Kara Scherer
10 Dec 2016
ENVS 400
<center>Final Thesis Synthesis Post</center>

Working Title
Love Thy Neighbor (Or know them, at least)

Background

Natural hazards are all around us. Though each geographic locale may be subject to a different kind of hazard (earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, tornado, flood, etc), the stages of response to this kind of mass devastation are similar: due to the scale of damage, emergency responders are often overwhelmed, leaving neighbors to rescue each other in the meantime. Portland, OR is subject to a number of natural disasters, but the impending rupture of the Cascadia subduction zone has been the focus of many local organizations and news outlets due to the estimated magnitude of destruction that it will cause. According to the Director of the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management Carmen Melo, "In parts of the world that have experienced catastrophe, one indicator of how resilient a community is social cohesion. Getting to know your neighbors and communities will really add to our resilience and the ability to help each other" (Gragg 2014). Portland Monthly published *The Big One: A Survival Guide* in 2014, with getting to know your neighbors in the top three most important things to do, and Oregon Public Broadcasting published an article titled, "The 1st Preparedness Commandment: Know Thy Neighbor." This push for more social networking is also supported in community resilience research. Davidson 2010 argues that the quality that separates community resilience from ecological resilience is human agency, a form of social capital. Social capital, or the resources available to people through their social networks, is argued to be "the strongest and most robust predictor of population recovery after catastrophe" (Aldrige 2011).

Although we know the importance of meeting neighbors, currently Portland government officials are recommending to knock on each others' doors. This one-time interaction seems insignificant when trying to build a trust between neighbors that will boost the neighborhood's resilience post-quake. Glanville et. al 2013 cites Barber 1983 and Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994 in defining trust as "the expectation that others will behave with goodwill; that they intend to honor their commitments and avoid harming others." According to a longitudinal study on trust, informal social ties achieved by socializing with friends, relatives and neighbors increase generalized trust between people, pointing to the conclusion that increased informal social interactions increases a person's trust in others (Glanville et. al 2013). However, in a time when social interaction in informal settings has been rapidly decreasing (Oldenburg 1989), where will neighbors be able to socialize and build trust? Oldenburg (1989) introduces the idea of a third place: "a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work."

Though third places are typically brick and mortar establishments that people can meet and mingle in, Steinkuehler et. al 2006 introduce the possibility of a virtual third place. There has

been criticism of social media as being completely opposite of third places -- of actually promoting individualism, or promoting the ""'bowling alone'' hypothesis (Putnam, 2000), which suggests that media are displacing crucial civic and social institutions" (Steinkuehler et. al 2006). However, more and more studies are showing that social media can be very beneficial to community engagement. According to Bouchillon 2014, "like the physical community, social networking sites are thus a crucible for connecting, and it follows, for social capital."

This paper is situated in the realm of disaster preparedness, and by extension deals with issues like trust, resilience, and social capital. Geographically, I am studying Portland, OR due to the preparation being done surrounding the predicted Cascadia earthquake. I chose to examine the app Nextdoor, since it encourages neighbor-to-neighbor interactions in an online setting. Nextdoor is a unique platform in that it has all the capabilities of mainstream social media sites, but it has an added component of place: all Nextdoor users have to confirm that they live in a specific neighborhood to gain access to their neighborhood content. Nextdoor acts as a kind of virtual third place for people to interact, but it also holds potential for people to meet in person since everyone lives in the same neighborhood.

Methodology

There were two components to my methodology: qualitative analysis of Nextdoor posts, and a corresponding survey that I distributed via Nextdoor. These two methods were aimed towards answering the question: What kinds of relationships are currently being formed between neighbors, and are they helpful or harmful in facilitating connection? The qualitative analysis was aimed towards determining whether there were any meaningful connections being formed, if interactions that took place were trust building or trust eroding, if they built a sense of community, or if they excluded certain groups from the neighborhood. I created the survey to see if my observations were congruent with what Nextdoor users thought.

I chose to analyze all posts from Collins View neighborhood, which currently has 626 members. I chose Collins View because I wanted to focus on a smaller community of people (as opposed to including nine surrounding neighborhoods in SW Portland, 2,580 extra people) and a smaller geographic area. This is important because when the earthquake strikes, roads may be damaged or people will run out of gas and will need to rely on the people immediately around them, so being in walking distance of the people you are making connections with is crucial. I analyzed 48 posts that range from October 1st, 2016-December 8th, 2016. Although there were actually 173 posts during this time period, I chose to analyze these particular posts because they each had four or more replies to them. Of the 173 posts, the average number of replies was 2.84, so I decided that four posts signified that the post was of above-average interest to people. Additionally, four replies would either allow for four different people to reply to the post, or a reply and subsequent follow up from two people, which could potentially create a connection between them. I analyzed the 48 posts for their potential for the neighbors to meet in person, if there were signs of trust being built, and if there were signs of neighborhood exclusion or mistrust of certain groups.

I created a survey to determine whether my observations were accurate portrayals of what people actually thought, and also to measure aspects of trust that were difficult to infer

from observing posts. Besides asking informational questions such as "how many neighbors have you met because of Nextdoor?" I also asked a few questions with the aim of touching on the themes of trust, inclusivity, and its ability to act as a virtual third place. I will explain the thought process behind those questions below.

- Which of the following would you be comfortable doing with a neighbor you met on Nextdoor?

This question included various actions that a person could take, ranging from borrowing an item from a neighbor to giving them a key to your house in case of emergency. It was crafted to indirectly access people's level of trust, since it can be difficult to determine what exactly trust means to individuals.

- Which of the following do you associate with Nextdoor?

This question included Oldenburg 1989's eight characteristics of third place, tailored to Nextdoor's functionalities.

- Who do you see as active members on Nextdoor?

This question aimed to figure out if certain groups in the neighborhood were perceived as invisible.

- Which of the following groups have you ever been bothered by in Collins View?

This question was included to determine whether there are any outsiders in the neighborhood, or groups that are not as welcome as others.


Results

      Although not always easy to categorize, I considered posts that were related to Lost & Found, Classifieds, and some General to be likely to result in an in-person meeting to exchange items, return a lost pet, or meet at a neighborhood meeting. Some of these posts had confirmed meetings in the replies, and others I inferred that a meeting would be likely. Twenty-three of the 48 posts I analyzed had the potential for people to meet in person, which is a total of 48%. In my survey, I found that in fact, 50% of my 52 participants had met a neighbor in person because of Nextdoor. This does not necessarily mean that we can assume that 50% of people on Nextdoor have met a neighbor in person thanks to the app, but rather 50% of the people who took the survey, who are likely to be somewhat active on Nextdoor to begin with, had met one or more neighbors through the app.

      Of the 48 posts, I analyzed which category proved to be most inviting of comments. 8 were for Recommendations, 2 Classifieds, 1 Crime & Safety, 2 Free Items, 6 Lost & Found, and 29 General posts. The survey results didn't quite mirror my observations -- General was the most used category, with Documents/Neighborhood information as second, and Crime & Safety and Recommendations as close thirds.

      One important capability of Nextdoor is that it allows local organizations to post, possibly adding to the trustworthiness and authority of the app. Of the 52 survey respondents, 23 people stated that they used Nextdoor to get information about local organizations. From my observations, only eight local organizations posted on Nextdoor between October and

December, as seen below. This leads to the assumption that the local organization capability of Nextdoor may not be very important or influential to people, but rather posts from neighbors are more important.

Local Organization Posts, Oct-Dec 2016
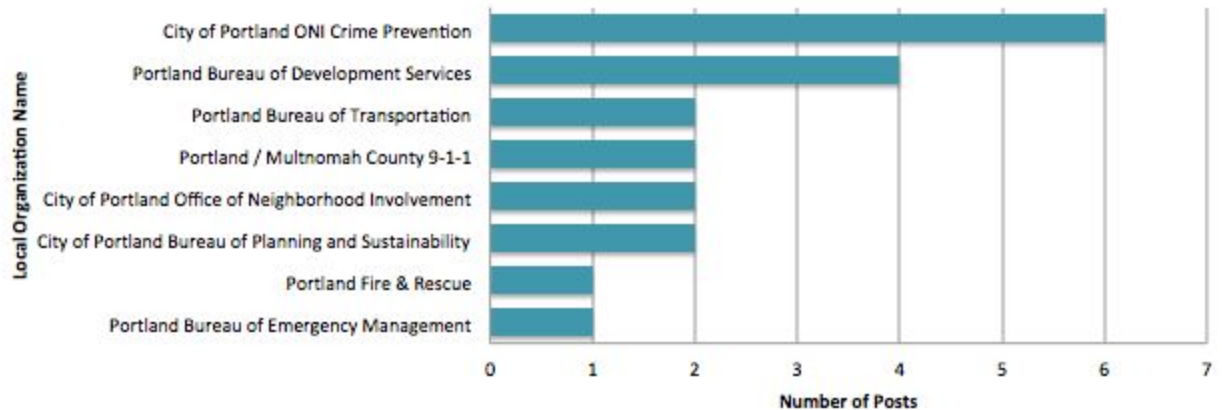
In terms of the level of trust people exhibit towards neighbors met on Nextdoor, providing a needed service was highest, followed by meeting for a social activity, borrowing an item, then feeding a pet or watering plants while away, while house sitting, childcare, enjoying a meal and giving someone a key were relatively low percentages. This could partially be due to the survey demographic, of predominantly middle aged people who live in households with only 1-2 people, so childcare is less of a need and house-sitting is less likely (since it is usually more transient, younger people who volunteer to house-sit). These findings also align with Oldenburg 1989's aspect of a third space: people are more likely to meet on neutral ground where they can come and go as they please, which might explain why more people are willing to meet for a social activity and less likely to commit to sitting down to enjoy a meal together.
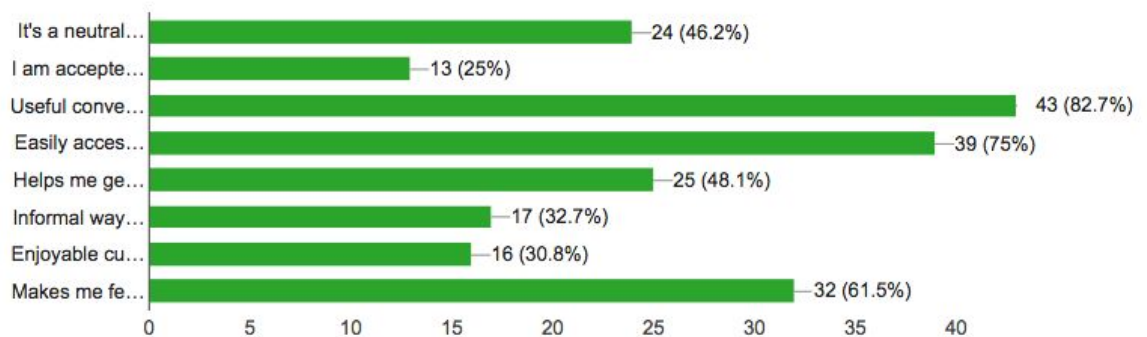
Which of the following would you be comfortable doing with a neighbor you met on Nextdoor?
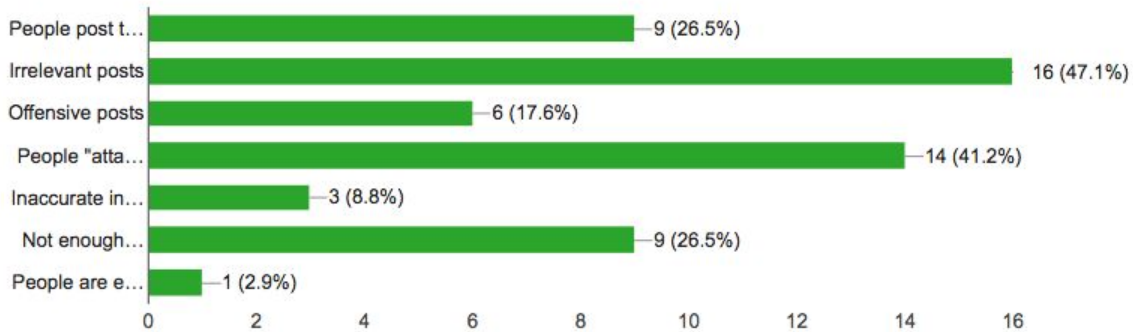(50 responses)
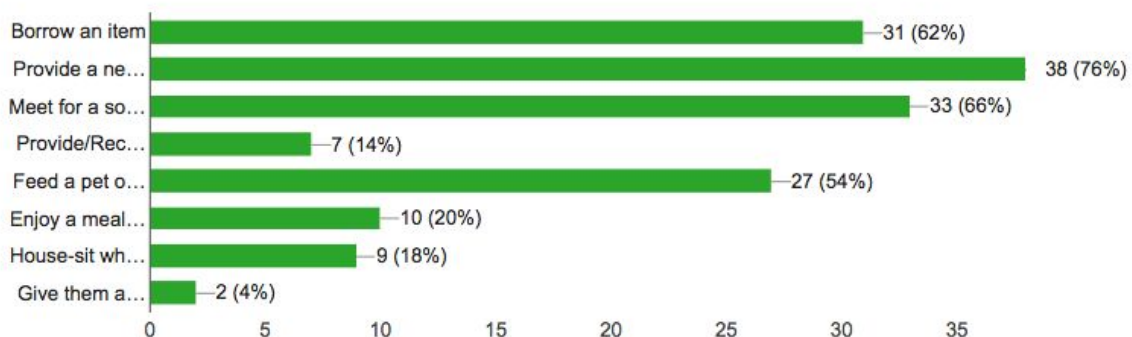
Although not all aspects of a third place scored highly in the survey, 82% of people associated Nextdoor with useful conversation, which Oldenburg argues is one of the most important qualities of the 8 criteria of being a third place. A significant amount of people also associated Nextdoor with being easily accessible (75%) and making them feel like part of a community (61.5%). The least selected quality of Nextdoor was to be accepted regardless of social status elsewhere (25%) which could align with demographic information as well: 44.2% of respondents had completed a college degree and 44.2% of respondents had completed a postgraduate degree, suggesting that most people on Nextdoor Collins View are of a similar status, at least in terms of education which is a large contributor to social status.

Which of the following do you associate with Nextdoor? (52 responses)

Category	Responses
It's a neutral...	24 (46.2%)
I am accepte...	13 (25%)
Useful conve...	43 (82.7%)
Easily acces...	39 (75%)
Helps me ge...	25 (48.1%)
Informal way...	17 (32.7%)
Enjoyable cu...	16 (30.8%)
Makes me fe...	32 (61.5%)

There were significantly fewer responses to the negative qualities associated with Nextdoor. Only 34 out of the 52 people who took the survey decided to respond. Irrelevant posts (47%) and people "attacking" others' posts (41.2%) were the highest percentages of choices for this question. The lowest, with only 2.9%, was that people are exclusive of certain groups. The second lowest with only 8.8% was that there is inaccurate information, which contributes to the assumption that people trust the information they see on Nextdoor, or at least believe it's accurate.
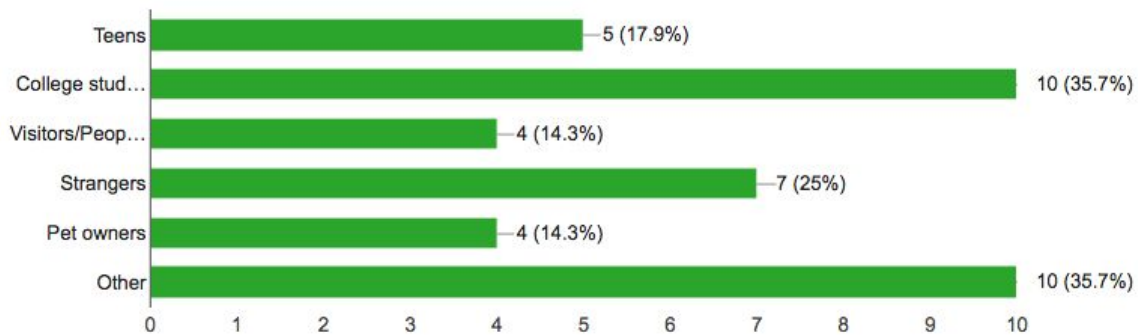
Which of the following do you associate with Nextdoor? (34 responses)

Category	Count (%)
People post t...	9 (26.5%)
Irrelevant posts	16 (47.1%)
Offensive posts	6 (17.6%)
People "atta...	14 (41.2%)
Inaccurate in...	3 (8.8%)
Not enough...	9 (26.5%)
People are e...	1 (2.9%)

In an attempt to identify possible "outsiders" in the neighborhood, I asked which groups people had been bothered by before. Again, there were only 28 responses which is low compared to the full pool of 52 participants. College students and Other were tied as bothering the most people at 35.7% each. This is significant to my analysis because in the same way positive informal interactions can generalize trust to a larger group of people, negative associations can also be generalized to a larger group, namely college students. Lewis & Clark students, although transient members of the community, will still be very important in community resilience after an earthquake, especially since the demographic of our neighborhood is otherwise older (73.1% of people who took the survey were over the age of 40). College students could be very important in transporting goods, clearing rubble, and doing other physical tasks that young able-bodied people might be more capable of doing -- therefore it's important that they are seen as trustworthy members of the community to ensure their involvement.

Which of the following groups have you ever been bothered by in Collins View?
(28 responses)

Group	Count (%)
Teens	5 (17.9%)
College stud...	10 (35.7%)
Visitors/Peop...	4 (14.3%)
Strangers	7 (25%)
Pet owners	4 (14.3%)
Other	10 (35.7%)

Post Vignettes

*names have been excluded to preserve anonymity

This post illustrates a repeated theme of annoyance caused by drunk Lewis & Clark students walking through the neighborhood. The last reply also illustrates someone embodying the enjoyable culture of interaction that Oldenburg described by attempting to keep the mood light and witty.

Did you lose a snow shovel last night?

I heard a group of young adults having a great time walking down Ridge Drive last night. This morning I found a snow shovel in the street in front of my house. An empty case of Rainier beer in front of the neighbors and crushed Rainier beer cans on the path in Tryon Creek Park near the ball field. If you're missing a snow shovel I've got it.

Edited on 30 Oct · Shared with Collins View in Lost & Found

| THANK · 2 | REPLY · 4 | ▾ |

★ ▆▆▆▆▆ and ▆▆thanked ▆▆

▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆ · 30 Oct ⌄

It was the same band of likely L&C students that were lighting off fireworks waking people up and dogs to bark. There was a party somewhere on SW 4th Ave last night as around 1am when awaken for the 3rd time with 10-15 loud stumbling kids going up SW Collins St. to SW 3rd. The worst part was there was at least 5-6 vehicles with potentially drunk drivers.

Thank

▆▆▆▆▆▆ 30 Oct ⌄

Slightly related, but anyone have any useful advice for shutting down the street noise for hoards like these?

They made their way down 6th ave too, just after midnight, and were loud in the street ... View more

Thank

▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆

▆▆▆▆▆▆▆ · 30 Oct ⌄

I also called the non-emergency police number last night but alas by the time they showed up the party was likely over. Quite a few under 21 looking folks as well.

Thank

▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆ · 31 Oct ⌄

I did lose my snow shovel last night, but I drink PBR. Oh well.

Thank

Write a reply...

This post about a new apartment for rent depicts potential detrimental impacts of an online forum -- people could feel more entitled or confident to post rude or confrontational comments since they don't know the person they are talking to.

New Apartment for Rent

22 Nov

My newly constructed ADU apartment is available to rent. Here is the link...
http://www.zillow.com/homedetails/541-SW...

For rent: $1,690. Brand-new, high-end, au...
ZILLOW.COM

Shared with Collins View + 9 nearby neighborhoods in General

THANK · 1   REPLY · 9

★ thanked

from Upper Multnomah · 22 Nov

Very pricey for a one bedroom.

Thank

from Lower Multnomah · 22 Nov

Two dollars per square foot per month :)

Thank

from Collins View · 22 Nov

I agree with   -- very expensive for 600 square feet. This is why
so many native Portlanders cannot afford to live here any longer. Very
nice, though.

Thank

from Lower Multnomah · 22 Nov

Beautiful

Thank

from Collins View · 29 Nov

Thanks for the comments, everyone. It is an expensive place. Someone
who can afford it will love it. To give you some idea of the quality of the
space (originally intended as my master bedroom suite), my return on
investment at this rental price is in the single digits. Inotherwords, this
level of quality isn't something one would easily be able to find in the
market. I could make more money airbnb'ing it but I'd rather provide
space to someone desirous of living here, in Portland. Happy holidays to
all!

Thank

However, as the comments continue, we can see the potential for community to form around defending people.

from Lower Multnomah · 29 Nov

I hope you don't feel the need to have to justify your pricing to people ▓▓ I say charge what you want! Nobody knows what you pay for your mortgage, property taxes, HOA fees, etc. and it's not their business. And if the price is too high, then it most likely will never be rented and you'd have to lower it anyways. Either way, it's your property and charge what you want regardless and don't feel the need to explain yourself. I'm not sure why people feel the need to comment on the price but that's just me.

People like you are NOT the reason why housing prices are so high. It has much more to do with more people moving here, a housing shortage, high property taxes that for the most part increase every year, etc. that property is in a great area and I'm sure it'll rent quickly! Best of luck :)

Thank

▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓thanked▓▓

from Collins View · 29 Nov

Thanks for the kind message, ▓▓ I almost didn't say anything, as you suggested, but I thought it might be nice for folks to understand a little bit of the economics behind the pricing. Be well, see you in the Village!

Thank

from Upper Multnomah · 29 Nov

This is a very well-priced 1BR for the market, especially considering all utilities are paid, parking and on-site laundry is provided, and the materials are clearly high-quality. Beautiful job, ▓▓ I'll send anyone I encounter your way.

Thank

from Collins View · 29 Nov

Thank you, ▓▓Much appreciated. Be well!

Thank

Write a reply....

Lost & Found posts got a lot of community involvement, and tended to result in an in-person meeting of two or more neighbors to return the lost pet or item. Since this was a service to the person who lost something, many times people were very grateful towards the person who returned the animal or item, most likely increasing the amount of trust between them and as a result the general neighborhood.

Found little white dog on maplecrest ct.

from Collins View · 3d ago

We found this little guy roaming on Maplecrest ct. No collar, no ID. Please pm me or text [redacted] if you know where he belongs. Thanks,

Shared with Collins View in General

| THANK · 1 | REPLY · 4 | ▾ |

★ [redacted] thanked [redacted]

from Collins View · 3d ago

Oh my goodness what a cutie! I bet his people are going to be glad to see him!

Thank

from Collins View · 3d ago

Thanks to [redacted] for finding [redacted] and [redacted] for keeping him safe. It was completely out of character for him to leave our yard--especially when it's freezing rain. My husband was even out there! Thank you very much--and very nice to meet you!!

Thank

[redacted] thanked [redacted]

from Collins View · 3d ago

I think he is [redacted] who belongs to [redacted] and [redacted] at the house next door to us at the back lot. The lot closer to [redacted]

Thank

from Collins View · 2d ago

And now [redacted] is famous!

Thank

Discussion

In summary, I found that most people associated Nextdoor with at least one aspect of a third place. Although mostly low-commitment activities, people were also willing to do at least one trust-building activity for or with the neighbors that they met on Nextdoor. In contrast, there were less people that had complaints about aspects of Nextdoor, with the biggest complaint being irrelevant posts, which doesn't really affect trust or community. This suggests that Nextdoor is a successful virtual third place, and although people may not have built up trust with their neighbors yet, this forum is a constructive way to do so. It is important to note, however, that this is a very specific demographic of people and cannot be generalized to other

communities: the average person who took this survey was a woman over 40 years old, white, college educated, living in a single family home with only 1-2 people for over 15 years.

The implications of Nextdoor being a successful virtual third place could be very important in a society that continues to focus solely on work and home spheres, neglecting easily accessible places for people to interact with people who encourage them to consider different viewpoints and ways of life. It could be a forum directed at the precise group of people who will need to be connected in the event of a disaster, which could vastly improve that neighborhood's resilience. If people are able to work together and organize efficiently after a disaster, it improves recovery time and frees up emergency responders to focus their efforts on more vulnerable parts of the city. Additionally, when communicating risk, people are more likely to listen to their friends and families than other authority figures like scientists and government organizations (Haynes et al 2007). Perhaps even before the earthquake hits, the generalized trust that is being built on Nextdoor will encourage people to pay attention to preparedness warnings posted by neighbors, and take individualized steps to prepare such as making a kit or retrofitting their house.

Bibliography

Bouchillon, B. C. 2014. "Social Ties and Generalized Trust, Online and in Person: Contact or Conflict--The Mediating Role of Bonding Social Capital in America." *Social Science Computer Review* 32 (4): 506–23. doi:10.1177/0894439313513076.

Davidson, Debra J. . 2010. "The Applicability of the Concept of Resilience to Social Systems: Some Sources of Optimism and Nagging Doubts." Society & Natural Resources 23:12, 1135-1149, DOI: 10.1080/08941921003652940

Glanville, J. L., M. A. Andersson, and P. Paxton. 2013. "Do Social Connections Create Trust? An Examination Using New Longitudinal Data." *Social Forces* 92 (2): 545–62. doi:10.1093/sf/sot079.

Gragg, Randy. 2014. "The Big One: A Survival Guide." *Portland Monthly*, July 1.

Haynes, Katharine, Jenni Barclay, and Nick Pidgeon. 2008. "The Issue of Trust and Its Influence on Risk Communication during a Volcanic Crisis." *Bulletin of Volcanology* 70 (5): 605–21. doi:10.1007/s00445-007-0156-z.

Haas, Ryan, and John Rosman. 2015. "The 1st Preparedness Commandment: Know Thy Neighbor." *OPB*, May 17. http://www.opb.org/news/series/unprepared/the-1st-preparedness-commandment-know-thy-neighbor/.

Oldenburg, R. 1989. The Great Good Place: Cafe´s, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through The Day. New York: Marlowe & Company.

Steinkuehler, Constance A., and Dmitri Williams. 2006. "Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as 'Third Places.'" *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11 (4): 885–909. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00300.x.