

UNCOVERING THE NEEDS OF THE OMAHA COMMUNITY: ASSESSING OMAHA JITTERBUGS' POTENTIAL AS A FORMATIVE SPACE

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Rationale:

This project was conducted for Omaha Jitterbugs, a swing dance scene in Omaha which seeks to use its space to create an empowering and inclusive environment for its members, encouraging greater interaction between members of different backgrounds. This project produces a theory of formative space to evaluate Jitterbugs' program theory regarding this goal.

Methods:

The study utilized a grounded theory approach, using Group Concept Mapping methods to create maps of members' needs. In addition, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with members to produce deeper insights into the themes raised by the concept maps.

Results:

Members identified purposeful outreach for member sourcing, continuing education of new members, and community cohesion as the most important needs to meet, while they viewed bureaucratic improvements and avoidance of intentional integration as less important. This suggests that they share the values of cultural

communication and empowerment that Omaha Jitterbugs seeks to promote as an organization. Members' valuation of Jitterbugs' "clean" atmosphere was linked to nostalgic sentiments characterizing the swing scene as recreating social and community relationships from the early twentieth century. This nostalgia can be problematic, as it often obscures the racial segregation and gender disempowerment prevalent at that time. As a result, the nostalgia that often brings new members to Jitterbugs may be inhibiting its ability to create a more inclusive and empowering culture. In addition, Jitterbugs' members held differing paradigms for how Jitterbugs should operate: some viewed Jitterbugs' action as occurring on an organizational level while others viewed its action as being conducted by dedicated members.

Conclusion:

This study determined that Omaha Jitterbugs is not currently meeting its potential as a formative space. While the scene does possess a defined physical and conceptual space, members within the scene hold conflicting sets of values. This lack of agreement among values within the scene results in significant impediments to Omaha Jitterbugs' ability to foster its stated values of cultural communication and empowerment in the broader Omaha community. To reach its potential as a formative space, the Jitterbugs scene must work purposefully to foster inclusivity and empowerment as values among its members, creating member buy-in and internalization of these values. This can be done effectively utilizing Habermas' communicative space to develop a more complete understanding of the varied values currently held by Jitterbugs members.

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Introduction

Social organizations play a significant role in individuals' formation of social capital in their community. They provide physical and social spaces in which people can form relationships, offer people ways to pursue meaning, and constitute an avenue by which people are enculturated into the customs of their locality. In addition to these individual-level functions, social organizations facilitate the development of a space in which members can foster organizational values. Promotion of these subcultural values within the space can then be extended to the dominant culture, creating social change by shifting dominant values to better reflect these subcultural values.

To conceptualize this function of social organizations, I advance the concept of formative space. This concept bears similarity to Polletta's prefigurative space and Goffman's critical space, though its apolitical scope and group level ultimately render it distinct from either concept¹. Formative space is characterized by the purposeful creation of a physical-conceptual space within a social organization or sub-culture which functions to foster ownership of the group's values by its members. This creation relies on the development of communicative space as a means of discerning the values of the group and achieving buy-in from individual members². However, instead of merely aiming to create consensus within the group, formative space functions in the additional goal of carrying those values into the larger dominant culture, doing so through group members promoting these values among other groups and organizations to which they belong.

¹ Francesca Polletta, "'Free Spaces' in Collective Action" *Theory and Society* 28, no. 1 (1999): 1-38.

<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006941408302>; Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1961).

² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

As mentioned, the concept of formative space applies to groups regardless of political intent. For instance, a local branch of a political party could function as a formative space just as easily as a women's book club. Each group creates a designated space in which value fostering occurs: political party members may meet in person or on online fora to foster values of freedom of speech or equal representation, and book club members may meet in a member's home or via email to foster values of critical thinking and empathy. Each group then promotes these values in the broader community via member engagement in other groups and organizations: political party members might encourage equal representation in their place of employment by purposefully including minority employees in decision-making processes, and book club members might encourage critical thinking within parent-teacher associations by deliberately analyzing rationales behind proposed actions.

Notably, social groups are not necessarily formative spaces by virtue of their fostering values among their members. Extension of these values to the larger community is a necessary component of formative space. For instance, a vegan lifestyle online chatroom may promote compassion towards animals and commitment to whole foods among its members, but it is not a formative space unless its members deliberately promote compassion and commitment among other groups to which they belong.

To illustrate this concept of formative space, and to further conceptualize what it means to be a formative space, I examined a social organization's potential to create such a space. I evaluated the Omaha Jitterbugs, a local swing dance scene which draws membership from the Omaha community and the environs, including Lincoln and Des Moines. The organization seeks to foster values including gender empowerment and cross-cultural communication among its members, and these values are at least partly held in the larger Neo-Swing sub-culture³. I utilized methods including group concept mapping and semi-structured interviews to uncover Jitterbugs members' perceptions of the organization's work in

³ Rikomatic. "It's Time to Listen: Black Dancers and Their Experiences in Swing & Blues [Op-Ed]," 2018. <http://www.yehoodi.com/blog/2018/1/23/op-ed-its-time-to-listen-black-dancers-and-their-experiences-in-swing-blues-communities?fbclid=IwAR29Yccok315KbdTAMqb40Yv97NGePoYNAmbiziAYIrFp6Su14ad1Nd5a5U>.

fostering these values as well as their perceptions of the role Jitterbugs should play in the larger Omaha community.

The realization by Omaha Jitterbugs of its potential as a formative space could have significant positive implications for the Omaha community. Doing so would create substantial positive exposure of Omaha residents to more marginalized groups such as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and more recent refugee communities. Exposure of members to people from other cultures within the social dance environment would allow positive relationships to form between them, and the extension of these relationships into the broader Omaha community would improve Omaha's cultural cohesiveness and attentiveness to marginalized groups. Realization of Jitterbugs' potential as a formative space would also likely improve people's experiences with gender performance in Omaha. Encouragement of equal contributions within social dances by male and female partners, in addition to mitigation of dominant norms of male-female dance partnerships, would enable male and female members alike to more easily resist gender role enforcement within the Jitterbugs scene, and the extension of this resistance to the larger Omaha community would assist in creating a more egalitarian culture in which Omaha residents feel less pressured to perform traditional gender roles. This study, in addition to advancing the concept of formative space within the literature, also serves to enable Omaha Jitterbugs to realize its potential as a formative space by making explicit its successes and shortcomings in fostering these values.

Literature Review

The Swing and Neo-Swing Subcultures: Embracing and Undermining Dominant Cultural Narratives

The swing subculture has been a point of cultural flux since its beginnings in the early twentieth century. A product of the Harlem Renaissance, swing dance began in African American communities within Harlem in New York City during the 1920s. Aided by the spread of the music record, swing dance grew from an unknown art form to a touchstone of American Interwar culture. With the rise of rock music in the 1950s and 1960s, though, the swing scene faded

from popular culture and continued unnoticed through the mid-twentieth century.

In the 1990s, the underground swing scene saw a revival. Considered a Neo-Swing movement, swing dance and culture were unearthed by white, middle-class college students on the Southern coast of California. Drawing significantly from films and other media of the early twentieth century, the Neo-Swing subculture sought to harken back to their perceived cultural past and distance themselves from their current dominant cultural norms ⁴. The Neo-Swing movement brought swing dance culture back into the eye of the dominant culture, spreading swing culture across the United States and internationally. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the movement has waned and swing culture has again moved out of the dominant cultural eye. However, swing scenes still thrive in numerous cities around the world.

Current Neo-Swing culture maintains often-conflicting values: while members champion the causes of racial equality and gender performance, there remains a powerful nostalgic force within the scene which counteracts this commitment. Such nostalgia for a perceived past obscures the role of African Americans in creating swing dance and perpetuates gender roles which disempower women and restrict men, severely complicating members' efforts to promote racial equality and gender performance within the subculture.

Race exists as a point of contention within swing culture. Swing scenes take pride in the dance's origins in African American culture: references to its birth in Harlem are ubiquitous in swing lessons internationally. However, the rebirth of swing culture in the Neo-Swing movement and its white, middle-class perspective complicated discussions of race within the swing subculture. Neo-Swing members sought to recapture the swing culture of the early twentieth century, but their references for such culture came largely from media produced by the dominant culture of the age which largely excluded African American dancers and musicians from coverage. As such, films and articles referenced by Neo-Swing members produced a false

⁴ Scott Renshaw, "Postmodern Swing Dance and Secondary Adjustment: Identity as Process." *Symbolic Interaction* 29, no. 1 (2006): 83-94. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2006.29.1.83>; Randal Doane, "The Habitus of Dancing: Notes on the Swing Dance Revival in New York City." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35 (2006): 84-116.

memory of the swing scene as a White scene rather than an African American one ⁵. While Neo-Swing members also developed perceptions of the earlier swing dance culture from contemporary members' narratives, these narratives also excluded African Americans from memory. Further, when African Americans were mentioned, the segregationist dynamics of the early twentieth century scene were obscured by narratives which cast the scenes as vibrant sites of racial harmony ⁶. Recently, African Americans within the scene have brought these issues of cultural appropriation to light; many swing scenes have responded to these criticisms by increasing efforts to diversify their influential members, including instructors and promoters ⁷.

Gender performance issues within the Neo-Swing scene have not been infused with as much controversy as racial equality, yet they are a major concern of the swing culture overall. Such issues are concerned with the maintenance of hegemonic masculine norms within swing scenes and their impact on members' empowerment. These hegemonic norms can take place within the dance itself or in the interactions peripheral to the dance. For instance, dominant cultural norms push men to dance in the lead role and women to dance in the follow role; such roles emphasize assertiveness in men and submissiveness in women. Deviation from this norm, whether through women leading men, women dancing with women, or men dancing with men, engenders resistance within the dominant culture. Off the dance floor, hegemonic norms promote male patronage of their social groups: by providing transportation to dance venues and paying for food or drinks for the group, men may establish themselves as prominent members within their own social group and within the swing scene ⁸. Swing scenes seek to subvert these hegemonic norms on and off the floor by intentionally normalizing male follows and encouraging dancers to dance with others of any

⁵ Eric Martin Usner, "Dancing in the Past, Living in the Present: Nostalgia and Race in Southern California Neo-Swing Dance Culture." *Dance Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2001): 87-101.

⁶ Sherrie Tucker, "Swing: From Time to Torque (Dance Floor Democracy at the Hollywood Canteen)." *Daedalus* 142, no. 4 (2013): 82-97. https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00243.

⁷ Rikomatic.

⁸ Doane.

gender. Further, they encourage positive social action off the dance floor by placing ally members within the scene to address aggressive behavior and maintain a safe environment.

The concept of nostalgia presents a significant challenge to swing scenes' efforts to promote racial equality and gender performance within swing culture. On a cultural level, nostalgia is the process by which a culture identifies a remembered past as ideal and seeks to emulate those norms and values in the present. Because nostalgia relies on a remembered past, it is uniquely prone to use as a tool of power maintenance: in the case of swing culture, nostalgia for a remembered past constructed using segregated accounts of early twentieth-century culture perpetuates the problematic race and gender relations into modern swing culture ⁹. Often, though, this nostalgia for an "American" past is the very reason why members became involved in swing culture in the first place, presenting challenges for overcoming the effects of nostalgia on the current swing scene.

Community Lost and the Effects of Social Clubs

As an example of a voluntary association, the swing dance scene has importance in the larger community. Since the turn of the century, considerable attention has been drawn to the attrition of American membership in voluntary associations beginning in the second half of the twentieth century ¹⁰. Scholars argue that Americans in the first half of the twentieth century created social ties within social organizations in their community, such as Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Daughters of the American Revolution, and bowling leagues. Such memberships were freely chosen, and they afforded individuals greater social capital in the form of emotional support networks, stronger community cohesion, and stronger interpersonal networks when searching for jobs or pushing community initiatives ¹¹. Out of this trend has sprung the Community Lost narrative, which bemoans the

⁹ Usner, 87-101.

¹⁰ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Renewal of American Community*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post-War Detroit*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996).

¹¹ Putnam.

decline of voluntary association membership in recent years and points to numerous detriments as a result of this decline. Despite the many benefits to the community resulting from membership in voluntary associations, they can result in negative outcomes as well. Neighborhood associations in Detroit, prime examples of voluntary associations, have historically been used to exclude African American homeowners from communal ties¹². Such instances illustrate the potential of voluntary organizations for social justice as well as injustice.

Whether in response to the Community Lost narrative or as a counterexample, swing scenes represent a voluntary organization which has maintained and even grown its membership, particularly among age groups most responsible for membership attrition. Members of swing scenes maintain their involvement largely due to personal attachment to swing culture, and they gain increased social connections, improved emotional support networks, and greater community cohesion. Given swing scenes' success in maintaining membership relative to other voluntary organizations, scholars concerned with the Community Lost narrative would benefit greatly from an increased understanding of swing culture and its interaction with dominant culture.

Discrimination in Society: Race and Gender

The dominant culture in modern America is rife with disparity: various groups in America are given greater access and increased freedom at the expense of other underserved groups¹³. Among other categories, race and gender stand out as major axes along which power is exercised on marginalized peoples. Discrimination based on race and gender generates significant stress for individuals and ultimately leads to their decreased wellness.

¹² Sugrue.

¹³ Seth Holmes, *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 2013); Michael Gill and Nirmala Erevelles, "The Absent Presence of Elsie Lacks: Hauntings at the Intersection of Race, Class, Gender, and Disability" *African American Review* 50, no. 2 (2017): 123-37. <https://doi.org/10.1353/afa.2017.0017>.

The axis of race, particularly between whites and African Americans, has long been a major means by which the powerful have acted upon the disempowered. Since the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, racism and racial discrimination have not vanished; rather, they have become more insidious as institutional racism is obscured by a supposedly “colorblind” culture. African Americans experience discrimination constantly, and this persistent stress has significant tangible effects on their health. A recent study found a correlation between adolescent experience of racial discrimination and adult usage of cigarettes by African American men ¹⁴. In addition, other scholars have found a correlation between adolescent experiences of discrimination and poor health outcomes, postulating that this correlation may result from increased discrimination-induced chronic stress, and consequently increased stress-induced illness ¹⁵.

The axis of gender has also been a long-standing source of disparity in America. While the Women’s Suffrage movement brought increased empowerment for women in the early twentieth century, women have still been victims of cultural and institutional discrimination in recent years. This discrimination can range from open sexism to subtle portrayals of women as objects in popular media ¹⁶. In addition, men who perform non-hegemonic masculinities, such as homosexual men, have seen significant discrimination for decades. Internalization of disempowering gender roles has been shown to correlate with increased self-destructive behaviors in both

¹⁴ Lauren J. Parker et al., “The Effects of Discrimination Are Associated With Cigarette Smoking Among Black Males.” *Substance Use and Misuse* 52, no. 3 (2017): 383-91.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2016.1228678>.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Brondolo, “Considering Social Processes When Examining Mediators of the Effects of Discrimination on Health.” *Social Science and Medicine* 215, no. August (2018): 160-62.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.08.004>.

¹⁶ Eric E. Rasmussen and Rebecca L. Densley, “Girl in a Country Song: Gender Roles and Objectification of Women in Popular Country Music across 1990 to 2014.” *Sex Roles* 76, no. 3-4 (2017): 188-201.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0670-6>.

men and women¹⁷. Further, even in traditionally safe spaces for those who do not adhere to hegemonic gender roles, individuals' performance of gender can still be affected by hegemonic role prescription¹⁸. The goal of swing culture to combat racial and gender discrimination, then, presents a pressing issue; a greater understanding of race and gender dynamics within swing culture would greatly benefit scholars seeking to address issues of race and gender within the dominant culture.

Formative Space: Conceptualization and Comparison to Other Space Concepts

The relationship between physical or conceptual space and social interaction has been highly examined by the scholarly community¹⁹.

¹⁷ Melanie L. Straiton et al., "Self-Harm and Conventional Gender Roles in Women." *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 43, no. 2 (2013): 161-73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sltb.12005>.

¹⁸ Kimberly Eichenberger, "Gender Differences in the Use of Gay Clubs: A Place to Resist Gender Norms for Gay Men and a Place of Diffusion for Lesbian Women." *The Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography* 2, no. 2 (2012): 1-17.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*. ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York, 1984); Lukáš Kordík and Štefan Polakovič, "Shifting the Line: Reclaiming Space for Social Interaction" *Architectural Design* 88, no. 5 (2018): 98-103. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.2349>; Elif Alpak, et al., "Kamusal Açık Mekânların Kalitesi ve Sosyal Etkileşim Üzerindeki Etkileri / Quality of Public Open Space and Effects on Social Interaction." *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 7, no. 2 (2018): 624. <https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v7i2.1508>; Scott W. Renshaw, "Postmodern Swing Dance and Secondary Adjustment: Identity as Process" *Symbolic Interaction* 29, no. 1 (2006): 83-94. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2006.29.1.83>; Jill A. McCorkel, "Going to the Crackhouse: Critical Space as a Form of Resistance in Total Institutions and Everyday Life" *Symbolic Interaction* 21, no. 3 (1998): 227-52. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.1998.21.3.227>; Goffman; Habermas; Paul Godin et al., "Opening Communicative Space: A Habermasian Understanding of a User-Led Participatory Research Project" *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology* 18, no. 4 (2007):

While many space concepts exist within the literature, there is no existing concept for formative space. To further refine the concept of formative space, I outline four other space concepts: Foucault's physical space, Polletta's free space, Goffman's critical space, and Habermas' communicative space.

Physical Space and Social Interaction

In his writings on social forces and their effects on social interaction, Michel Foucault outlines the role physical space plays in facilitating different social relationships. He argues that the physical spaces within which people live may promote or inhibit different ways of interacting with other individuals. For instance, prisons built to provide little privacy to inmates and scarce visibility of wardens encourage social interactions which strip power from inmates: constantly fearful of being caught by wardens they cannot see, inmates self-monitor their own behavior. Similarly, railroads connecting distant towns and cities transformed national and international identities during the nineteenth century: people who once would have to travel for weeks to reach a neighboring country could now do so in a matter of days, allowing formation of meaningful relationships between people of different nationalities. Foucault is careful to qualify this relationship, however: while the effects of physical space on social interaction are significant, they are ultimately determined by the culture in which the physical space exists. Physical spaces designed to promote a certain pattern of interaction may be appropriated to promote a different pattern if actively utilized for that end ²⁰. Even with this caveat, the concept of physical space remains powerful and has been frequently used by institutions to promote desired patterns of interaction ²¹.

452-69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14789940701470283>; Francesca Polletta, "Free Spaces' in Collective Action" *Theory and Society* 28, no. 1 (1999): 1-38. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006941408302>; Robert Futrell and Pete Simi, "Free Spaces, Collective Identity, and the Persistence of U.S. White Power Activism." *Social Problems* 51, no. 1 (2004): 16-42. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2004.51.1.16>.

²⁰ Foucault.

²¹ Kordík and Polakovič; Alpak, et al. 98-103.

Communicative Space and Formation of Community

While the effects of physical space are limited to physical localities, other concepts of space may operate in conceptual rather than physical environments. Such a concept is Habermas' communicative space, which exists as a purely conceptual space. Habermas utilizes communicative space when exploring democratic action and communication. He distinguishes two different modes of communication: strategic action, which aims to create consensus on a desired goal, and communicative action, which aims to uncover a shared understanding of the group's perceptions, values, or goals. Because strategic action operates to persuade group members, it is susceptible to coercive use; communicative action, however, does not aim to persuade, preventing coercion and encouraging democratic interaction. Habermas describes the portion of group communication devoted to creating this shared understanding as communicative space, stating that groups which greatly utilize communicative space will operate more democratically²². This concept of communicative space has been used in settings such as mental health intervention design to improve such programs' empowering capacity for their members²³. Communicative space is essential to groups' potential to act as a formative space: to effectively foster values within and without the subculture, the group must first utilize communicative space to understand what their shared values are. Otherwise, the group's formative potential may decline as members who do not embrace the group's stated goals spread them to the community poorly or not at all.

Free Space: Generating Socio-political Movements

Polletta's concept of free space constitutes an analogous sociological concept to formative space. However, it remains distinct from formative space in its essential socio-political nature. Borrowing Goffman's individual-level concept of free space, Polletta repurposes the concept on the group organization level. She defines free space as a physical or conceptual space in which a politically-oriented group may maintain its group cohesion safe from the oppression of

²² Habermas.

²³ Godin et al., 452-69.

dominant political groups. Within this free space concept, she distinguishes three sub-concepts: indigenous space, in which group members foster close personal ties; transmovement space, in which members from separate locations create connections between these cells; and prefigurative space, in which members emulate an idealized future within their community²⁴. Simi and Futrell modify this framework to transmovement prefigurative and indigenous prefigurative spaces, arguing that all free spaces have a prefigurative element²⁵. While Polletta's prefigurative space shares similarities with formative space in terms of group-level scale and fostering of group values, it can be conceptualized as a more specific case of formative space which applies to groups which are politically oriented and oppressed. Since swing culture is neither politically oriented nor particularly oppressed, the more general formative space is a more appropriate concept.

Critical Space: Facilitating Individual Identity

Lastly, Goffman's concept of critical space presents an individual-level analogue to formative space. Goffman theorizes this concept using observations of total institutions, which act on individuals to maintain total control of their narrative identity. Looking specifically at mental institutions, Goffman identifies critical space as a physical or conceptual space in which individuals carry out identity work to maintain personal identity in opposition to the one-dimensional institutional narrative. Goffman indicates the importance of decreased institutional monitoring in allowing for critical space: whether as an unmonitored hallway or as encoded phrasing, critical spaces must give individuals physical or conceptual room to do identity work without fear of institutional watch²⁶. McCorkel extends this concept beyond the total institution, stating that individuals may utilize critical space within normal life to maintain their own identity narrative in opposition to a dominant narrative of their identity²⁷. While formative space occurs on the group level, its emphasis on

²⁴ Polletta, 1-38.

²⁵ Futrell and Simi, 16-42.

²⁶ Goffman.

²⁷ McCorkel, 227-52.

fostering a group culture distinct from the dominant culture bears similarity to critical space.

Methods

Omaha Jitterbugs is a nonprofit organization which preserves and celebrates Swing and Jazz dance styles from the early twentieth century. It offers Jitterbugs Night Out, a weekly social dance which provides a beginner lesson, in addition to month-long lesson tracks and a yearly swing dance convention. Founded in 2000, the organization is a gathering space for members of the Omaha community across age groups, neighborhoods, and ethnicities. Jitterbugs strives to create a unified community through social dance, arguing that dance provides a metaphoric means to foster communication between individuals from disparate groups. Stemming from this commitment to communication, Jitterbugs strives to create equitable relationships between people of different genders and ethnicities, using its space as a locus of positive interaction and inclusivity. Jitterbugs executives believe that fostering intercultural interactions within the Jitterbugs scene will result in greater intercultural interaction, and increased community cohesion, in Omaha at large²⁸. In essence, Jitterbugs seeks to be a formative space, fostering positive communication and inclusivity within the scene and carrying those values into the larger Omaha culture. To evaluate Omaha Jitterbugs' potential as a formative space, I utilized a mixed-methods approach consisting of group concept mapping and semi-structured interviews. Data were collected concurrently, allowing for development of increased nuance in both methods.

Group Concept Mapping

I utilized GroupWisdom, an online concept mapping software program, to carry out the group concept mapping. I designed the data collection in accordance with guidelines outlined by Kane and Trochim²⁹. I carried out informal interviews with the Jitterbugs

²⁸ Jitterbugs, "Brand Book." (2013).

²⁹ Mary Kane and William Trochim, *Concept Mapping for Planning and Evaluation* Edited by Leonard Bickman and Debra J. Rog (Thousand

executive director and examined the Jitterbugs brand book to formulate program theory pertaining to Jitterbugs' inclusivity and empowerment goals. Based on this, I constructed the following focus prompt:

"Omaha Jitterbugs strives to unite disparate groups in Omaha into one community, empowering people by creating a welcoming atmosphere and promoting equality and cooperation among its members. Omaha Jitterbugs can best accomplish this by..."

This focus prompt was incorporated into a brainstorming exercise which was sent to Jitterbugs members via an online interface created by GroupWisdom software. The link to the exercise was sent to members through Jitterbugs social media and email lists. In addition, laptop computers were brought to one social dance to target members who attended the social dance. A small dessert was provided as compensation for participants who completed the exercise at the social dance. Informed consent was obtained passively from each participant by including a consent letter within each concept mapping exercise. The brainstorming exercise yielded 21 participants who generated 36 raw statements. These statements were reduced to 28 statements during idea synthesis, which standardized statement structure and eliminated duplicate and grossly irrelevant statements while maintaining semantic content.

The resulting statements were incorporated into a statement structuring exercise which consisted of one sorting and two rating activities. The link to the exercise was sent through Jitterbugs social media, and laptop computers were brought to two social dances. A small dessert was again provided as compensation for participants at the social dances. The statement structuring exercise yielded 18 sorting participants, 22 importance rating participants, and 21 feasibility rating participants. Sorting data were analyzed using multidimensional scaling and hierarchical clustering to generate

Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007); Douglas Caulkins and Susan B. Hyatt, "Using Consensus Analysis to Measure Cultural Diversity in Organizations and Social Movements" *Field Methods* 11, no. 1 (1999): 5-26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X9901100102>; Garry Chick, "Writing Culture Reliably: The Analysis of High-Concordance Codes." *Ethnology* 39, no. 4 (2000): 365-93.

concept maps³⁰. Rating data were used to construct Go-Zones and pattern matching.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to more deeply illuminate themes generated from the concept maps. Interview participants were recruited utilizing convenience sampling through a recruitment email sent through Jitterbugs' email list and through face-to-face recruitment. Informed consent was obtained passively by providing a consent letter to each participant prior to interviewing. Participant demographics were predominately white, with one participant identifying as Asian. African American members of Jitterbugs were sought, but none agreed to participate. One participant was college-aged, two participants were young adults, and three participants were middle-aged. Six total interviews were completed, ranging in length from four to forty minutes, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Confidentiality was assured by removing identifiers from interview transcripts. All interviews were conducted using an interview guide. The resulting transcripts were coded using OpenCode software, which allowed the use of a grounded theory approach³¹. As part of this approach, transcripts were coded initially according to themes which arose from each interview. Transcripts were coded iteratively, with novel codes in one interview prompting further analysis for these codes in the other interviews.

³⁰ Kane and Trochim; Chick, 365-93; Caulkins and Hyatt, 5-26.

³¹ Torkil Clemmensen, "Templates for Cross-Cultural and Culturally Specific Usability Testing: Results from Field Studies and Ethnographic Interviewing in Three Countries" ; Laura Atkins, "Half the Battle: Social Support Among Women With Cancer" *Qualitative Inquiry* 22, no. 4 (2015): 253-62.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800415574911>.; Mary J. Fechner, "Berliners' Models of Heart Disease Causation" *Qualitative Health Research* 21, no. 6 (2011): 807-17.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732311400430>.; H. Ensaff et al., "A Qualitative Study of a Food Intervention in a Primary School: Pupils as Agents of Change." *Appetite* 95 (2015): 455-65.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2015.08.001>.

Results

Table 1: Concept Map Statements

	Statement		Statement
1	holding "bring a friend, get in free" nights to increase outside exposure	15	offering a Jitterbugs Night Out yearly membership
2	encouraging more responsive DJing to feel the energy of the dancers	16	encouraging Jitterbugs regulars to reach out to new or unfamiliar faces
3	increasing variation of song types (slow songs, high energy, different eras)	17	handing out passes to Jitterbugs Night Out at outreach events
4	holding more themed dances (pajama, animal print, superhero, black tie, prom)	18	offering beginner lessons at Jitterbugs Night Out
5	cross-marketing Jitterbugs events with other dance and music scenes in Omaha	19	encouraging new dancers to ask other people to dance
6	expanding marketing to coffee shops, grocery stores, high schools, and universities	20	offering weekly lessons at different skill levels
7	targeting underserved neighborhoods when choosing new locations or partnering with outside groups	21	increasing awareness of Jitterbugs Night Out
8	purposefully choosing non-gendered language when teaching dance parts	22	creating a "welcome committee" of ambassadors or liaisons for new attendees
9	frequently switching partners during lessons to facilitate interaction	23	advertising through various platforms (word of mouth, social media, partnerships)
10	implementing allies to address disrespectful behavior	24	facilitating people's growth from casual to social to excellent dancers
11	avoiding forcing equality, inclusion, and diversity on Jitterbugs members	25	designating a grant writer to raise funds for Jitterbugs
12	offering annual events, contests, and giveaways	26	playing mixer dance songs - e.g. Shim Sham - that encourage people to come out on the dance floor and partner up part way through.
13	fostering "underground" identity of swing dance	27	celebrating everyone's abilities

14	giving dancers nametags to encourage interaction	28	Reaching out to other communities in the area that aren't especially represented in the current Jitterbugs scene
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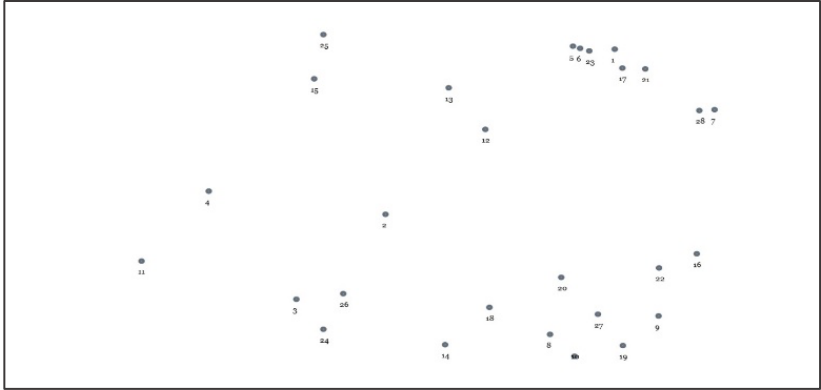


Figure 1: Point Map

Multidimensional scaling yielded a point map containing five broad conceptual regions, shown in Figure 1. Statement numbers are identified in Table 1. Preliminary analysis of this point map suggests a region in the upper left concerned with how to bring new members to Jitterbugs, including statements describing cross-marketing at dance events, advertising through various platforms, and reaching out to communities not currently in the Jitterbugs scene. Another region in the upper middle concerns administrative actions that could be taken, including statements describing hiring a grant writer, fostering the swing scene's "underground" identity, and offering a yearly membership. Moving counterclockwise, a region in the lower left contains two statements which do not fit neatly with other groups, including avoiding contrived integration of the Jitterbugs scene and holding themed dances. A region in the lower middle left contains statements concerning ways the DJ could impact members' experience, such as increasing variation of song types, being more responsive to dancers, and playing mixer songs to encourage interaction. A region in the lower middle right contains statements concerning members' development as dancers, such as holding beginner lessons, encouraging dancers to develop their abilities, and

offering weekly lessons at different skill levels. Finally, the region in the lower far right contains statements concerning the social environment within the Jitterbugs scene, such as celebrating the abilities of all dancers, implementing allies and ambassadors, and encouraging regular dancers to interact with newer dancers.

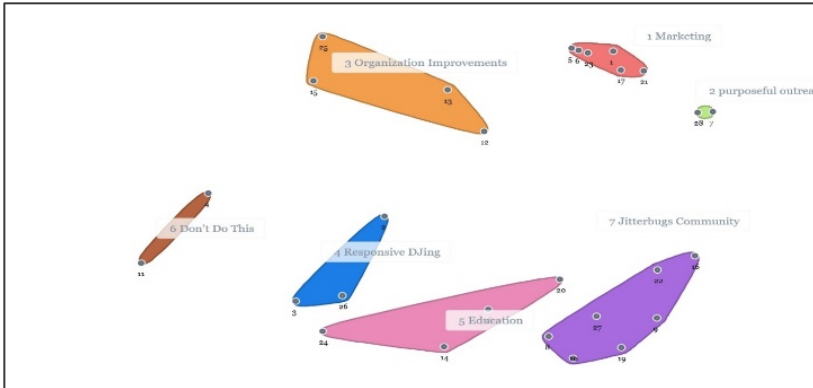


Figure 2: Cluster Map

Hierarchical clustering of these statements yielded a cluster map with seven major clusters, shown in Figure 2. This map was largely consistent with preliminary themes arising from the point map. Clusters were labeled using labeling analysis, which identified participant groupings most similar to those in the cluster map and used the labels used by such participants³². This analysis yielded seven major themes: Marketing, Purposeful Outreach, Organization Improvements, Responsive DJing, Education, Don't Do This, and Jitterbugs Community. Within the Organization Improvements cluster, subclusters concerning financial streamlining and Jitterbugs identity work were present. In addition, within the Jitterbugs Community cluster, I identified subclusters concerning community standards and community cohesion. Analysis of average importance ratings for each cluster, shown in Figure 3, indicates that Jitterbugs members view Marketing, Education, and Jitterbugs Community as most important, with Purposeful Outreach and Responsive DJing only slightly less important. Several interviews echoed this emphasis on marketing, arguing that the best way to improve Jitterbugs'

³² Kane and Trochim.

accessibility to underserved communities was to increase Jitterbugs' social media presence and have members engage in more word of mouth advertisement. Notably, participants rated Don't Do This, concerning avoiding contrived integration, as least important, suggesting a desire for integration within the Jitterbugs scene.



Figure 3: Cluster Rating Map



Figure 4: Go-Zone

Creation of a Go-Zone comparing importance and feasibility ratings for each statement, shown in Figure 4, indicated that statements pertaining to Marketing and Jitterbugs community are most actionable, having been rated most highly for each value. Among these actionable statements are providing beginner lessons at social dances, frequently switching partners to increase interaction, increasing awareness of Jitterbugs Night Out, celebrating everyone's

abilities, creating a welcoming and inclusive culture using ambassadors and allies, and advertising through various platforms. Statements pertaining to purposeful outreach, such as reaching out to unrepresented communities, were considered to be important, but they face barriers of feasibility before they can be implemented. Fostering the “underground” identity of the swing scene, wearing nametags, and avoiding contrived integration of the scene were considered to be least important, indicating that they should not be pursued.

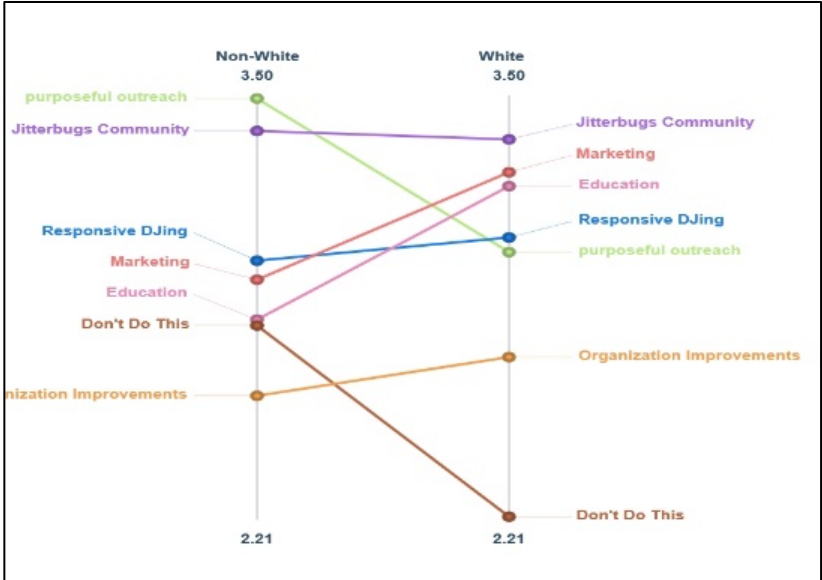


Figure 5: Importance Ratings by Race

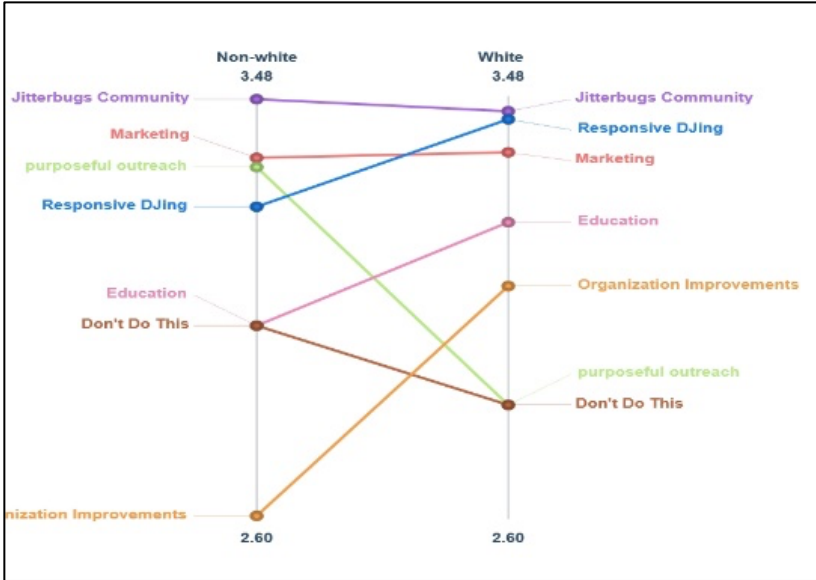


Figure 6: Feasibility Ratings by Race

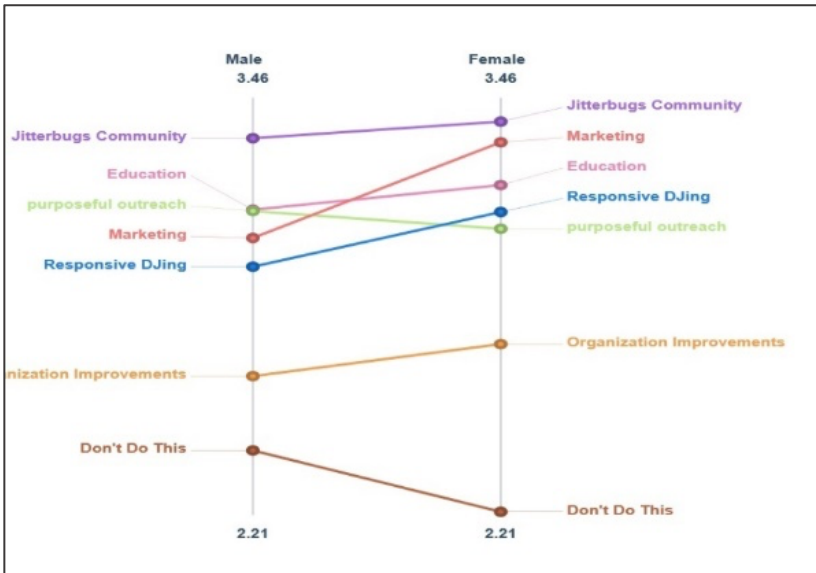


Figure 7: Importance Ratings by Gender

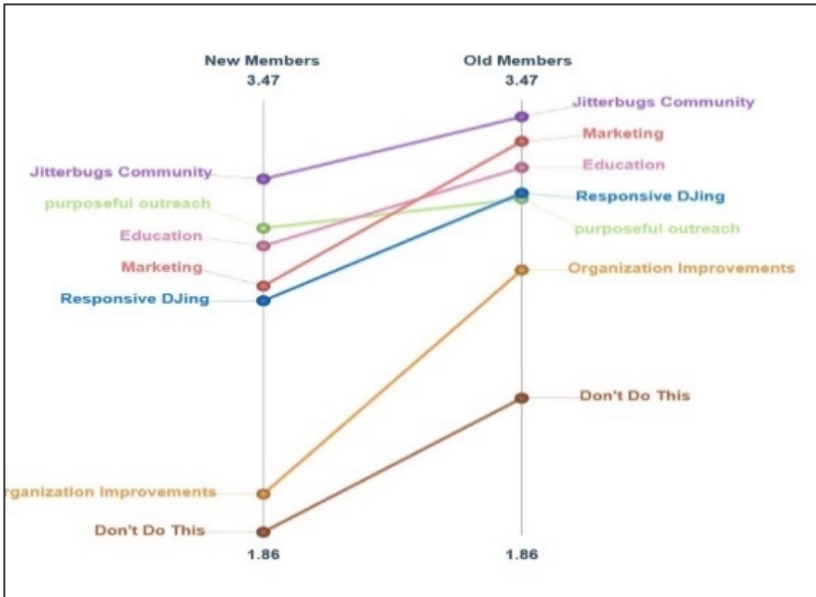


Figure 8: Importance Ratings by Membership Duration

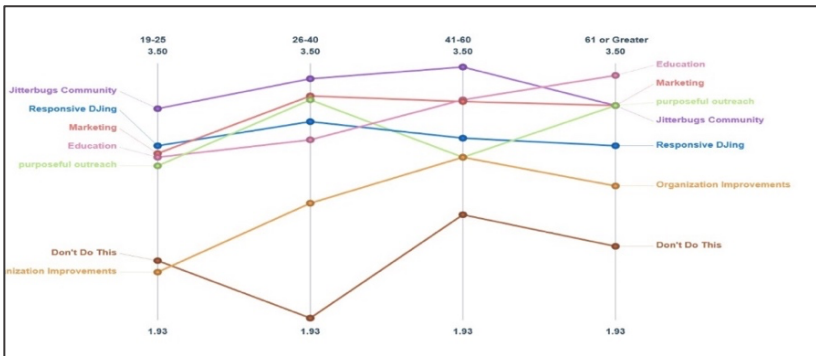


Figure 9: Importance Ratings by Age

Analysis of ladder graphs of importance based on participant demographics, shown in Figures 5 and 6, indicated a general consensus across demographics that views the Jitterbugs Community cluster as most important. Similarly, participants viewed the Organization Improvements and Don't Do This clusters as least important. Minority-ethnicity participants valued the Purposeful

Outreach cluster more importantly than white respondents did, indicating that potential future Jitterbugs members who are part of ethnic minorities would best be drawn to the scene through purposeful targeting of underserved populations. Interestingly, minority-ethnicity participants also valued the Purposeful Outreach cluster more feasibly than white respondents did. This suggests that efforts to bring in new members from underserved areas may in fact be easier than what Jitterbugs fears it may be. New members valued the Purposeful Outreach and Education clusters above the Marketing cluster in contrast with members who had been part of the scene for a year or more, who valued Marketing above Purposeful Outreach and Education. This suggests that people new to the Jitterbugs scene are more impacted by the formation of community within the scene rather than by Jitterbugs' social media and marketing presence.

Despite the low importance rating of fostering the “underground” identity of the swing scene, this sentiment was echoed in the interviews. Participants emphasized the distinction between the Jitterbugs scene and other nightlife scenes, describing Jitterbugs as “clean fun” and “bringing people together in a natural way”. They frequently referenced the “iffy” atmosphere in nightclubs and bars, setting Jitterbugs as an opposite due to its emphasis on positive social interaction. In the words of one participant:

Usually on Friday nights, I don't see a lot of people on their phones. They're actually communicating and talking – it's kind of like the phenomenon when the power goes out and the whole neighborhood goes out to their front porch – and they talk to each other and they see each other. It really brings the community together, that doesn't involve technology, it just brings people together in a natural way and they have fun! It really brings that community together.

This “clean” atmosphere was linked to nostalgic sentiments characterizing the swing scene as recreating social and community relationships from the early twentieth century. They associated this gathering of “old souls” with the qualities of class and sophistication, indicating significant positive sentiments towards the Swing Era. As earlier mentioned, this nostalgia can be problematic, as it often obscures the racial segregation and gender disempowerment prevalent at that time. As a result, the nostalgia that often brings new

members to Jitterbugs may be inhibiting its ability to create a more inclusive and empowering culture.

Lastly, interviews revealed an association between members' personal ownership of Jitterbugs and their suggested method of outreach. Several participants stated that Jitterbugs could best improve its accessibility if the organization improved its social media presence and distributed advertisements throughout Omaha establishments. This method of marketing, however, places the onus of success on the Jitterbugs executives, who are responsible for maintaining the social media accounts and contribute to much of the institutional outreach efforts. In contrast, it demands very little effort from members who are uninvolved as volunteers. Some participants, however, stated that Jitterbugs could best improve its accessibility through intentional outreach by members in their workplaces and communities. These participants often shared stories of their experiences sharing their hobbies, and in some cases, they had been introduced to Jitterbugs through this same process. This method of marketing places the onus of success on each member of Jitterbugs rather than on executives only. In addition, it requires members to actively embrace the values of the Jitterbugs scene, resulting in a more cohesive subculture.

Discussion

Implications for Jitterbugs Policy

Omaha Jitterbugs as an organization seeks to create a space where members can engage in positive relationships with other members of the Omaha community, enabling cross-cultural communication and developing a cohesive community. This study illuminated several initiatives that could be carried out to reach that goal. Participants in both the interviews and concept mapping indicated that Jitterbugs should engage in greater outreach in the Omaha community. While there is some disagreement whether organization-level marketing or individual-level approach is more useful, the fact that interview participants initially came to Jitterbugs due to word of mouth invitation suggests that this would be a more fruitful approach.

In addition, concept mapping participants considered the creation of a cohesive community within Jitterbugs and purposeful engagement with members to develop their skills to be highly

important for the scene to be inclusive and empowering. They suggested organization-level initiatives such as ambassadors and allies in addition to individual-level initiatives such as having regular members purposefully engage with newer members. That said, interview participants provided important insights into members' perceptions of member interaction. They cautioned against contrived activities such as snowball dances, which involve dancers bringing other members onto the floor over the course of the song, saying that these interactions often create stress for those asking for dances. Conversely, they support DJ-led initiatives, such as songs in which people are directed to ask those they do not know to dance. They state that these types of initiatives establish a culture of interaction which is not present in snowball dances, allaying the stress that comes from asking someone they do not know.

Finally, the interview participants also expressed concerns with working to interact with new members. For some, while they do not refuse to interact with new members, they experience disappointment and loss when a new member with whom they have put effort into engaging decides not to return to the scene. This input indicates greater complexity involved in encouraging interaction between new and regular members. Jitterbugs should seek to address these and similar concerns when working to promote intra-scene interaction.

Jitterbugs' Role Within the Omaha Community

While Jitterbugs as an organization desires to use its scene to promote cultural cohesion in the broader Omaha community, data from the concept maps and interviews suggest that members view Jitterbugs' role as primarily within the scene. Concept mapping yielded Jitterbugs Community and Education as two of the most important initiatives for members, indicating a strong focus on Jitterbugs' role within the scene. Further, Marketing was rated more important than Purposeful Outreach, indicating an into-Jitterbugs orientation rather than an out-to-Omaha orientation.

The into-Jitterbugs orientation frames the Jitterbugs scene as a recipient of people from the Omaha community: while some marketing may be done on an organizational level, recruitment is largely passive and there is little consideration of what the organization should do in the broader community. By contrast, the out-to-Omaha orientation frames Jitterbugs as an agent in the Omaha

community: recruitment is largely done by actively seeking potential members and inviting them to join, and the organization actively looks for ways to engage with the community and other organizations. While the Jitterbugs leadership strives to create cultural cohesion in the Omaha community through an out-to-Omaha orientation, participants suggest that this orientation has not been adopted and an into-Jitterbugs orientation remains prevalent among members. This orientation will likely remain a barrier to Omaha Jitterbugs' efforts to create community cohesion in Omaha unless purposefully addressed.

Formative Space Potential

Omaha Jitterbugs possesses potential to become a formative space within the Omaha community. Occupying both a physical space and a conceptual space defined by its niche as Omaha's swing dance scene, it creates a defined space where Omahans meet around shared values and interests. Jitterbugs is actively working to foster gender and racial equality within the scene through creation of an inclusive culture and an emphasis on dance as a metaphor for effective communication. However, this work is counteracted by residual nostalgia pervading the scene: by emulating revisionist memories of the Swing Era, Jitterbugs members obscure the history of racial and gender segregation that the organization is currently trying to overcome. This duality of values hobbles efforts to spread values of cultural inclusivity and empowerment to the broader Omaha community, generating conflict between outwardly-oriented values of empowerment and inwardly-oriented values of nostalgia. Because of this, Jitterbugs has not reached its potential as a formative space.

To do so, the organization must work purposefully to foster inclusivity and empowerment as values among its members, creating member buy-in and internalization of these values. This can be done effectively utilizing communicative space. Such space functions without agenda to illuminate group understanding of their similar or different perceptions of what values the Jitterbugs scene should foster. This project, utilizing group concept mapping and interview, has created a communicative space to address these questions, though greater communicative space is required to generate organization-wide understanding. If Jitterbugs members truly value inclusivity and empowerment, communicative space will illuminate these shared

values and members can carry them into the broader culture. In this case, Jitterbugs could realize its potential as a formative space. If Jitterbugs members do not value inclusivity and empowerment, Jitterbugs will not realize its potential and will likely have to reevaluate its goals as a scene. Even in this case, though, the resulting unified understanding of shared values will result in a more cohesive scene despite its lack of function as a formative space.

The findings in this study allow for refined conceptualization of formative space and its characteristics. Despite Omaha Jitterbugs' current failure to reach its potential as a formative space, the causes for this provide insight into how a formative space may be created successfully. Jitterbugs had a distinct physical-conceptual space and desired to spread its values out to the Omaha community, but it failed to do so due to conflicting sets of values within the group. Groups which successfully create formative space will likely have to carry out significant communicative action within their membership to develop a refined understanding of the values held by the group.

Additionally, Jitterbugs' efforts to spread their values to the greater community were hampered by a significant portion of members who viewed Jitterbugs' role as focusing within Jitterbugs rather than out into the community. Groups which successfully create formative space will likely have to devote significant energy to enculturation of their members, creating collective buy-in of the groups' desired values by the individuals who make up those groups. This enculturation would be crucial to such groups' success in spreading their values, as it is individuals who mediate interaction with the larger culture rather than the group itself. Considering this, groups which successfully create formative space will likely be small and closely-knit, since increases in membership size compound the communicative action and enculturative work necessary for consensus within the group.

Limitations and Future Inquiry

During the course of this study, I found it necessary to modify my initial recruitment protocols for the concept mapping activities. I anticipated most respondents would be recruited through Jitterbugs social media and email lists, but I discovered during the brainstorming phase that this method of recruitment was largely ineffective. I refocused my efforts on recruiting participants at the

weekly social dances, providing laptop computers for participants' use in completing the activities. This method was more successful in recruiting participants, but I found during the statement structuring phase that it potentially compromised the quality of data I could receive. While members were more likely to participate when approached in person, they grew fatigued by the relatively long duration of the sorting and rating activities. They did not wish to spend time on a survey when they could be dancing, so a portion discontinued the survey before completing one or more of the activities. Had this not occurred, I might have been able to produce more robust findings from the concept mapping. In future studies of swing dance scenes or similar organizations, this survey fatigue may be better avoided by carrying out the concept mapping activities in a workshop format, separate from the dance setting to which many respondents wished to return. Such a format would likely increase the validity of data gathered from this methodology, allowing for better integration with complementary sources of data.

While this study did not produce a positive example of formative space, it did yield data that hint at fascinating avenues of inquiry concerning the development and functioning of formative space. This study indicates that the creation of formative space requires a degree of enculturation of members to create buy-in of the group's desired values. This invites questions regarding that enculturation. How does the group create buy-in among newer members? To what degree do new members' values impact the values previously held by the group? While this study does not concern itself with individuals' interactions with the greater community, such interactions would also be fruitful terrain for inquiry. How are values spread on an individual level? Does adoption of more abstract values require similar adherence to concrete activities like swing dance? Is the spread of values in the greater community qualitatively different than the fostering of values among new members within the group? Each of these questions would be useful in developing a greater understanding of the characteristics and functioning of formative space.

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