noting that the government did not compare Zapata to Carranza, the revolutionary turned president who was allegedly responsible for arranging a hit on him. Their rhetorical moves reflect an attempt to “purify” the past in two important ways (Bromberg and Fine 2002). First, the Mexican government is downplaying Zapata's radical, and at times violent, leftist political position, a position so radical it led the very revolutionaries who eventually took power to murder him. This purification is an attempt to transform the government's stance on Zapata's reputation “from subversive to saint” (Bromberg and Fine 2002). Second, the

government is attempting to erase from memory the fact that it was responsible for the murder of the man to whom it is claiming allegiance, in an effort to purify its reputation. When a group or nation wants to commemorate a difficult past, it is a common practice to elevate certain individuals while ignoring the causes for which they stood (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991).

A History of Struggle

We will now examine in detail the methods by which each group claims to be heirs of Zapata's legacy, however they define it, in terms of their respective knowledge bases. In the commemorative communiqués of the Zapatistas, they asserted the continuity between Zapata's struggle and their own in various ways. They claim that they are facing the same problems Zapata and his army faced: “As in 1919, we, Zapatistas, must pay in blood for our cry for land and freedom. As in 1919, the land does not belong to those who work it” (EZLN 1995b:194). In a longer passage, the spokesperson of the Zapatistas, Subcommander Marcos, wrote a letter to the deceased Zapata, referencing a letter he had written to President Woodrow Wilson in 1914:

And then you wrote, “And it is that the large landowners, stripping by stripping, today with one pretext, tomorrow with another, have been absorbing all the properties which legitimately belong and have belonged from time immemorial to the indigenous people, out of whose cultivation they used to get their sustenance and that of their families.” And that was in 1914. Now, in 1997, **the story hasn't changed**. [EZLN 1997, emphasis added]

Marcos and the Zapatistas were arguing that while the context may have changed, the problems are essentially the same. The aforementioned propensity to refer to Zapata as “the General” highlights that he was the leader of a revolutionary army, but it is also used to claim Zapata as the leader of the contemporary Zapatistas. For instance, in one passage, they identify the revolutionary as, “Emiliano Zapata, General-in-Chief of the Liberation Army of the South (**and the EZLN**)” (EZLN 2000, emphasis added).

The Zapatistas also made figurative claims of familial continuity with Zapata: “Emiliano Zapata, our father, gave us his name. Our brother, Emiliano Zapata, set an armed example. Our son Zapata asked us for a new future” (EZLN 1995c:204). They made further claims of *being* Zapata: “Emiliano Zapata has come again to the Zócalo of Mexico City; **he is in you; he walks in you**” (EZLN 1995d:199, emphasis added); “since when all is said and done, **you are us**” (EZLN 1997, emphasis added). This claim of Zapata being *in* them or working *through* them appeared repeatedly, and reflects the Mexican myth of *Vótan-Zapata*.⁷ In short, there were multiple references (one communiqué was titled “Vótan-Zapata” [EZLN 1995e]) to *Vótan-Zapata*, which is the belief, either literally or figuratively, that *Vótan*—a shape-shifting Mayan god associated with revolting against the Spanish, reincarnating the dead, and providing early indigenous people with land—had somehow merged with Zapata. This notion solidified Zapata as a true Mexican, an Indian.⁸

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the *Vótan-Zapata* myth, see: Brunk (2008), Stephen (1997; 2002), Taylor (2001).

⁸ Despite the fact that Zapata was actually a mestizo, part Spanish and part Native American.

The Zapatistas assert continuity with Zapata not only in terms of the conditions they face and their figurative common ancestry but also with regard to their actions or responses to these conditions in comments such as: “We are like you, our General, exactly like that, rebellious and struggling” (EZLN 1997). Similarly, in a letter Subcommander Marcos wrote to the deceased Zapata, he compares the situation in Mexico at the end of the twentieth century to that at the beginning of the century:

Like then, those who refuse to accept injustices, are persecuted, jailed, killed. But just like then, our General, **there are righteous men and women who do not keep silent and fight not to be victimized, they organize to demand land and liberty.** [EZLN 1997, emphasis added]

Marcos's use of the phrase “righteous men and women” points to the memory work being done with such communiqués. He is, in this short passage, drawing a line of continuity from Zapata to the Zapatista movement, highlighting the exceptional traits of Zapata's revolt, and suggesting that the movement's actions reflect those traits. He is also suggesting that the claims of the Mexican government to be the rightful heirs of Zapata's legacy are unfounded, and that their actions, moreover, should be marked as profane.

Institutionalizing the Revolution

The Mexican government's emphasis on general and abstract traits of Zapata reflected their ability, as a group positioned in a traditional, elite knowledge base, to have their claims resonate with cultural and

political schemas already in place (Swidler and Arditi 1994). Since they wield more power and legitimacy, the government's claims are better suited to establish continuity via abstract principles. On the other hand, the Zapatistas have far less power and institutional legitimacy, necessitating their concrete claims to direct, specific lineage (they go as far as drawing the line back before Zapata and the Mexican Revolution to the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish). Without power and traditional political legitimacy, the Zapatistas cannot refute the government's claims to heirship using the same abstract rhetorical tools. They instead attempt to use specific historical evidence to argue that they are the direct descendants, as opposed to institutional placeholders, of Zapata's legacy. In doing so, they provide counter-schemas for their own claims to heirship in order to resonate with the people of Mexico.

As mentioned above, almost immediately following the murder of Zapata, the Mexican government began their campaign to institutionalize the revolution and, by extension, Zapata's legacy. After nearly a hundred years, their narrative regarding the revolutionary mission of the party has established a relatively strong cultural schema. It is thus indisputable that the Mexican government has the upper hand in terms of control over existing social and cultural arrangements, in this case, their ability to dramatically change the quality of life of indigenous people, due to the power they hold.

The abstract nature of their appeals to heirship, again, typically took the form of describing themselves as a “revolutionary government.” The oxymoronic nature of such a label makes abstract and

seemingly paradoxical claims of being the heirs to Zapata's legacy more plausible, or at least less surprising, despite being the direct descendants of those who arranged his murder. The content of their arguments typically centered on either their previous fulfillment of Zapata's demands or their continued commitment to Zapata's ideals. For example, Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo began a 1995 speech saying:

Fellow farmers: Here at Chinameca [*the village in which Zapata was murdered*] we pay tribute to Emiliano Zapata; here at Chinameca we affirm that the principles, ideals, and the legacy of Zapata remain valid; here at Chinameca today we ratified the commitment of keeping the agricultural reform alive. Liberty, law, and justice were the principles that Zapata defended. Zapata fought for the freedom of those who generation after generation had worked their land to restore their communities and their people. This fight is your fight and in this fight I am and will always be with you. Zapata fought for law so that its respect should be the best guarantee of the rights of the men and women of the countryside. This fight is also for you, I am in this fight and I will always be at your side. Zapata fought for justice so that in the Mexican countryside we could overcome backlogs, fight poverty, and expand opportunities. This fight is also for you, I am in this fight and I will always be at your side. [Zedillo 1995]

Zedillo's statement is vague in three ways: it is unclear as to what the indigenous people needed freedom from; it is unclear what laws would help guarantee the unspecified rights Zedillo refers to; and finally it is unclear what expanding opportunities means.

Other government speeches asserted that Zapata's *commitment to social justice became the constitutional mandate that defines the root and reason that the state arose out of the revolutionary movement*. Zedillo also suggested that *Zapata did not see his aspirations realized, but from his ideals and from his fight new laws arose and new institutions were formed*. Perhaps the most audacious claim suggested *the demand for agricultural justice expressed in the Plan of Ayala was surpassed extensively by the Mexican Agricultural Reform, one of the most extensive and profound in the world*. It is important to reiterate that we are less concerned with the truthfulness of these statements, but more the form in which these claims are made relative to the knowledge base from which they come. The institutional authority and legitimacy enjoyed by the government affords them the ability to make vague, abstract claims to heirship without concrete examples of why Zapata would support their position on land reform, largely because of their position in a traditional or elite knowledge base.

More of the Same

The Zapatistas were much more explicit in suggesting that neoliberal policies were a major issue in the dispute over land. They argued that the signing of NAFTA in particular was the beginning of a process that would destroy the indigenous people's way of life. An entire communiqué in 1994 was dedicated to the topic. In it, a fictitious beetle named Durito discusses the concept with Subcommander Marcos. Durito tells Marcos that he is “studying about neoliberalism and its strategy for dominating Latin America,” arguing that:

There are now laws which attack the communal property and the “ejido,” which favor the monopolizing of lands, which allow the sale of our riches to the foreigner's monies. And the laws were drafted by the bad Mexican governments, we call them “neoliberal,” which rule this country, yours and ours, our General, as if it were in full decadence, a large property which must be advertised for sale with all of its peons, that is to say with all Mexicans, our General, included in the bargain. [EZLN 1994]

This passage suggests that, while the *haciendas* of the past were broken up and some land was given back to indigenous people, due to the implementation of neoliberal policies, the entire country now operates like a *hacienda*. The Zapatistas are suggesting that the struggle remains the same, but on a larger scale, as their exploitation is more comprehensive.

Also in the 1997 communiqué, the Zapatistas point to the transformation of their exploitation from a national problem to an international one, again drawing connections between themselves and Zapata:

Here we are because these governments continue to display a lack of memory towards the Indians and because the rich landowners, with different names, keep on stripping the farmers of their land. Like when you called to fight for land and liberty, today the Mexican lands are turned over to the wealthy foreigners. Like it happened then, today, governments make up laws to legitimize the theft of lands. [EZLN 1997]

This comment suggests that, for the Zapatistas, neoliberalism is not a liberating force, but rather a repackaging of the same old exploitation, a matter of

shifting from exploitation at the hand of their own country to that on a global scale. Furthermore, they argue that they do not intend to allow the exploitation to continue without a fight. In this, they again draw a line of continuity between themselves and Zapata.

New Opportunities

While the government never explicitly uses the term “neoliberalism” or mentions NAFTA specifically, it is apparent that in 1995 when Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo talked about “a truly comprehensive policy that includes alternatives to agricultural production in order to create enough jobs to take root for the population in its places of origin,” he was referring to NAFTA, which resulted in produce from the United States being imported into Mexico at cheaper prices than Mexican farmers could offer. It is also clear that when Zedillo, again in 1995, spoke of creating “a new productive culture” and “a profound productive transformation” that will take “advantage of the new legal framework, new support philosophies, and possibilities offered by foreign trade in fair conditions,” he is talking about neoliberalism. He further suggests that this “transformation of the Mexican countryside” is “the best way to memorialize Zapata.” Instead of being a “strategy for dominating Latin America,” neoliberalism would provide “the future Mexico deserves.”

“¡Zapata Vive! ¡La Lucha Sigue!”

With statements like, *we will not stop struggling until all the peoples of Mexico have democracy, freedom, justice, independence, decent housing, well-paid work, land, good*

food, health, and education, the Zapatistas were asserting that their future is one of continuous struggle until their demands are met. This sentiment is reflected in their often used cry, *Zapata vive, la lucha sigue* (Zapata lives, the fight continues).

They were not only determined to keep fighting but also not to allow the government to trick them:

As in your time, Don Emiliano, the governments have tried to deceive us. They talk and talk and no promises are kept, except for the killings of farmers. They sign and sign papers and nothing materializes, except for the evictions of Indigenous people and their persecution. And they have also betrayed us, our General. [EZLN 1997]

The Zapatistas had tried cooperation and it did not work. Cooperation was no longer an option.

Though the Zapatistas never explicitly discuss their vision of Mexico's future, it is clear from their communiqués that it would be a land where the country respected the indigenous and the poor. They claimed not to be interested in moving into fancy homes in the cities, but rather wanted to be free to live off the land as their ancestors had.

Help Us Help You

Nowhere in the Mexican government's speeches do they specifically address the Zapatista movement. There are passages, though, directed towards farmers, indigenous people, and rural Mexicans in general that could just as easily have been meant for the Zapatistas:

The best way to honor the memory of Zapata is to work together to build the future Mexico deserves. I know that today, as always, the national unity will count on the men and women of the countryside and with the Mexican farmer organizations. United and preserving in effort we will honor Zapata, we will honor the farmers, we will honor Mexico. [Zedillo 1995]

That the Zapatistas are not explicitly mentioned is not important. What is significant is the call to rural Mexicans not to support rebellion, but to work with the government to achieve its neoliberal version of land reform.

Other passages imply that the government will fight for rural people, but that it needs their help in the struggle:

With the participation of the farmers and its organizations we will continue this fight for justice until the population of the countryside is on equal terms with the population of the cities. With you we are going to build that productive, just, and prosperous field that we all want, so that the rural families do not need to be separated, so that they find opportunities of progress in their places of origin. [Zedillo 1997]

This quote suggests that the government is fighting for the farmers, but missing in statements like this one is an antagonist. If the Zapatistas are wrong, and the government is not the barrier to freedom and justice and land, then who is oppressing the indigenous, rural, and poor people of Mexico? Also significant here is the assertion that equality with urban areas and neoliberal notions of progress are desired by rural, poor, indigenous Mexicans. It seems the

government was suggesting that the people needed saving from themselves; from a nostalgic desire to live in the simpler times of the past. The government's vision of the future of Mexico thus was one where the nation leaves behind its past and becomes immersed in the global economy.

Social Marking in Memory Entrepreneurship

We will now discuss, using social marking (Brekhus 1996), how each group naturalizes different traits of Zapata in order to support its claims. First, the groups selected traits of Zapata that support their position in the mnemonic battle. Next, they attached their own actions or traits to those they emphasized in Zapata in order to establish continuity. Third, they juxtaposed their current action or traits with those of their opponents to show that the opposition contradicts those of Zapata. These last two stages are what we term the naturalization process. Finally, previously extraordinary actions or traits are treated as mundane or normal. This stage is crucial to support the claims of each group that it is *obviously* Zapata's rightful heir or that it is *obviously* interpreting the past correctly.

Marked Traits

The major difference in representing Zapata revolved around his role in the revolution. The Zapatistas presented Zapata as a stubborn, dedicated *warrior* who refused to settle for less than complete fulfillment of his demands, even after other revolutionaries had taken power and wanted to stop the revolt. The Mexican government presented him as

a *humanitarian* who wanted the revolution to contain a social justice component and who strived to improve the lives of the indigenous, rural, and poor Mexicans.

In order to justify their respective representations of Zapata, the groups emphasized events or characteristics that supported their views. They marked these attributes as extraordinary in order to separate them from the rest of Zapata's traits or actions. Differences in the ways in which the groups emphasized traits derived from their distinctive knowledge bases. The Zapatistas provided specific stories describing actions of Zapata, while the government, given their position in a more traditional, elite knowledge base, made more abstract claims concerning Zapata's involvement in the revolution based on their long-standing, institutional power. Their claims took the form of stating that Zapata stood for "Liberty, Justice, and Law" while trumpeting their own dedication to these principles as inscribed in their latest agricultural plans.

The notion of marked and unmarked categories also holds true for the representations both groups select for remembering Zapata. Brekhus (1996:500) points out that "the marked term signals a certain characteristic that is left unsigaled in the unmarked term" and that "the 'social mind' actively perceives one side of a contrast while ignoring the other side as epistemologically unproblematic." Thus, when Zapata is marked as being a warrior or humanitarian, and examples are provided to serve as marked traits amidst many other traits that are left unmarked, those traits are highlighted as exceptional, as reasons for being commemorated, while

the other unmentioned, unexceptional traits are left unmarked. In marking certain aspects of Zapata's memory, the groups were suggesting that the highlighted traits were not present among Zapata's historical peers. Additionally, when the groups marked certain traits or actions of his as exceptional, their inattention to his other traits or actions implicitly left them unmarked, as unexceptional, or as traits or actions not unique to Zapata. The first characteristic of markedness, that the marked element is more narrowly specified and heavily articulated than the unmarked, holds true as the traits highlighted by both groups were the only ones discussed; all others were left out.

The second characteristic of markedness, that "the unmarked feature appears to represent the nonspecialized whole, while the marked appears to represent a specialized subset of the whole" (Brekhus 1996:500), is again true in this case, as the traits or actions marked by each group as exceptional are those they describe as fit to commemorate Zapata. In other words, the other, unmentioned traits and actions of Zapata were unexceptional or characteristic of many other people. Unmentioned traits are those that made him like everyone else, while those the groups marked set him outside or above the average person. The third characteristic, that the unmarked is often more common than the marked, ties into the previous point and again fits the case at hand. Zapata's exceptional traits were marked as such because they were what made him worthy of commemoration.

The final characteristic, that marked elements comprise a "master status," trumping distinctions that

are relevant in the unmarked, fits the case of Zapata's memory, as well. This characteristic points to the fact that once, for example, the Zapatistas presented Zapata as a stubborn, armed, warrior, the fact that he was willing at times to entertain the idea of compromise with the government, a part of his unmarked traits, was trumped by his determination to achieve complete fulfillment of his demands. Similarly, once the government presented Zapata as a humanitarian, his many violent and aggressive actions during the revolution, a part of his unmarked traits, were trumped by his determination to improve the living conditions in rural Mexico.

Connecting Present Action to a Marked Past

In addition to marking certain traits and actions of Zapata as exceptional or extraordinary, the opposing groups also connected their actions to particular marked traits or actions. This is the second stage of the naturalization process. In claiming continuity or heirship of Zapata's legacy, both groups attempted to establish the relevance or importance of their view. The Zapatistas not only pointed out that the enemy they were facing was similar to the one Zapata faced, they discussed how their methods for combating that enemy were the same as Zapata's. Similarly, the Mexican government suggested that they were facing problems that Zapata opposed, and that they desired to work with rural Mexicans to enact laws that would protect the rights of the indigenous poor. Again they asserted that in working with rural Mexicans they were upholding the principles of "Liberty, Justice, and Law" that Zapata supported.

Disconnecting the Opposition's Present Action From a Marked Past

Discrediting the opposition to strengthen one's own viewpoint is the third stage of the naturalization process. This occurs in our case, for instance, when the government asserts that cooperation to enact laws is the key to land reform, while implicitly discounting armed rebellion as an ineffective means to achieve that goal. Similarly, the Zapatistas claimed to have tried the government's approach and that it did not work. Speaking of the government, the Zapatistas argued that, "they sign and sign papers and nothing materializes, except for the evictions of Indigenous people and their persecution." This was an attempt not only to criticize the government's method as ineffective but also to discredit its claims to sharing Zapata's goals. In turn, their assertions as to the ineffectiveness of the government's methods were an attempt to bolster their own claims to heirship, thus further strengthening the image of Zapata they wished to promote.

Treating the Marked as Unmarked

In the fourth stage of the naturalization process, traits that were previously treated as exceptional or extraordinary are represented as mundane, common, or natural. What is important to note here is that the shift from marked to unmarked is not a demotion, or a devaluing of the trait or action, but rather a change in emphasis (Brekhus 1996). As Brekhus (1996) points out:

Social markedness creates the illusion that marked categories represent deviations from a generic pop-

ulation while unmarked categories simply represent the generic population. [p. 519]

As such, the shift in emphasis in our case was one in which the opposing groups marked Zapata's alleged traits or actions as exceptional, as positive deviations from a generic population (both from his other common traits or actions and from those of other people who engaged in undistinguished behaviors). Then, after attaching their own actions to the marked traits or actions while simultaneously detaching the actions of their opponents from those same traits or actions, the opposing groups recast certain traits from marked to unmarked. When the same traits that were marked in Zapata's legacy show up in one of the groups' discussions of their own behavior, they are not treated as exceptional, but rather as natural. For example:

Today Zapata lives in us and he lives in the struggle of millions of Mexicans who know that the defense of national sovereignty is loose in the countryside and in the city, in the indigenous municipalities and communities, in the unions and social organizations, in the non-governmental and the political organizations, in the grass roots church communities and in the honest clergy, in students and teachers, in neighbors and housewives, in homosexuals and lesbians, in boys and girls, in women, in young people, in old ones. [EZLN 1999]

In this passage, the Zapatistas were suggesting that their response to governmental oppression is not an isolated experience, but rather one shared by many people in Mexico, suggesting that their rebellious sentiment was becoming increasingly ubiquitous, or normal.

The Mexican government tried to do the same thing:

With the participation of the farmers and its organizations we will continue this fight for justice until the population of the countryside is on equal terms with the population of the cities. With you we are going to build that productive, just, and prosperous field that we all want, so that the rural families do not need to be separated, so that they find opportunities of progress in their places of origin. In this manner we will honor Zapata; in this manner we will honor those who followed him; in this manner we will honor all who have fought and continue fighting for justice in the countryside; thus we will build a better future for our children. [Zedillo 1997]

Through these words Zedillo proposed not only that the government was concerned with the same issues as rural Mexicans but also that the determination and clear thinking so revered in Zapata were universally accepted as the only way to fix their problems. By promoting cooperation as the means to justice, liberty, and the law, Zedillo was suggesting that, since so many people are determined, everyone could do their small part, and together they could create change.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have extended the concept of collective memory by demonstrating how the dynamics of social marking (Brekhus 1998) help illuminate a naturalization process that is used by those engaged in mnemonic battles to recast constructed representations of the past as natural, pure, and true. We have shown that the Zapatistas and the

Mexican government provide decidedly different representations of the revolutionary Emiliano Zapata in ways that support their positions in a century-long agrarian dispute. The Zapatistas focus on Zapata's radical revolutionary behavior and his demand for ownership of the land to those who work it, while the government emphasizes Zapata's passion for social justice and his dedication to making Mexico a better place. Put simply, the two groups exemplified what Olick and Robbins (1998) call instrumentalist collective memory or, more specifically, memory entrepreneurship.

The rhetorical strategies employed by the Zapatistas were correspondingly different from those of the Mexican government. That is, their attempts at asserting continuity and rightful heirship of Zapata's legacy were more concrete as opposed to abstract. These differences also reflected the two groups' different knowledge bases, that is, their divergent relationships to authority structures.

While we used social marking to analyze the data, we also employed it as an interpretive device to make sense of how the groups discussed Zapata's characteristics.⁹ In the process of examining the narratives of both groups, a pattern emerged regarding the naturalization of Zapata's traits. Analysis of social marking can thus help scholars

⁹ Zerubavel (2004) has emphasized the ways in which social marking can help understand which parts of the past are considered memorable to particular "mnemonic communities." Zerubavel's focus is more on the social marking of time, however, emphasizing how particular stretches in a group's past come to be understood as "sacred" periods. Our focus is instead on instances where the contents of those sacred spans of time are contested and the ways in which groups employ processes of social marking in these disputes.

interested not only in studying the narratives of groups participating in mnemonic battles but also in understanding how these struggles take place. Previous research that examined mnemonic battles approached the process as though the mechanics involved were obvious. Conceiving of these disputes in terms of the naturalization process, what we presented here can further illuminate their internal dynamic. The more disputes over historical representations are dissected and their mechanics made visible, the better suited we will be to identify memory entrepreneurship when it takes place. Additionally, if we come to better understand how representations are crafted to reflect current interests, we can more effectively identify which, if any, side of a representational dispute we wish to support.

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Focusing research on the manipulation of the past is becoming more important in the increasingly polarized atmosphere of contemporary American life. Current disputes over the legacies of prominent personalities in recent American history, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Polletta 1998; Dewan 2008; Cupp 2012) and former president Ronald Reagan (Drum 2011; Dellinger 2013), as well as broader ideological offensives by reactionary political groups such as the Tea Party movement (see: Lepore 2010) and the Texas Board of Education, who have proposed replacing the phrase “trans-Atlantic slave trade” with “Atlantic triangular trade” (Mangan 2010; McGreal 2010), have greatly intensified in recent years. Analysis of the naturalization process as outlined here can serve as a vital tool for understanding these contentious debates.

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Book Review

DeGloma, Thomas. 2014. *Seeing the Light: The Social Logic of Personal Discovery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Sociologists frequently argue that Westerners today lack a “sociological imagination.” Westerners, the argument goes, too often isolate the autobiographical from the historical and structural. “Public issues” get confused as “personal troubles,” and consequently, people are in need of some consciousness adjustment. This argument has been applied to topics ranging from divorce to mental disorder to poverty. The argument is true enough; in fact, it is obvious. Most sociologists would not find it noteworthy when a contemporary American blames an illness on a virus rather than on a neighbor’s witchcraft, nor is it compelling when the same individual blames his or her financial distress on a personal drug addiction rather than on the functioning of the “base” and “superstructure.”

Seeing the Light, however, proves this argument about misguided consciousness to be even more banal. In the book, DeGloma shows that stories about “personal troubles” and personal blessings—autobiographies—are a way for individuals to step into debates on public issues. DeGloma concisely develops a novel approach to personal stories by illustrating that they are not necessarily just expressions

of the self but can also be a way that people classify the world into right and wrong, good and evil, and true and false. *Seeing the Light* offers new projects for the sociology of knowledge, the study of social movements, and most importantly, the analysis of autobiography. While the book focuses on stories of “awakening,” DeGloma provides sociology with a paradigm that can be applied to autobiographical stories in general.

Seeing the Light is a work of formal sociology. DeGloma’s interest is in the generic patterns among a diversity of personal “awakening” stories. “Awakening narratives,” according to DeGloma, are “stories people tell about having once been contained in a world of darkness and ignorance and subsequently awakening to an enlightened understanding of their experiences and situations” (p. 2). The book identifies the similarities in narratives among an array of late-modern moral entrepreneurs, such as anti-war veterans, political radicals, religious converts, religious apostates, ex-homosexuals, ex-ex-homosexuals, those who claim to have recovered memories, as adults, of childhood sexual abuse, and those who claim their recovered memories of abuse were false memories.

However, he also considers stories of awakening exemplary of the so-called “Axial Age,” “an era extending from approximately 800 BCE to 200 BCE” during which thinkers “began to engage in a new type of critical second-order theoretical reflection that involved, in each case, postulating the nature of, and the path to, ultimate truth” (p. 35). These thinkers include, for example, Plato with his cave allegory and Siddhartha Gautama with his transformation to Buddha under the Bodhi tree. According to DeGloma, the Axial Age classics—and other transformation stories from antiquity, such as Paul’s conversion to Christianity—have become “established storytelling models that actors adapt and recombine” to affirm a contemporary community’s version of the truth (p. 63). This is the first historical argument in *Seeing the Light*. The second historical argument is that awakening stories have multiplied as a response to the increased moral pluralism of late-modernity. He argues that awakening formulas are “cultural resources” (p. 63) that actors use “to make sense of the world in the face of complexity—to resolve contradictions about moral obligations and to negate feelings of anxiety that often stem from moral uncertainty” (p. 152).

His main theoretical contribution, however, regards not history but symbolic representation. DeGloma shows that awakening stories turn personal time into moral space; the temporally divided self symbolizes normatively divided worldviews. Consequently, autobiographies are vehicles for moral persuasion. In awakening narratives, the individual’s past represents a false worldview. Before the awakening, the individual lived in moral darkness. The awakening is enlightenment to the moral truth.

In this way, the individual’s past self and present self embody wider societal divisions over how to define war, sexuality, religion, recovered memories, or some other issue or identity. As DeGloma puts it, “By employing a moral polarization of identity, [moral entrepreneurs] reinforce the cultural boundary between dueling communities in a contentious cultural arena” (p. 148). They take a stance in this cultural arena by debasing the past self. Though they debase the past self, the past self establishes “cognitive authority” (p. 5) for tellers. Because they have lived in the “darkness,” they have a “socially founded right...[to] testify to the false nature of the rejected lifestyle and its associated worldview” (pp. 136-137).

Awakening narratives make claims about right and wrong, but they also involve claims about how one comes to the truth. DeGloma conceptualizes “autobiographical periods” (p. 97) in awakening stories as being separated either by “sociomental express elevators” (pp. 102-109) or “sociomental staircases” (pp. 110-121), accepting that any awakening narrative might include aspects of both. “Express elevators” and “staircases” generally correspond to different epistemologies. An “express elevator” awakening is an awakening that suddenly *befalls* the individual. DeGloma argues, “Whether psychological, political, sexual, scientific, or religious in focus, [express elevator stories] ask us to believe in some ‘power’ that often works in mysterious ways” (p. 109). In contrast, “staircase” awakening is a longer process of uncertainty and searching that separates the past self and present self, and the movement from falsehood to truth is the result of individual agency or intentional pursuit.

Seeing the Light is simple, concise, readable, and richly illustrated. At the same time, DeGloma pointedly engages a breadth of theory and theorists, such as cognitive sociology, semiotics, Goffman’s dramaturgy, Giddens, Mead, and Bourdieu. The book would be appropriate for undergraduate and graduate courses on symbolic interaction, social psychology, the sociology of knowledge, social movements, gender and sexuality, narrative, and, among others, contemporary sociological theory.

However, do not let the simplicity and accessibility of DeGloma’s work deceive. It is a highly sophisticated sociological contribution. While his emphasis is on the “strategic use” (p. 95) of autobiography by moral entrepreneurs, DeGloma provides a new paradigm for the sociology of autobiography in general. No longer should the study of self-nar-

rative be only the study of identity. As DeGloma shows, autobiography conveys moral boundaries, epistemologies, and judgments of authority. This is true of any autobiography: Autobiography is a statement about the self, but it also expresses knowledge about the world. Stories about “personal troubles,” as well as personal blessings, even when the key protagonist is the self, define “public issues” or “shared cultural realities” (p. 95). When an individual attributes his or her financial distress to drug use, for example, the person is making a claim about the moral location of drug addiction, just as much as the individual is making a statement about his or her self. This is something sociology has missed for the most part. DeGloma enlightens us to the fact that autobiography is sociological imagination, which itself is an awakening for the discipline.

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Book Review

Harding, Jamie. 2013. *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish*. London: Sage

Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish is a scholarly and significant work which attempts to provide researchers, especially novice researchers, with the experience of qualitative data analysis. The need for an expansion of *qualitative data analysis* beyond a mere theoretical interest in research disciplines has long been recognized, and *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish* has already been introduced as a procedure for step-by-step instructions for those “who have wanted guidance as to how analyze qualitative data” (p. 2). Concerned with the issues of understanding qualitative data analysis, Jamie Harding has presented a general overview of qualitative research as his starting point. He manages to touch upon features, modes, types, and techniques of conducting and analyzing qualitative research while providing examples and exercises to put the researchers well on the way of making accurate judgments in their studies. As the title implies, the volume is an invaluable contribution to *analytic status of qualitative research from start to finish*, including 10 chapters.

The first chapter illustrates a broad image of topical areas of qualitative research and focuses on

the points of relationships between steps of establishing qualitative research. Harding touches upon concepts of the structure of the book, the interviews and focus groups, introduction to data analysis, validity, and definition. In fact, the introductory chapter elaborates the content of each chapter of the book in a step-by-step fashion, and on this basis the author provides a brief description of each chapter. His intention is to provide fairly coherent and elaborate considerations about next chapters so that he can go on to analyze and discuss them later. Harding ends the final section of the chapter with a recap of key definitions that are used in later chapters.

With this general conceptual framework, chapter 2 illustrates more specifically the factors and decisions that affect the earlier stages of the research process. Like some other scholars (e.g., Holliday 2002), Harding highlights underlying principles of qualitative and quantitative approaches in establishing research, as well as considerations about mixed methods and critical research. Moreover, he touches upon the concept of methodology and decisions about deductive and inductive research ap-

proaches. According to Jamie Harding, “the theory to be tested, research question(s) to be answered, or research objective(s) to be met by a study should be reflected in the design” (p. 15). In this way, he starts elaborating on research designs which include ethnography and case studies, sampling, negotiating access, maximizing responses, as well as forms of data collection. In the final section of the chapter, he provides fairly coherent and elaborate considerations of the ethical issues and researcher’s moral responsibility to conduct social research ethically.

Chapter 3 on practicality of data collection may be especially useful for novice researchers as the author has provided good pieces of advices for them. “Collecting data through interviews and focus groups” (p. 170), as two forms of qualitative data collection, are considered as initial steps in conducting qualitative research. Face-to-face, telephone, and online data are introduced as modes of data collection in this chapter. In his detailed discussion of data collection, Harding provides a basis for deeper and broader understanding of data collection and moderating a focus group. Following the explanations, the author indicates the importance of pilot study, both for interviews and focus groups. He discusses the importance of a pilot study aimed at reducing the amount of flawed data, on the one hand, and that of difficulty of pilot focus group research, on the other. Finally, he draws the attention of his readers to the advantages and disadvantages of recording and transcription of interviews and focus group data. Perhaps the most valuable and most interesting strategy that Harding uses in this chapter is showing similarities and differences between collecting data through interviews and focus groups.

The next three chapters deal with analyzing interview data, from the very beginning, when the researcher uses observation, interview, focus group, et cetera, to look at the gathered data, up to the time s/he can identify the integral outcomes of the research. Chapter 4 focuses on two processes including making summaries and the use of the constant comparative method. In this way, Harding admirably provides his readers with “the processes which can assist in the identification of themes running different transcripts” (p. 56). By making summaries, he explains how to reduce the full transcript to a summary of about one paper, and by constant comparative method, he indicates how to identify two cases based on their possible similarities and differences. Jamie Harding used many easy-to-understand examples and exercises which can help learners in the first stages of data gathering. Along with valuable exercises, he adopts a three-step approach to the constant comparative method, which involves: making a list of similarities and differences between the first two cases to be considered; amending the list as further cases are added to the analysis; and identifying research findings once all of the cases have been included in the analysis. Then, the author refers to the concept of decision-making in qualitative research and the fact that the researcher’s judgment will lead to one’s subjective decision-making.

In chapter 5, the author “introduces codes as an important tool for conducting a comprehensive thematic analysis of an issue” (p. 82). After briefly portraying the context of using codes in qualitative research, as well as a distinction between a priori codes and empirical codes, the author

covers the idea of using codes to analyze an illustrative issue by suggesting a four-step process. The process involves a scrutiny of: identifying initial categories based on reading the transcripts; writing codes alongside the transcripts; reviewing the list of codes; revising the list of categories and deciding which codes should appear in which category; and looking for themes and findings in each category. Identifying categories following the reading of transcripts and providing a list of categories are discussed as the initial step for the coding process. This stage is almost too time-consuming, in which the researcher should provide the initial list of categories in order to sort the gathered data of qualitative research. The second step in coding process deals with writing codes and transcripts, which includes summarizing, selecting, and interpreting codes in qualitative research. The author believes that in the selecting stage, the qualitative researcher gets involved in a difficult decision-making process about how to either treat their findings or exclude them from the qualitative research. Revisiting the lists of codes and categories is the main discussion of the third stage of the coding process. In fact, "This third stage of the coding process is central to the search for commonality" (p. 92). The author explains how finding connection between codes and similar themes can be helpful for novice researchers in a step which shapes one of the most important steps for qualitative researchers. In stage four, Harding elaborates on identifying findings and explains that the aim of this stage is the thematic analysis of findings, which includes examining commonality and differences, as well as relationships between factors. To further lay the foundation of his analyses in

this chapter, Harding appreciates exercises and examples among each stage.

More elaborate discussions on conceptual themes are presented by Jamie Harding in chapter 6, where characteristics of conceptual themes are discussed. As to the importance of conceptual themes in qualitative research, the author goes on to assert that a conceptual theme *is*, in fact, a finding in its own right—because it is a commonality which depends on the ability of the researcher to see something that may exist behind the surface of what is said. In this chapter, data memos and tables are considered as helpful tools in qualitative research; the former can be used as a tool to note emerging ideas and the latter can be helpful to identify patterns of response. Harding also reminds the researchers to keep a record of main decisions made in data analysis. He admirably provides his readers with an example of a four-step process for analyzing conceptual themes and identifying relationships between gathered data and categorization in order to build a theory, which covers a large amount of the chapter. The process involves: identifying the conceptual theme and creating a category; bringing together codes from different illustrative issues into the category; creating sub-categories to reflect different elements of the conceptual theme; using the conceptual theme to explain relationships between different parts of the data and to build theory. For a better discussion, each step is followed by data memos or tables and exercises.

Chapter 7 "provides an insight into some of the alternative methods of analyzing qualitative data"

(p. 128). The approaches involve deductive coding and analysis, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis. Much of Harding's writing on deductive coding and analysis is taken up with demonstrating a considerable view of application of a priori codes to data. Harding also exercises two feasible forms of narrative analysis, including thematic and structural narrative analysis. His concern about discourse analysis was to heighten the awareness of the role of language by providing a practical choice for novice researchers. Finally, Harding briefly discusses computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS), as well as the advantages and disadvantages of specialist software programs such as NVivo. Unlike some other authors (e.g., Bazeley 2013), Harding does not take a critical glance at specialist computer software to see whether the use of such software will help or hinder the process of data collation. Considering the technology and the technology-related discussions in the field of qualitative research, such discussions are not highly prominent in this volume.

The distinction between specific features of focus groups and interviews is the major feature of Harding's qualitative perspective in chapter 8, in which he explores techniques for analyzing focus groups. In his discussion on the main lines of analyzing group data, Harding adopts broad working definitions of individual data analysis, group data analysis, and group interaction data analysis. The inclusion of examples, experts, and tables is helpful in expanding the ideas in this chapter. Moreover, he deals with the problem of validity. This is what Harding discusses in chapter 9, where he specifically concentrates on checking validity. Of

course, the author had to deal with the tough task of explaining validity problem. He could have grouped these parts in to a section in ways which would make it easier for the readers to establish conceptual links between the various aspects of validity.

Harding devotes two chapters specifically to writing qualitative research. In chapter 9, he deals with writing methodology and findings of qualitative research. In line with the broad perspective developed in the previous chapters, he discusses thoroughly the methods of validity. Throughout his discussion on writing methodology and then findings, based on sound reasoning and examples, he makes a strong case for the view that using individual examples and quotations, as well as presenting focus group data are essential in writing qualitative research. Having devoted a chapter to discussion on how to write methodology and the results of qualitative research, the author devotes the last chapter to two sections, including how to write literature and how to make links between the literature and research findings. In the concluding chapter of *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish*, Harding recognizes the importance of the role of the qualitative research conclusion. In order to make this very clear for readers, he provides beneficial recommendations and examples, as well as exercises.

The precious insights presented in *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish* would highly benefit novice researchers and students, as well as those who teach qualitative research. In his illuminating discussion on key concepts of qualitative data

analysis, Harding supports his ideas with a wide range of examples and exercises in order to pave the way for learners in qualitative data analysis. Moreover, beyond the context of each chapter, the readers of *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish* will find a well supported reference section including the rich references of recent publications in the field of qualitative research. It is surely

a rich and scholarly work which is written in an easy-to-understand language by Jamie Harding. It should be read; for which I can only give a taste.

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