Taxis, Technology, and Transmigrants:
Communication Practices of Chicago’s Immigrant Taxi Drivers

BY
MARGARET CARR GRIFFITH WILLIAMS
B.A., Trinity College, Hartford, 2002
M.A., Temple University, 2007

THESIS
Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012

Chicago, Illinois

Dissertation Committee:
Steve Jones, Chair and Advisor
Zizi Papacharissi
Andrew Rojecki
Robert Bruno, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Tracy Luedke, Northeastern Illinois University
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Steve Jones, Zizi Papacharissi, Tracy Luedke, Andrew Rojecki, and Robert Bruno for their guidance and insights throughout the dissertation process. In particular, I would like to thank my advisor, Steve Jones, for his support during each step of the dissertation and for believing in this project. Additionally, I want to thank all the study participants who generously shared their time and their stories with me. Without their contributions and assistance, this project would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their unwavering support throughout the entire Ph.D. program and the dissertation in particular. Specifically, my brother, James, who has always provided a sounding board for bouncing ideas around and who helped me conceive of this topic. Most importantly, I want to thank my husband, Jermaine, who listened to me discuss the daily victories and struggles of the Ph.D. program and the dissertation, and who always believed in me and in this project. Jermaine’s steadfast strength, support, and advice have been crucial to achieving this goal. Lastly, I want to thank my late mother, Peggy, from whom I learned how to listen to others and to see the world through their eyes – skills that are valuable in qualitative research.

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SUMMARY

In this qualitative study I have explored the meaning of community to a globally mobile group and the role of communication technology within this community. These questions are important because society is increasingly interconnected and interdependent at the global level with families as well as citizenries dispersed around the world. Community is an important topic for social research because it represents how people live their lives, and examining communities and how they adapt to social changes can tell us how broad forces like globalization impact people at the daily level. Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers are a unique population for research because as immigrants they represent the migratory aspects of globalization and as taxi drivers in a global city they represent low-wage service jobs that are often undervalued in a global economy. Moreover, the taxi industry in Chicago illustrates, on a small scale, the kind of neoliberal economic practices of flexible employment that are common under globalization.

I found that a labor community exists for my participants, but it is not as robust as it could be. The community exists by way of a combination of strong and weak ties, which are linked through communication technology and immobile places that support face-to-face communication. Newer technologies that make up the official and unofficial devices and traditional technology are crucial for keeping these mobile professionals connected and consciously working toward community together.

Drivers are the face of the taxi industry, but they are at the bottom of the industry hierarchy. And while many drivers enjoy the flexibility the job gives them, many adopt strategies to empower themselves within an employment structure that seems to devalue and sometimes exploit them. The cell phone was a key technology used by drivers to empower themselves with greater access to job-related information that they believe improves their earnings and customer
service. Interestingly, their cell phone connections are relatively ethnocentric. I argue that drivers may be missing the opportunity to develop more weak ties with other ethnic groups. Developing a strong network of cross-ethnic weak ties among the taxi driver community could further empower drivers to influence industry structure and policy in their favor.

Understanding which communication devices are most utilized among this population is valuable when considering the ways that drivers might be able to empower themselves, build weak ties, and possibly improve working conditions. In addition, recognizing the everyday challenges of communicating within a transnational community is valuable for understanding the on-the-ground experience of globalization for these dispersed communities. Globalization may compress time and space leading to faster communication and transportation and link people so that events around the world have concrete, local effects, but when it comes to transnational community communication, these concepts remain as tangible barriers that must be consciously negotiated and managed.
I. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1900s while at the University of Chicago’s Department of Sociology, Robert Park challenged his students to get off campus, out of the library and into the city. At this same time the United States experienced great changes as the Industrial Revolution took off. Immigrants came to the United States by the thousands, many of them heading straight for Chicago. Additionally, local business magnates like Cyrus McCormick and George Pullman recruited factory workers from abroad, which fueled the Industrial Revolution (Grossman, 2004). By 1850 half the population of the new city was foreign born and by 1890 nearly 80 percent of Chicago’s population were immigrants or children of immigrants (Grossman, 2004). Park’s encouragement to explore the city was also a call to understand these rapid social changes in the city and the nation.

By the end of the 1900s Chicago was once again facing great change. The city was transitioning from an industrial center to a business services center fitting of the new millennium. In the 1980s Chicago’s future looked bleak as factories closed, unemployment rose, and corporate headquarters left town. However, a decade or two later “network[s] of specialized corporate service firms” like global law firms, global accounting firms became the dominant businesses in the city (Sassen, 2004, p. 21). These firms provide specialized services to global corporations who lead the world economy.

As globalization swept the business world and dominated discussions in parts of the academic world at the end of the twentieth century, city leaders sought to turn Chicago into a global city, one with international connections and influence. In 2000 a dual report study commissioned by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (2000) found that while the city has global assets such as multinational companies, top universities, as well as
internationally engaged religious, labor, and ethnic organizations, these resources were not being pulled effectively enough to advance Chicago’s global influence. Eight years later, Chicago ranked among the top-ten global cities according to the Global Cities Index (Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2008). While more work remains to be done to advance Chicago’s transition, the city is emerging as a powerful player on the global stage (Moskow, Perritt & Simmons, 2007).

Chicago is transforming in response to economic forces just as it did at the turn of the century. And, just as before, scholars must get off campus, out of the library, and into the city to understand these transformations as they are experienced on the ground. Chicago’s rising status as a global city is rooted in globalization.

Globalization inevitably has a local, even personal impact on people despite its global quality. Two characteristics of globalization – faster, cheaper communication and transportation – have resulted in greater mobility of people and quicker communication within and across borders. As of 2000, 175 million people were living outside the country of their birth which means that “1 in every 35 persons on earth [is] an international migrant, up from 1 in every 40 in 1960” (United Nations, 2004, p. 25). Increasingly, particularly in global cities, people from all over the world are also the people down the street. A study of people’s mobility and communication in a global city will yield insights into how people manage globalization at the local level.

Globalization has its benefits, but it also has a downside, notably its ability to create inequality. Globalization looks different depending on whether one is benefiting or suffering. This project looks at globalization from below, from the perspective of an undervalued labor force within Chicago that also plays an integral and local role in globalization. Service jobs such as doormen, dishwashers, or drivers tend to be an overlooked and undervalued part of urban life.
Cab drivers, in particular, play an important role in the functioning of a city’s transportation system and yet they are largely ignored in public and scholarly discourse (Luedke, 2009). In Chicago the majority of taxi drivers are immigrants (Bruno & Schneidman, 2009a) who embody globalization as people who are both globally mobile across national borders and locally mobile throughout the city. Additionally, their job of moving people around a global city like Chicago makes them an active part of the global economic system. This project will analyze this mobile group’s communication practices.

Despite the movement of people that globalization brings, communities still exist. Traditional notions of community being physically grounded in a specific place and maintained through face-to-face communication are no longer the only relevant definition. Communities and the relationships that constitute them can be cultivated across national and international borders through the use of communication technologies. This project assumes that community is one strategy for managing the displacement of globalization and is an attempt to understand how immigrant taxi drivers in Chicago cultivate professional and personal communities given their mobility both across international borders and throughout the city itself.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before proceeding, it is necessary to review some important concepts and lay out definitions that will inform this project. First, this study will be positioned within the community literature and important terms will be defined. Next, the social uses of communication technology will be explored, as these are the tools people use for community building. Then, the notion of globalization will be discussed followed by an examination of the notion of transnationalism. Next the social context of cell phones will be explored followed, finally, by background on taxi driving as a profession.

A. Community

Community is an amorphous term. Perhaps this vagueness is what draws people to it; everyone can imagine their own definition without articulating it. The term has an almost “primordial pull of symbolic force” and we generally feel that creating community a good thing to do (Jones, 1998, p. 22). Traditional notions of community evoke cozy images of a village or a small town where all inhabitants know each other and communicate face-to-face. Early Chicago school scholars were particularly inspired by this interpretation, many of them coming from small towns where they may have experienced such relationships. Many of them applied that experience to urban life in Chicago as they researched immigrants, hobos, taxi dance girls (Coser, 1994) and the ways that contemporary media, such newspapers, cultivated community (c.f. Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927). This traditional understanding was later adapted for electronic media with the image of a “global village” (McLuhan, 1994), which assumes media like radio, television, and the telephone connect people across the world in mediated face-to-face contact.

Nostalgic images of a community village may be nothing more than idealized interpretations of how people in the past lived. Trade has always challenged the ideal of face-to-
face community by leading to relations between distant others (Tönnies [1887] 2002; Cooley, Angell, & Carr, 1933). Tönnies ([1887] 2002), an early scholar of community, distinguishes between Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society). Gemeinschaft refers to “real and organic life” commonly found in a shared physical locality, family life being a good example (Tönnies [1887] 2002, p. 33). Gesellschaft refers to an “imaginary and mechanical structure” found in public life (Tönnies [1887] 2002, p. 33). The city is an example of Gesellschaft. Gesellschaft may at times appear like a close-knit Gemeinschaft, but it is an artificial construction. For Tönnies ([1887] 2002) there is a pattern of social life beginning as a community and as it expands, particularly with the growth of a trading merchant class, it eventually becomes a city that resembles a Gesellschaft wherein family life decays and public life prevails.

This sense of loss of an idyllic form of community has existed since at least the late 1800s. Three things that persist in traditional notions of community are people, relationships, and place. People create a community and their relationships further set the boundaries of that grouping, structuring the interaction among them. These relationships require communication. Communication, then, is a prerequisite for community (Dewey, 1927). Humans are born dependent on one another for survival, but this relationship is one of mere association. Association is a condition for the creation of community, but “communal life is moral, that is emotionally, intellectually, consciously sustained” (Dewey, 1927, p. 151). People automatically associate with each other, but community takes conscious emotional and intellectual effort (Dewey, 1927). People make this effort through communication making it the basis for all social life and Dewey valued it greatly. For Dewey, “Communication is the most wonderful because it
is the basis of human fellowship; it produces social bond, bogus or not, that tie men together and make associated life possible” (Carey, 1989, p. 22).

Face-to-face interaction is an important requirement of community for Dewey (1927): “In it deepest and richest sense a community must always remain a matter of face-to-face intercourse” (p. 211). This attachment to face-to-face communication for communities has its roots in urban growth of 18th century Europe (Sennett, 1977). Cities expanded with the growth of trade and merchant classes and people began to meet and network in a variety of ways beyond royal control. Parks and pedestrian streets were constructed for people to mingle, challenging older distinctions between private and public life. Public life became the world of business and commerce that supported city growth (Gesellschaft) and family life (Gemeinschaft) became a morally superior realm of social interaction (Sennett, 1977).

The underlying assumption here is that face-to-face interaction is better than mediated interaction. Face-to-face is believed to be more genuine and truthful than other kinds of communication. However, this is a mistaken assumption; face-to-face interaction “does not necessarily break down boundaries, and to adopt it as an ideal will likewise not necessarily facilitate communication, community building, or understanding amongst people” (Jones, 1998, p. 26).

In addition to people and relationships, place is a third element of community, the attachment to which may be what results in people’s assumption that face-to-face interaction is superior to mediated interaction. Traditionally people must gather is a certain place to be a community – whether it is a coffeehouse or a family’s living room. With electronic media people can communicate instantly through space, testing traditional notions of the importance of place in community. Increasingly people began to worry about having “no sense of place” as electronic
media blurred social roles and broke down distinctions between public and private (Meyrowitz, 1985).

While Meyrowitz (1985) has argued for a sense of placelessness created by media technologies, Morley (2007) takes the position that, in fact, people are quite placed. People use technologies like the internet and cell phones to manage geographic distance. In other words, place is still a factor in social life, but people placed at distance can remain in communication using information and communication technologies (Morley, 2007). The role of place is an important factor in community interaction, but communication technologies, such as the internet and cell phones, free communities to exist in more complex ways than traditional, face-to-face interaction.

The internet has been particularly inspiring for rethinking community and the attachment to place and face-to-face interaction. In fact, the role of place in community had been unquestioned until digital technologies emerged (Jones, 1998). Online community is “predicated on knowledge and information, on the common beliefs and practices of a society abstracted from physical place,” and on the ritual sharing of that information (Jones, 1998, p. 15). By basing community on interaction instead of a geographic place “it is possible to liberate community from its physical setting and see it as based on relations that can be maintained anywhere and via any technology that makes interaction possible” (Haythornthwaite, 2006, p. 2). Although trade has always led to relations at a distance, today more people have more geographically dispersed relationships and digital technologies help in maintaining these preexisting personal and professional relationships (Wellman, 1997). People are connecting with unknown others using digital media based on shared interests (Rheingold, 1993; Baym, 2000), but these media are most
powerful when they are used to supplement face-to-face interaction among geographically dispersed family and friends (Calhoun, 1998).

By focusing our interpretation of community on interaction, shared knowledge, information, beliefs, and practices, community need not be restricted to a narrow Gemeinschaft interpretation; it can include the Gesellschaft as well. Every community is always part of a larger one (Park, 1925b) and people belong to multiple communities at the same time (Park, 1925a). A person belongs to a family, a circle of friends, a circle of co-workers, perhaps an alumni group and/or a religious group, a city, a country, etc. With this new understanding of community then the concept of nation can be understood in terms of community.

A nation is a large “imagined” community wherein citizens are bound together by an abstract sense of connection to other citizens (Anderson, 2006). Nations define themselves in various ways, creating symbols for insiders and outsiders with which to imagine it. Nation can be highlighted daily through strategic rhetoric or cultural symbols (Billig, 1995) as well as through daily rituals (Wedeen, 2008). Nationalism can be embedded within a culture in the most banal ways; it is not necessarily always extreme. Even something as mundane as mail delivery has played a part in developing an abstract notion of the United States as a nation in the early years of the country’s formation (John, 1995). The US Postal Service (USPS) subsidized delivery of newspapers, magazines, and public documents on Congressional proceedings, thereby “spreading the news” of national politics to all citizens from the Western frontier to the back-tier regions along the East Coast during the 1700s and 1800s. A national community formed around shared knowledge and information as well as the shared practice and belief in the movement of information to inspire thought and deliberation (John, 1995).
More modern examples can be found on online communities where migrants gather in nationally focused cyberspaces to practice nation. Mitra (1997, 2006) has studied Indian immigrants creating online communities in order to have a “safe” place to express themselves and a place where non-Indians are excluded. When citizens are linked “independent of race, ethnicity, occupation, region or social class” through communication media they can connect “directly to the imagined community of the nation” (Carey, 1993, pp. 175-176). For the “imagined” national community, place is relevant in that nation is built upon a geographic location, but place is not an obstacle to maintaining a national community when some citizens live in other countries.

Community as interaction, shared knowledge, information, beliefs, and practices is not a static end to be achieved. Interaction, knowledge, information, beliefs and practices are fluid processes in which humans engage. Therefore, a reconceived notion of community needs to think of it not as an end, but as a process (Fernback, 2007). Community is something that people cultivate, but once created it must be maintained through continuous communication. Like many human creations, such as language, community is fluid and adaptable. Fernback (2007) further argues that place in online communities may not be as important as commitment to the relationships that make up the community. Without commitment to a community, whether on- or offline, it is likely to dissolve because individuals will not be emotionally or intellectually dedicated to the hard work of communicating and building the relationships. For Fernback (2007), “community is a mutable construct, determined by social actors who create meaning about it…We enact community the way we’ve conceived of it…[its] meaning evolves as we devise new ways to employ it” (p. 66). Community is an ongoing process of meaning construction that evolves as people create it. For the purposes of this study community is
understood to be a process of social interaction in which information, knowledge, beliefs, and practices are shared.

B. Communication Technologies

Just as communication is the way that community is enacted, so is communication the means through which culture is performed. One misunderstanding about communication has to do with the different ways of thinking about it. The differences are described as the transmission view versus the ritual view of communication (Carey, 1989). The transmission view is the more common conception of communication and is rooted in the connection that communication and transportation have. Until the invention of the telegraph, communication depended on transportation (Carey, 1989). Messages required physical transport by foot, horse, or boat. After the telegraph, messages could travel quickly through wires and this relationship changed (Carey, 1989). Transportation came to depend on communication for success and safety (Packer, 2006). Despite the changed relationship between them brought on by the telegraph, the transportation metaphor continued to shape people’s thinking about communication (Carey, 1989).

The transmission, or transportation, view of communication is characterized by the sending of a message through space in order to control space and dispersed groups of people (Carey, 1989). A book contains information that people read, a telegraph transmits a message through wires, a newspaper contains stories about the day’s events, and using a telephone or a cell phone we can call other people or organizations to exchange messages. The transmission and distribution of messages is the focus in the transmission view.

The ritual view of communication is concerned with the maintenance of society through time (Carey, 1989). Under this view the communal, the shared, and/or the ritual aspects of communication are of interest. People have books that they read over and over not for
information, but out of habit or for special occasions. People read the newspaper over breakfast with coffee, or perhaps on the way to work in habitual ways. Some immigrants who have left their children back home call or text their children, not necessarily to exchange information, but to maintain their parental relationship while out of the country for long periods of time (Horst, 2006).

While the content of messages exchanged is relevant for understanding communication and/or community, it is also important to consider ritual aspects of communication and what role they play in these processes. As such, both aspects of communication will be explored in this study.

1. Technology and Society

Communication technologies are particularly useful for communication amongst dispersed groups. Whether they are a bell, pen and paper, a cell phone, or the internet all enable specific kinds of communication. These media are like architecture, they shape the kinds of interaction in which people can engage (Meyrowitz, 1985). Moreover, just like walls and windows of a building, some things are hidden and some are revealed (Meyrowitz, 1985). A letter written in pen and paper reveals the writer’s thoughts, perhaps the kind of paper or writing utensil used reveals something about the writer’s age or personality, but it conceals the sound of his/her voice. Here the question of form versus content comes into play, or medium versus message. Like the transmission view of communication, often the content of communication, that is the messages themselves, get more attention (McLuhan, 1994). However, the form in which messages are exchanged is also important to consider. Meyrowitz (1985) describes the difference between reading a book and watching television as an example of the influence of form. Reading a book requires one to learn a complex code of written language and punctuation,
however watching television only requires basic language understanding. Moreover, a book can only contain one set of written material. To get more content one has to get another book. A television, however, is a single object through which multiple messages can be sent. These difference in the form of communication influence how people communicate (Meyrowitz, 1985).

The technology a society uses are an excellent way to understand that society. Technology, in a sense, “is society, and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools” (Castells, 2000, p. 5). For Castells (2000) a society’s ability to harness the technological capacities of its age influences their capacity to transform. Technology itself does not necessarily produce change, but the way each culture takes advantage of it for their own growth can determine their destiny (Castells, 2000). Media technologies are among those representations of society and are unique in their specific role of communicating within each society.

Technology is not independent of culture or society. By understanding technology one can understand society itself (Mumford, 1934). Technology is “the hardest of material [and] is cultural from the outset: an expression and creation of the very outlooks and aspirations we pretend it merely demonstrates” (Carey, 1989, p. 9). Technologies are created within specific cultural contexts and because they challenge old ways of doing things by attempting to improve them, they are expressions of the aspirations of the culture within which they emerge. Humans are never satisfied with the world as is, there is always a way to improve one’s existence and this compulsion has contributed both the creation of art and of technology (Mumford, 1934).

The introduction of new technologies to a communication environment transforms culture (Castells, 2000). The introduction of the telegraph in the 1800s changed the way that people communicated by enabling instant communication over vast spaces. While the USPS was
a fast and reliable message delivery system in its day (John, 1995), the telegraph superseded it. Each new age brings with it new technologies and new forms of communication which leads to changes in culture and communities.

Reactions to technological innovation vary. On the one hand, new technologies tend to strike a “social nerve by strengthening or weakening familiar structures of association” (Marvin, 1988, p. 233). Old habits of interacting tend to be projected onto the new technologies. The new communication practices that emerge are not exactly new, rather “they are improvised out of old practices that no longer work in new settings” (Marvin, 1988, p. 5). On the other hand, new technologies also tend to be accompanied by what Carey (1993) calls, the “rhetoric of the electrical sublime,” which is the hope that “the dual elixirs of communication and technology will dissolve our troubles and transport us to a new place of economic advance, social harmony, and human understanding” (Carey, 1993, p. 172). People that get swept up in the novelty tend to express this hope that the new communication practices that emerge will “make the world nearly what it was meant to be all along” (Marvin, 1988, p. 235).

Despite the sometimes divergent reactions to technological innovation all communication and technologies are fundamentally rooted in the social, cultural, political, and economic environments in which they emerge. They are as adaptable as the environment from which they emerge. Media are “constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication” (Marvin, 1988, p. 8).

Like the telegraph helped transcend boundaries created by time and space, technologies of today are often touted for their ability to transcend boundaries. Using cell phone migrant workers can communicate with their children left behind in the care of relatives. However, new technologies “also continually recreate [boundaries]…Far from areas or regions being a thing of
the past, they are now continually reinvented and reinscribed in technical forms” (Morley, 2007, p. 239). Morley (2007) provides the example of regional codes on DVDs preventing one from playing a European DVD on an American DVD-player. Or, some countries block certain websites to prevent their citizens from seeing them. Although technology like the cell phone may appear to be free from constraints, social and institutional forces structure the way that technology can be used creating different boundaries and constraints.

Carey (1993) reminds us that we are “engirdled” with technology such as satellites orbiting the earth providing access to images and information from around the world (p. 171). These products of human ingenuity represent the colonization of our intelligence in the atmosphere and the hope of these innovations is that they will make the world a better place (Carey, 1993). However, back on earth and on the streets, “we have surplus of disorientation and disarray…we live…in a moment of divergence, when things fall apart and the center will not hold” (Carey, 1993, pp. 172-173). While media may be converging so that we can watch videos, listen to music, text, or phone a friend with a single handheld device, “social convergence” has not followed (Carey, 1993, p. 172). There is a tension between homogenization and fragmentation; at the same time as there are general, national media there is a wealth of special interest media. Space has imploded between immigration to the cities and movement from rural to urban areas leading to competition for physical space, media space and ideological space. Special interest media compete with national media for business in urban areas; conservatives and liberals compete for power and influence as well. Communication and transportation technologies may be making us mobile, both physically and imaginatively, but they are not leading to unity (Carey, 1993). Instead we have “collage societies barely hanging together, where host and migrant culture leak into one another” (Carey, 1993, p. 183).
2. Mobility

Physical and imaginative mobility characterize communication today. People are physically mobile through transportation technologies facilitating face-to-face communication for those who are usually physically apart. Communication technologies like cell phones enable both people and messages to be mobile as they are transmitted through wires and satellites connecting networks of family, friends, and coworkers. The internet and television allow people to be imaginatively mobile by providing access to messages moving all over the world.

When people travel with their cell phones they, in a sense, bring their private life with them as they traverse public spaces. Prior to the cell phone questions about media, mobility and privacy have been explored. Williams (1975) described these connections with regard to the television. As he saw it, television exemplified a kind of “mobile privatization,” arguing that while staying at home one can imaginatively travel to see the world coming through the screen (Williams, 1975). As people retreat to the home communication from the outside becomes necessary. Early on, radio and newspapers served these functions, but television became the ultimate medium for this kind of imaginary movement given its aural and visual elements (Williams, 1975).

Television, however, was not the first medium to challenge notions of mobility and privacy. At the end of the nineteenth century new media such as electricity and telephones tested contemporary notions of privacy and social structure (Marvin, 1988). The telephone was “the first device to enter the home and unsettle customary ways of dividing the private person and family from the more public setting” (Marvin, p. 6). Before the electric light became an ordinary part of household life, it was a public spectacle that mesmerized large outdoor audiences inspiring them to dream of a dazzling future (Marvin, 1988). Similar to the telephone, the
telegraph invited people to think of message mobility in a new way because messages could travel instantaneously through code or, with a telephone, by direct voice contact.

Today, when people move with a cell phone they maintain access to their private connections. In these cases one can see Williams’ (1975) mobile privatization in reverse; one sees a mobilization of the private. When people are talking on a cell phone they are managing two front stages, the physical environment in which they are in and the stage via the phone (Ling, 1997). Stage in this sense refers to Goffman’s (1959) studies of the ways people interact in social settings. Through theatrical metaphor he describes a front stage wherein a person performs the self that s/he want others to perceive and a back stage wherein that person stops performing and is his/her true self (Goffman, 1959). When on a cell phone in a public place the talker must negotiate the public stage they are physically in and the private stage of the conversation. More than that, the people in the physical setting must also manage the private conversation they are near, using strategies such as civil inattention, challenging the talker or even creating stereotypes about the talker (Ling, 1997). In a situation of “cross-talk” wherein a pair is in a public place and one of the pair takes a cell phone call, the “with” (the person in the pair not on the phone) is left vulnerable in a public space (Humphreys, 2005). Abandoned “withs” use management strategies such as walking slightly ahead of the talker, listening in on the conversation while pretending they are not, or getting in on the conversation (Humphreys, 2005).

People often use their cell phones to engage with their own social network rather than engage with their immediate surroundings because the interaction is more familiar (Fortunati, 2002b). When on the phone in a public place people are, in a way, in two places (or stages) at once – the physical and the virtual place – leading to altered notions of presence and absence.
(Fortunati, 2002b). By facilitating movement while still connected to one’s network we develop a new relationship with space and using the cell phone allows people to act on this newly structured sense of presence. Physical absence is not as painful when people can maintain virtual presence through a cell phone. Moreover, these technologies have “granted the same communicative rights to nomadic persons as those that are sedentary or immobile” (Fortunati, 2002b, p. 525). Mobilization of the private means that physically mobile people remain connected to their private network. It also means that sedentary members of a mobile person’s network also experience movement in part of their private world because of the virtual presence of that moving person via the cell phone.

Mobilization of the private allows communities, such as a family or a group of friends, to maintain their relationships regardless of their physical location. They can send information, but also engage in rituals such as a goodnight text. However, there needs to be a commitment to the relationships and the community to keep it going. Technologies provide the means; it is people who must manage the relationships. Unfortunately, sometimes political and institutional boundaries prevent some communication and sometimes social fragmentation prevents people from communicating with each other in the same place. This project will draw attention to the communication practices of one community that is largely ignored due to such social fragmentation in the hopes of bridging one social boundary.

Physical mobility of people and goods due to improved transportation is but one element of the converging and diverging about which Carey (1993) wrote. Improved transportation and communication are two key elements of globalization. The term globalization is popular and often used without proper elucidation, much like the term community. The next section explores the term globalization and defines its usage within this project.
C. Globalization

Globalization tends to be defined differently depending on one’s perspective. Generally speaking it involves the interconnections and movement of people, capital, commodities, images, and ideologies across the globe (Inda & Rosaldo, 2008). Improvements in communication and transportation have facilitated these global relationships and movements.

Although some argue that globalization is nothing new (c.f. Hirst, 1997; Hirst & Thompson, 2000), others argue that there is something different from previous eras (c.f. Castells, 2000; Friedman, 2007; Sassen, 2007). This project is positioned within the latter perspective that globalization has unique qualities distinguishing it from earlier times. Today’s globalization grew from three interrelated policies implemented in the 1970s: 1. “deregulation of domestic economic activity,” 2. “liberalization of international trade and investment,” and 3. “privatization of publicly controlled companies” (Castells, 2000, p. 137). As some developed countries adopted these policies, they subsequently pressured the rest of the world “either through direct government action or through imposition by the IMF/World Bank/World Trade Organization” to take them up as well (Castells, 2000, p. 140). Developed countries would only provide capital to help after the less developed countries adopted the liberal economic policies. Castells (2000) points out that this strategy’s success “can be predicated on its starting point: economic crises were pervasive in many areas” at the time (p. 140-141). Developed nations’ institutions go in to rescue, so to speak, developing countries ultimately forcing those countries to adopt liberalized economic structures regardless of whether or not these policies were appropriate.

Globalization is hardly an even experience, equally distributing rewards around the world. For the most part North America, Western Europe, and Japan have benefitted while the rest of the world is either trying to catch up or has been left behind. Institutions put in place to
help developing nations succeed economically like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank often end up creating policies that help developed countries and make it harder on developing ones (Stiglitz, 2002). Nevertheless, the success of North America, Western Europe, and Japan as well as the extreme poverty in many parts of the world, such as Africa, both represent globalization (Inda & Rosaldo, 2008). In other words, globalization is not restricted to only those countries that benefit from its connections. It is also characterized by those people and countries that it harms and disconnects. Globalization is as much about connection as it is about disconnection (Ferguson, 1999).

1. Time/Space

Before getting into the inequalities of globalization let us first take a step back to explore an underlying tension in globalization. While globalization is fueled by powerful macro-level forces such as the global economy, most people in the world experience it locally. It is the local experience that is of interest in this study. People experience a world that is changing in terms of time and space. The underlying tension in globalization has to do with this shifting relationship with time and space.

For Giddens (1990) one of the changes brought on by modernity is the stretching out of time and space so that people formerly absent from one another can be connected and become present. This stretching out is termed, “time-space distanciation,” and refers to the “conditions under which time and space are organized so as to connect presence and absence” (Giddens, 1990, p. 14). In pre-modern, agrarian societies most activity occurred locally, with time, space, and place all coinciding. However, with modernity came the break up of these concepts. The “advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between ‘absent’ others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction”
Social relations became disembedded from place, place being the “physical settings of social activity as situated geographically” (Giddens, 1990, p. 18). Instead, place becomes phantasmagoric meaning that “locales are haunted… by that which is absent” (Inda & Rosaldo, 2008). Place is no longer strictly affected by the physical geography, it is connected to and affected by forces far removed from its physical locality. Giddens (1990) explains, “locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. What structures the local is not simply that which is present …the ‘visible form’ of the local conceals the distanciated relations which determine its nature” (p. 19). The local becomes stretched out over time and space because its relations and influences are increasingly spread out.

Globalization, for Giddens (1990), is merely an “intensification” of time-space distanciation. More people live in situations where “disembedded institutions, linking local practices with globalized social relations, organize major aspects of day-to-day life” (Giddens, 1990, p. 79). One is increasingly connected to distant others with the growth of globalization. Yet the local is not irrelevant in globalization, it is merely stretched out and less dependent on face-to-face relations. Giddens (1990) explains that, “Local transformation is as much a part of globalization as the lateral expansion of social connections across time and space” (ital. orig., Giddens, 1990, p. 64). Ultimately, Giddens’ (1990) argument is about the relationship of the local with the global and the changes in time and space as a result of modernity, which became intensified by globalization.

Another description of the shifting relationship with time and space is Harvey’s (1990) time-space compression – a reversed visualization from Giddens’ (1990), yet an altered time/space relationship nonetheless. Time and space, Harvey (1990) argues, have become
“compressed” such that people, information, and capital can travel across immense spaces in decreasing amounts of time. Although not the first time-space compression society has experienced, he argues that today’s technologies of production, transit, and communication, combined with new organizational forms (post-Fordist “flexible accumulation”) have led to the accelerated circulation of commodities and ideas through the market. Such changes can be seen in the ways that “we represent the world the ourselves” – e.g. use of terms like “global village” – by reflecting our experiences of compressed time and space (Harvey, 1990, p. 240). Harvey (1990) suggests that although time-space compression may be triggered by economic pressures to reduce production time and minimize spatial barriers, it has effects on social life as well, for example, through rapid, global movement and/or communication of ideas, goods, information, and people.

Whether stretched or compressed, both descriptions argue that time and space are less and less the obstacles for the movement of people, information, and capital that they once were. People travel between countries (depending on legal status and financial constraints) and regularly communicate with friends and family from afar.

2. Global Cities

Building beyond these earlier conceptualizations of the changing relationship to time and space is Sassen’s theorization about the experience of globalization. She argues that indeed, people’s relationship with time and space has shifted, but there is a simultaneous “dispersal” and “centralization” of economic and social activity (Sassen, 2007). In other words, globalization entails both stretching and compression. To illustrate this argument she develops the notion of a “global city.”
Global cities are “strategic sites in the global economy because of their concentration of command functions and high-level producer-service firms oriented to world markets” (Sassen, 2006, p. 154). They have large concentrations of service firms (i.e. legal, financial) and these firms provide legal, accounting, and other specialized services to global firms that have trimmed these departments from their own corporations. Urban growth today consists of the expansion of information or knowledge firms, not the growth of manufacturers. Despite the hypermobile and internationalized flows of information, people, and capital, supporting such globalized movement are large centralized places to organize such movement as well as physical infrastructures (Sassen, 2007). In other words, as much as globalization entails the rapid connection of vast distances, it also entails centralization to support this expansion. Global cities are those places of centralization; they are the places “where the work of globalization gets done” (Sassen, 2007, p. 108).

Cities are important sites for examining the intensification of modern processes, because one can see in them the effects of global forces locally grounded “with the texture and fabric of human experience” (Low, 1996, p. 384). Global cities in particular are unique places to explore the “texture and fabric” of globalization because they are important nodes in the global network. As in the past, cities are critical in shaping the economy, but global cities today are shaping the world economy, serving as “concentrated command points” for globalization’s activities (Sassen, 2004, p. 16).

The time-space distanciation of modernity wherein time and space are stretched out makes communication with physically absent others possible and is intensified with globalization. The current economy is a decentered “global assembly line” wherein manufacturing occurs in the places that offer the cheapest options (Sassen, 2001). As a result,
centralization of management becomes necessary in order to contend with the complexities of operating in dispersed locations (Sassen, 2001). The emergence of global cities illustrates that face-to-face communication remains important, particularly for sensitive matters. The work these professionals are doing involves “specialized knowledge, considerable innovation, and risk-taking [which require] direct meetings and environments that bring together many diverse, highly specialized professionals” (Sassen, 2004, p. 28). Proximity to other professionals provides access to information, to social contact, and even to gossip that influence the system. Despite the dispersal of economic activity, global cities have become locations of concentrated global activity (Sassen, 2001).

Global cities are not only the workplaces and homes of the high-wage earners working in these global firms. They are also the workplaces and homes of the many low-wage earners servicing these professionals as maids, doormen, busboys, and taxi drivers (Sassen, 2001, 2004, 2006). Global cities often have concurrent growth of high- and low-wage jobs. That is, globalization’s and global cities’ growth of high-wage earners combined with the need to feed, entertain, and transport these professionals relies on “the availability of a vast supply of low-wage workers” (Sassen, 2007, p. 116). Low-wage earners, then, are as much a part of globalization as the high-income workers, but they are rarely included in globalization research. Many of these low-wage jobs are held by immigrants, minorities, and disadvantaged women which “adds to their invisibility and contributes to the devalorization of this type of worker and work culture, and to the ‘legitimacy’ of that devalorization” (Sassen, 2007, p. 118). By understanding how immigrants in low-wage jobs manage globalization we can better understand globalization from below.
3. Power/Resistance

In a world where time and space are compressed (or distanced), where global and local are so intertwined, old boundaries such as the nation-state come into question. Indeed, the very notion of a global city indicates a leapfrogging of the traditional power hierarchy from the nation engaging in the global to the city engaging directly in global activities. The role of the nation-state is a topic of discussion in globalization literature. Some scholars suggest that the nation-state is irrelevant given the advent of globalization (c.f. Ohmae, 2004), while others suggest that its role is changing and adapting (c.f. Castells, 2000; Slair, 2008). Underlying these discussions are questions about power – who has the power over whom and in what ways?

Traditionally, a nation-state is a political term that refers to a sovereign state that governs a society and citizenry within a certain geopolitical territory. Modern day phenomena like transmigrants and “global elites” (Beck, 2005, p. xv) bring such territorially-bounded notions into question. In other words, “the equation of citizenship, nationality and territorial residence is belied by such phenomena as migrations, diasporas, dual and triple citizenship arrangements, indigenous community membership and patterns of multiple residency” (Fraser, 2007, p. 16). Institutions that were once critical for exercising power are no longer as relevant in a world where time and space are compressed. The boundaries of nation-states are less clearly defined as they once were and thus controlling people become murky.

Instead of clear boundaries we have networks. Castells (2000) calls this a “network society,” which is a society organized into a network of nodes throughout which people, information, ideas, money, and goods flow throughout the world. Multiple networks co-exist, each operating on its own terms toward its own goals (Castells, 2009). Power, in a network society, rests with those actors who can establish (i.e. program) a network’s goals and those who
can connect different networks (switchers). The sources of social power have not changed according to Castells (2009); rather the environment in which power relationships function has. Power now operates both locally and globally, and within networks rather than territorial units.

In any kind of social structure power relies on control of communication, for it is through communication that those in power mold people’s minds and thus their behavior (Castells, 2009). In a global network with globalized communication technologies, those in power can have a universal impact, even over those outside that network. Additionally, there are multiple networks coexisting and each one has “different geometries and geographies of inclusion and exclusion” (Castells, 2009, p. 26). Thus, networks of a country’s citizens versus a network of immigrants will in/exclude differently. Each will be structured differently and have different ways to demonstrating power, despite that the one network (likely, the immigrants) may be less powerful.

With power always comes resistance and, in fact, resistance occurs in another kind of network (Castells, 2009). The information and communication technologies that fuel the global economy, enable the compression of time and space, and that make up the network society provide the power to exert control as well as to resist. Recently, for example, the world has witnessed revolutions throughout the Arab world, known as the “Arab Spring,” that have toppled several political regimes. These movements have partly been organized through online social networking sites like Twitter, enhancing revolutionaries’ abilities to communicate with each other as well as with the outside world. Sometimes, online technology can fuel offline resistance movements, as in the case of Harlow’s (2011) study of a Guatemalan justice movement wherein the posting and sharing of an online video about an unjust act led to offline creation of a justice and reform movement that resulted in a presidential resignation. Certainly access to the
technology that connects people to these online networks may determine how successful a
resistance movement is, but when people are able to connect and communicate towards a
common goal like power resistance the results can be incredible. This dynamic of power and
resistance with regard to technology will be explored in the context of taxi drivers in Chicago.
Globalization has led to a restructuring in how power functions resulting in a network society
wherein economic, political, and cultural networks co-exist at local and global levels.

4. Inequality

For all the talk of connections and making the movement of people and goods across the
globe easier, it has only become easier for some. Globalization may have an impact on every
country and culture, but not everyone benefits. There are those that are included in the economic
network, but are hardly powerful within it (e.g. Chicago’s taxi drivers) and there are those that
are simply excluded, aside from receiving aid (e.g. Haiti). It is exciting to get swept up in the
allure of globalization and notions of a global village. However, for every flow that has created a
connection, there has been a channel dug out changing the landscape in the process (Tsing,
2008). Indeed, globalization requires a certain “material and institutional infrastructure” to
operate and these infrastructures can restrict or encourage the movement of people, ideas, and
capital (Tsing, 2008, p. 76).

Castells’ (2004) discussion of the use of the internet by the Zapatista movement is a
strong example of infrastructure promoting mobility and of a resistance network defying
powerful economic and political networks. The Zapatistas are a group of Mexican peasants who
protested the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and liberal economic policies of
President Salinas because their policies excluded peasants and Indians from the benefits of
modernization (Castells, 2004). In the early 1990s the Zapatistas used innovative communication
strategies, including the internet, to disseminate messages and garner national and international support. Their efforts produced “a movement of international public opinion that made it…impossible for the Mexican government to use repression on a large scale” (Castells, 2004, p. 84). The incident highlights the often one-sidedness of globalization wherein peasants are left out. It also illustrates the materiality of globalization in that this global activist movement relied on the material infrastructure of the internet to transmit their messages. The internet provides an infrastructure for activist movements to reach local and global audiences (Juris, 2008). Without this material infrastructure of wires and computers global social movements will not work. Globalization is not all abstract flows of money and ideas in the ether. There is a material element to it as well.

However, the material and institutional infrastructures that facilitate globalization’s flows also restrict movement. For some, the restriction can be as simple, yet insurmountable as the cost of a plane ticket to visit family living far away. In other cases the restriction may be institutional, for example Stiglitz’s (2002) discussion of the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) lending policies that ultimately benefit developed countries and make growth nearly impossible for loan-receiving countries. The heads of the IMF (and the World Bank) are all from industrialized nations; there are no representatives from the developing world heading either institution despite the fact that they mostly serve developing countries. Stiglitz (2002) argues that the “institutions are not representative of the nations they serve…the current system run by the IMF is one of taxation without representation” (pp. 19-20). The IMF distributes funds so as to obstruct growth and equal flow of people, capital, commodities, and ideas.

A country’s hindered growth can lead to its disconnection from the rest of the world. A newly independent Zambia entered the global economy after World War II with rich mineral
resources for export. Its economy boomed and its people began to enjoy their new wealth and new independent position on the world map, signified, in part, by the multiple international flights to and from the country as well as international music acts that toured in Zambia (Ferguson, 1999). However, as the industrial economy declined Zambia suffered a loss of wealth as well as a loss of dignity (Ferguson, 1999). Ferguson (1999) explains, “The experience of abjection here was not a matter of merely being excluded…but of being expelled” (ital. orig. p. 239). The country’s attempt at building its own economy was crushed in the 1970s as the global economy changed leaving it out of the loop. International airlines terminated routes to Zambia, international musical acts stopped touring there; a country once connected to global activity was disconnected and the pain of this severance for its people is not “a lack but a loss” (Ferguson, 1999, p. 238).

A similar case of abjection in the U.S. is the case of Detroit – once a thriving industrial city, now a symbol of the disconnection that comes along with globalization’s connections. Alternately, Chicago represents a city that was also once at the heart of the industrial economy, but reinvented itself to fit the changing global economy. Chicago has become a global city.

D. Transnationalism

Immigrants are part of what make Chicago a global city. Immigrants, as people who move around the globe, are excellent resources for understanding the day-to-day aspects of globalization. Moreover, transmigrants (immigrants who maintain ties, often on a daily basis, with their country of origin) present a unique opportunity to understand community cultivation across borders as well as the communication practices used in that community.

Immigrants are considered transmigrants when “they develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders”
At the same time that they become engaged in the daily life of the society in which they live, to they are also engaged in and maintain connections and influence within their countries of origin (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1995). The term incorporates the fluidity that characterizes much of the immigrant experience today wherein people stop to live and work in multiple places and many also move back and forth between their host country and country of origin. The term transnational suggests its meaning. *Trans* refers to “both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something” (Ong, 1999, p. 4). Tranmigrants are people who move through space, across national borders, impacting both their country of settlement as well as their country of origin.

The communication that transmigrants can engage in given the technology available makes maintaining relationships across national borders easier today than it was in previous eras. Levitt and Waters (2002) explain:

> international migration can no longer be seen as a one-way process. Events, communities, and lives...are increasingly linked across borders. The frequent and widespread movement back and forth between communities of origin and destination, and the resulting economic and cultural transformations, have prompted some researchers to speak of a set of activities grouped loosely together under the rubric of ‘transnationalism’ (p. 5).

The communication and transportation technologies available as well as the globalized economy facilitate this easier linking across borders. Although not all immigrants engage in transnational activities (Levitt & Waters, 2002), most immigrants at least have the possibility of being transnational through connections to transmigrants within their social network (Jones-Correa, 2002). Transmigrants lead “dual lives” (Portes, 1997, p. 812) in both home and host countries. They “organize their daily economic, familial, religious, and social relations within two networks that extend across the borders of two nations-states” (Fouron & Glick-Schiller, 2002, p. 171).
Much like a person on a cell phone is in two places at once (Fortunati, 2002b), transmigrants are in multiple places at once – a physical place, virtually in their country of origin, or any other country where they may be communicating with friends/family.

Given these connections across national borders and phenomena like global cities becoming concentrated sites of globalization’s activities, some scholars argue that states are weakening and national boundaries are becoming less relevant (cf. Ohmae, 2004). However, transnationalism is deeply rooted in physical contexts where it takes place, including the social, economic and political dynamics present in the countries of origin and countries of settlement (Guarzino & Smith, 1998). Nation-states are not necessarily weakening; they are being re-defined (Basch, Glick-Schiller & Szanton-Blanc, 1994). As Castells (2004) argues, states are losing power, but not influence because in an increasingly networked society, states can form alliances that influence other states within the network. Many states have responded “eagerly and even creatively to the challenges of global capital” as, for example, several Asian nations have embraced global capitalism while also “securing their own economic interests and the regulation of their populations” (Ong, 1999, p. 21).

Some states assert their power over and/or acceptance of émigrés by symbolically and, in some cases, literally deeming them nationals. Some sending countries have adjusted their notion of a “national” to include its émigrés working and living abroad (Glick-Schiller & Fouron 1998; Guarzino & Smith, 1998). They symbolically as well as literally (through state policy) incorporate transmigrants into that nation’s definition of itself, meaning the nation is not necessarily bounded by its geographic/political borders (Basch, Glick-Schiller & Szanton-Blanc, 1994). Haiti’s former president, Aristide, for example, set out on a campaign to “re-define Haiti as a nation-state which exists beyond its physical borders” (Glick-Schiller & Fouron 1998, p.
135). Shortly after the president’s election he was forced into a three-year exile in the U.S. where he interacted with Haitian immigrants and came to further believe in the émigrés political and economic importance. Upon his return to the presidency in 1994 he popularized the notion of the “Tenth Department,” referring to the nine geographic departments of the Haitian government (Glick-Schiller & Fouron 1998; Parham, 2004). Haitians living abroad have been incorporated into the nation’s political, social, and economic arena through this notion of the “Tenth Department.”

Eritrea actually imposes a 2 percent tax on its émigrés (Bernal, 2006). When Eritrea became an independent nation many of its citizens living abroad did not return, thus the government took steps to include them in a definition of Eritrean citizenship, including this tax (Bernal, 2006). Similarly, Nigeria’s government, although it does not impose a tax on émigrés, has reached out to them for various forms of support, including financial assistance for local projects (Lampert, 2009). Rather than viewing the movement of Nigeria’s talented citizens to other nations as a “brain drain,” the government as well as local authorities have come to perceive it as an opportunity and re-interpret transmigrants as powerful players in their local and national activities. Lampert (2009) found in studying London-based Nigerian organizations that transnational support for local and/or national activities can sometimes perpetuate ethnic conflict in Nigeria, but some of them are able to transcend these issues and “foster convivial inter-ethnic relations and signal desires to see Nigeria fulfill its promise as a nation” (Lampert, 2009, p. 180). The fact that many sending countries reach out to and incorporate émigrés as political, economic, and/or social resources combined with the fact that “in a global economy contemporary migrants have found that full incorporation in the countries within which they resettle either not possible
or not desirable” (Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton, 1995, p. 52) has produced the circumstances for fluid, flexible migration known as transnational migration.

Transnationalism and the communication technologies that support it invite nation-states to, particularly those sending countries, reconsider how nation is imagined. Transnationalism, globalization, and digital communication technologies often trigger visions of a borderless world, but as has been discussed, this is not the reality for many people. Instead we ought to consider how these things bring about “a reconfiguration or remapping of boundaries, so that, for example, what might have once been outside the margins (of the nation) is now more effectively included within a larger framework of imagined community” (Bernal, 2006, p. 163). Nations and ethnic communities are affected by migration, but a more flexible interpretation of community, as the present study has, allows for a re-interpretation of the terms in light of today’s migration patterns and communication technologies. Evidence from less powerful nations such as Haiti, Eritrea, and Nigeria demonstrate the creative ways they are making migration work in their own favor and in maintaining a national community across borders.

Immigrants of earlier generations certainly had means of maintaining back-and-forth movements and contact with those left behind – e.g. writing letters, sending telegrams, traveling by train or boat. However, Portes (1997) identifies three unique characteristics of immigration today: 1) the amount of people involved, 2) the speed of communication across vast distances and 3) “the fact that the cumulative character of the process makes participation ‘normative’ within certain immigrant groups” (p. 813).

These characteristics highlight an essential point of transnational research: that transnationalism is not limited to the people who move, rather it includes the entire social network involved in these movements and communication practices (Levitt & Waters, 2002).
Additionally, the transnational experience becomes “normative” for those living abroad as well as for those in the countries of origin. The example of Haiti’s “Tenth Department” and Eritrea’s tax on émigrés exemplify macro-level, normative practices wherein transnationalism involves the entire social network, not just the people on the move.

1. Communication and Transnationalism

Although studies of transmigrants inevitably mention the roles communication and transportation play in facilitating this kind of immigrant experience, it is only recently that the technologies themselves have been studied in detail (Panagakos & Horst, 2006). As McLuhan observed, communication is for people like water is for fish. It is so fundamental to the social environment that people often do not notice it. Or, in the case of transnationalism, it is noticed, but only recently analyzed in depth. Communication technologies like mobile phones (Horst, 2006; Thompson, 2009), the internet (Mitra, 1997, 2005, 2006; Parham 2004), or a calling card (Vertovec, 2004) aid the maintenance and growth of these social networks.

The two main technologies researched in terms of transnationalism are, not surprisingly, cell phones and the internet. In an environment where immigrants may not have a voice in the public sphere, they may use the internet to make their voices heard (Mitra, 2001, 2005). Mitra, a well-known scholar in this area, has produced research on the Indian diaspora. Online sites where Indians congregate provide an opportunity to create a cyber-community of persons physically distant from one another (Mitra, 2001, 2005). Although, given the nature of the internet, anyone can find his/her way to an Indian diaspora website, the discourse on the site may be such that only an insider to this group would understand or appreciate it (Mitra, 1997). Thus, despite the hope of free flowing information on the internet the human tendency towards establishing insiders and outsiders endures (Mitra, 1997).
The concept of a border, whether national or social, can be challenged through the use of communication technologies, like the internet. Research on immigrants’ success in using the internet to develop offline relationships, and thus a shift in social borders/boundaries, has mixed conclusions. In examining the Haitian diaspora Parham (2004) found that although the internet provided a space for civic engagement and other kinds of discourse, the online group studied struggled to translate their online experience into an offline relationship. Conversely, Elias and Lemish (2009) found that former Soviet Union youngsters living in Israel had some success in their offline socialization based on online interactions. Generally speaking it seems that various sources online can serve as a socialization tool for immigrants to learn about the new culture where they live. The internet can be used to create a “safe” place for immigrants to express themselves (Mitra, 2006) and as a place where non-members are excluded (Mitra, 1997). It can also be used to reach out beyond immigrant confines. In fact, because immigrants may be made to feel like outsiders in their countries of settlement, specific internet sites offer the opportunity to feel at home or serve as a socialization tool for immigrants to learn about the culture where they live in the hopes of adjusting successfully (Elias & Lemish, 2009). Communication technologies facilitate border transitions; insider / outsider borders may be held up or they may shift due to use of the technology. Immigration and transnationalism challenge the notion of borders and communication as well as transportation technologies aid these re-definitions.

Telephone technology is also commonly examined in relation to transnational communication. Vertovec’s (2004) findings on the use of calling cards as a kind of “social glue” holding transnational communities together represent a seminal work in this area. A technology as mundane as a calling card can have an important role in people’s lives by offering an affordable option to maintain contact on a relatively regular basis. The cards may even hail
specific immigrant groups in their design, such as through linguistic choices as well as ethnic-specific illustrations (Thompson, 2009). A telephone call with these phone cards “join[s] migrants and their significant others in ways that are deeply meaningful to people on both sides of the line” (Vertovec, 2004, p. 223). Transnationalism impacts not only the people on the move, but also the people left behind and a telephone call can be a crucial, if not only, source of contact across borders.

Cell phones have also increased communication among transmigrants and their significant others. Horst’s (2006) study of cell phone use among Jamaicans reveals both the “blessings and burdens” of such technologies. For a country like Jamaica where landlines are hard to come by, particularly in rural areas, cell phones are a chance to bypass such structures (Horst, 2006). The author found that many of her Jamaican participants carried on love relationships over the cell phone, whether between husband and wife, boyfriend and girlfriend, or parent and child (Horst, 2006). However, this regular communication also has its burdens. The cost of having the credit to call people on one’s phone is sometimes a great expense (Horst, 2006). Moreover, as with all information and communication technologies, the freedoms enjoyed because of them also comes with increased surveillance, which, in one case, caused a romantic relationship to turn sour (Horst, 2006).

Beyond utilitarian goals of relationship maintenance, cell phones also have symbolic meaning. For example, in Singapore in the early days of mobile technology cell phones only had negative associations with foreign workers, e.g. they own a phone because it is stolen (Thompson, 2009). However, today, telecommunication companies seek out foreign workers in Singapore, especially through advertising, because they are likely to use the service often (Thompson, 2009). For low-income immigrant workers, particularly those with jobs that require
mobility, cell phones are likely to be a prominent communication technology. As such, the social context of cell phones is explored next.

E. Cell Phones

The cell phone emerged from two technologies – the telephone and radio. The telephone was invented in 1876, but did not cause quite the stir that one might expect based on telephone technology’s ubiquity today. By 1876 the telegraph had been around for about 40 years and still captured people’s imaginations (Aronson, 1981). At first, Americans struggled to understand that “spoken words could be converted into electrical waves, transmitted along wire, and then reconverted into sound at the other end of the line” (Aronson, 1981, p. 17). However, with the realization that the telephone meant people no longer had to rely on telegraph operators to send/receive/translate messages, the telephone rose in popularity.

The modern urban center exists, in part, because of the telephone. The telephone is a spatial technology in that its users can communicate across distances. In business terms, that meant that management offices no longer needed to be attached to the factories they oversaw (Gottman, 1981). Factory operations could be re-located to the suburbs and management remained in the city center with the two locations staying in close communication by telephone. One cannot help but think of global cities where factories have moved from the suburbs to developing countries while management remains in the city, using the phone, internet, and modern transportation to stay connected with distant factories. Moreover, Gottman (1981) argues that the skyscraper came into existence as much as a result of elevators as the telephone. With more and more offices gathering in cities, they wound up stacked on top of each other with elevators and telephones enabling communication within the building. The landline telephone
influenced people’s spatial relationships and with the introduction of the cell phone about a century later came the added dimension of mobility to telephony (Townsend, 2000).

Radio also plays a role in the history of cell phones. It is another technology meant for communication at a distance. Developed in the late 1800s, it grew in popularity in the 20th century. In fact, marine communication is an early form of mobile communication, and after the Titanic tragedy all ships, including passenger ships, were required to have radio communication (Ling, 2004). Additionally, radio communication has been used by police, firefighters, and taxi companies in order to coordinate movements, though they were characterized by a central dispatch system (Ling, 2004).

Cell phones facilitate decentralized, mobile communication among users. The technology was available in the 1980s, but it was in the late 1990s and especially the early 2000s that cell phones became commonplace for more than just wealthy consumers (Ling, 2004). Much of the research on the social context of cell phones has been in Western Europe (cf. Fortunati, 2002a; Puro, 2001; Ling, 2004; Christensen, 2009), North America (cf. Robbins & Turner, 2001; Katz & Sugiyama, 2006), and Asia (cf. Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda, 2005; Katz & Sugiyama, 2006; Wei & Lo, 2006; Daliot-Bul, 2007) as these are the regions where the technology had been adopted first. However, researchers are also beginning to explore the cell phone in less wealthy nations such as Jamaica (Horst, 2006; Horst & Miller, 2007), India (Tenhunen, 2008) and the Philippines (Pertierra, Ugarte, Pingol, Hernandez, & Dacanay, 2002).

As discussed above, there has been research on people’s cell phone manners in public (Humphreys, 2005), particularly among North American and European researchers. People must, essentially, be in two places at once while on the phone. The ringing cell phone or the cell phone conversation become intrusions of private communication in a public setting. For example, use
of a cell phone in a restaurant, which is a place that involves highly complex cultural codes and performances, is particularly offensive and becomes more intrusive as the price tag of the restaurant increases (Ling, 2004).

This tension over the intrusion of the private into the public is an area of contention in social life today. In discussions of the cell phone, people often note their frustration with being forced to listen to someone else’s private conversation (Katz & Aakhus, 2001). At the same time, it is this ability to be, in a sense, present while physically absent that is a draw to the cell phone (Fortunati, 2002b). As discussed above, through this technology people within the same household, or across the globe can be virtually present while physically absent. For transnationals, the cell phone allows them to be in multiple places at once making it an important device for maintaining relationships across the globe.

However, the stress of being in “perpetual contact” (Katz & Aakhus, 2001) can weigh on social relations and may cause the lines between work and private/home life to blur. By being always available, it is easy for a worker to be reached after hours, but at the same time, private life tends to blend into work time via the same technology (Wajcman, Bittman, & Brown, 2008). However, Wajcman et al (2008) found in their survey that workers are tending to take action to establish boundaries between work and personal life, such as turning their phone off. Moreover, they found that the boundaries between work and private life may be more blurred or more established depending on the type of job (Wajcman et al, 2008). In the case of transnational taxi drivers one wonders how much their personal communication blends with professional communication while using their cell phone.

As far as what people use their phones for, it seems that micro-coordination is one of the most common uses. Micro-coordination involves calls for reasons such as a parent informing a
child s/he will be home late from work or taxi drivers informing each other of traffic conditions. Although such coordination is not new, the cell phone seems enhance this kind of communication (Christensen, 2009). Micro-coordination speaks to the changing ways that people can be present while physically absent, but it also connects to the social changes brought on by the automobile. As Ling (2004) argues with the development of the automobile people became mobile in a way they had never quite been before and created a need for improved real-time coordination. Without the ability to communicate en route one was left to wonder if someone got lost, was stuck in traffic, or in an accident. The cell phone completes the mobile revolution started by the automobile by allowing people to be on the move while still connected (Ling, 2004).

However, there are safety concerns with driving and using a cell phone. In many U.S. states there are laws against the practice because cell phone use while driving can lead to car accidents. Accessories such as blue tooth technology or some other kind of hands-free product are meant to free drivers’ hands to focus on the wheel and the road. For professional drivers, however, driving and using the cell phone is part of the job. For these mobile professionals it will be relevant to consider this legal opposition they face regarding effectively doing their job.

For the average cell phone user, the technology has social value beyond mobility. It has become a fashion accessory, symbolic of one’s identity. The symbolic value of cell phones begins with pre-teens before they even own the object (Ling, 2004). Elementary school student desire the cell phone and once they acquire one it represents a transition to the next life stage. Fortunati’s (2002a) analysis of cell phone use in Italy reveals that the phone has significance for its communicative function as well as for its symbolic value. The cell phone can be something that people wear on their body like a piece of jewelry. Early in the (recent) history of cell phones,
one showed that one was wealthy enough, and desired enough, to have a phone. Today, cell phones are more commonplace, so people are likely distinguishing themselves by having the latest, coolest cell phone model. The cell phone is representative of one’s identity as much as clothing is (Ling, 2004). Teenagers play with both the form and style of their cell phone by changing outer characteristics such as the color, but also programmable aspects such as ringtones (Townsend, 2000; Ling, 2004; Horst & Miller, 2007).

The symbolic value of phones goes beyond fashion, the phone is something that people wear, meaning it is something they manipulate outside their body and on their body. The cell phone then has become part of people’s lives symbolically and physically as a wearable tool (Katz & Sugiyama, 2006). It is linked to the individual owner in a fundamental way, but the cell phone has this value more for what it represents – communication, connection, belonging – than for what it physically is (Townsend, 2000).

By carrying a cell phone with them people demonstrate that they are “an object of communicative interest, and are thereby desired, on the part of others” (Fortunati, 2002a, p. 54). No matter what model cell phone one has, owning it grants membership in some network of people who communicate with that person (Wei & Lo, 2006). This sense of belongingness is particularly important for young people who have indicated “feeling loved, valued, and popular, when contacted on their mobile phone” (Walsh, White, & Young, 2007, p. 235). Young people, especially teenagers, are searching for an identity beyond their home and so their peer networks become important sources for negotiating their identity. The cell phone is a means for them to develop and maintain relationships with their peer groups, but can also bring new pressures, such as fulfilling the expectation of constant contact and responding quickly when contacted (Walsh et al, 2007). For transnationals the cell phone is an important communication device because it
represents connection and belonging. It connects them to loved ones left behind, helping them to maintain relationships.

People use cell phones for more than just voice calls. Texting, the practice of sending a short text message to another person’s cell phone, is also a popular means of communication on the phone. Texts are not limited to words; people can also send picture and video through their phones and includes conversational cues like any other conversation. In Japan texting has been found to be a type of brief conversation filling in communication gaps in one’s day or during a time when one cannot call (Ito & Okabe, 2005). In the Philippines, texting is a primary means of communication on the cell phone, partly because of its lower cost over voice calls. However, the Filipino preference for texting is more than economic, it is also because texting “combines the immediacy, informality and affectivity of speech with the reflectiveness, control and anonymity of writing” (Pertierra et al., 2002, p. 150). People can feel comfortable texting things they may not say in person.

Texting allows people to asynchronously maintain relationships, but in a less noticeable way than a voice call, particularly when one is in a situation where a call is inappropriate (Ling, 2004). Texting and cell phone communication in general allow for the persistent “foreground and background awareness” among users (Ito, 2005, p. 15). Rather than the more intentional act of starting up one’s computer and going online, cell phones provide a “seamless and unremarkable integration of this ‘virtual domain’ into more and more settings of everyday life” (Ito, 2005, p. 15). Texting and phone calls are varying ways that people can connect to their network. Life accomplishments may be marked with a congratulatory text or one may call just to check in.

While first adopted heavily in Europe and Asia and then the U.S., the cell phone is spreading to less developed countries offering the chance to “leap frog” the technologies in
between, such as the landline telephone and the internet (Horst & Miller, 2007, p. 2). This has certainly been the case in Jamaica. Horst and Miller’s (2007) ethnography of cell phones in rural Jamaica provides an understanding of how technology can adapt to a society as well as how a society adapts to a technology. The cell phone arrived in Jamaica around 2001 and quickly grew in popularity, especially in rural areas where there were limited means of distant communication, aside from a single, unreliable, public telephone booth. Now it seems that everyone owns a cell phone and not owning at least a cheap model signifies deep poverty (Horst & Miller, 2007).

Even for those considered to be poor, the authors argue, the cell phone is a lifeline for survival because they use the phone to contact others (local or international) for money. Among low-income Jamaicans it is common for close friends or acquaintances to give each other money for things like school fees and the cell phone is a crucial tool for this kind of communication. On a related note, Jamaicans also use the phone for brief calls with close friends as well as acquaintances in order to keep their friend networks active, particularly should the need arise for a favor or for money (Horst & Miller, 2007).

Unlike many assumptions about information and communication technologies (ICTs) being used for entrepreneurial reasons to uplift people from poverty, Horst and Miller (2007) show that low-income Jamaicans use the phone to temporarily alleviate poverty with the poor helping the poor rather than trying to rise out of it. This is significant for showing how a technology is adapted uniquely to each cultural context and that assumptions of its adoption in one context may not apply in a different context.

Like Jamaicans, Filipinos have adopted the cell phone because of the lack of previous landline infrastructure and its lower costs (Pertierra et al, 2002). They allow the local population to overcome these local failings of government and “enjoy access to global capital, technology
and patterns of investment,” meaning that globalization, in this sense, has been helpful in the Philippines (Pertierra et al, 2002, p. 151). The authors argue that in a quickly changing and globalized society Filipinos have a sense of powerlessness and the cell phone allows them to cling to those they can depend on: “cell phones do not provide any viable answers to the problems of modernity but they give us the means to share our anxieties, uncertainties, trivialities and even banalities with others” (Pertierra et al, 2002, p. 151). According to the authors, Filipinos use the cell phone like most others, save for their fondness for texting, as discussed above, given their traditional preference for oral communication and the uniquely oral characteristic of texting.

In Morocco the cell phone has been appropriated in distinctive ways. The practice of “beeping” has become popular, which involves calling someone and then hanging up after a ring or two (Kriem, 2009). The result is that the call registers on the person’s phone as a missed call. This practice goes by other names in different countries, such as “flashing,” and has become a popular strategy in the developing world for balancing the desire to communicate with the costs of cell phone use (Kriem, 2009). Another practice the author discovered refers to the adaption of “silatu rahim,” which refers to the maintenance of kinship ties through face-to-face communication. Kriem (2009) found that Moroccans are using the cell phone for what would traditionally be face-to-face communication, such as sending good wishes via text message during Ramadan rather than making an actual visit. This is similar to behavior in a European context where Ling (2004) has shown that people send a “Congratulations” text for the birth of a child.

In rural India, Tenhunen (2008) shows how the cell phone has been adopted within a particular cultural and technological context so that combined with television, radio, and DVD
players, cell phones have become “culturally approved” devices for the “widening of culturally constructed spheres, especially for those of women” (p. 530). For these Indians, the cell phone allows them to communicate beyond their immediate surroundings for reasons such as calling for help in an emergency or checking market prices for agricultural goods. The devices have also heightened family and village ties so valuable in their culture (Tenhunen, 2008).

There is a growing body of literature on the social context of cell phones throughout the world. It is a technology that has some common uses throughout the world, but that is also adapted within each cultural context. For populations that must manage distance, such as transnationals, the cell phone is an important communication tool. For uniquely mobile populations like professional drivers the cell phone serves not only for personal communication, but also for professional communication. Furthermore, for transnational drivers, the cell phone may be adapted in distinct ways for their mobile work and global personal connections. For example, for what reasons do they use the cell phone? What features, like texting, do they use? Have they developed creative practices, like beeping (Kriem, 2009), to balance communication needs with the costs of use? In what ways do transnational drivers personalize their cell phones? How does the cell phone help them cultivate community connections? This project will explore these kinds of questions to explore how drivers have adapted the cell phone for their own purposes and how they have adapted for their cell phone use. However, before getting into this specific project it is necessary to provide some background information on the profession of taxi driving.

F. Taxis

A taxi is a classic symbol of a bustling city (think of New York City’s yellow cabs or London’s black cabs). Taxis and their drivers have occasionally been depicted in popular culture,
for example, in the film *Taxi Driver* (1976) about a mentally unstable Vietnam veteran who drives a taxi at night, or in the popular primetime comedy *Taxi* (1978-1983) about the daily lives of drivers at the Sunshine Cab Company in New York City. Other than these few depictions in popular culture, the general public often knows very little of the profession or its history.

The taxi, as a mode of urban transportation, can be dated back to Egypt in 4000 B.C. when boats were used to transport people along the Nile (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982). Even in mythology there exists a water taxi along the River Styx transporting the dead. The taxi, as it is understood today, emerged around the 17th and 18th centuries around the same time that urban areas were changing. As Sennett (1977) argues, notions of public and private changed during the 18th century when, in Europe at least, people began to socialize and do business outside of royal control, which became reflected in urban planning with the building of pedestrian streets and parks. Prior to this period land transportation was not as necessary because cities were relatively small and located along waterways, so walking was more popular within the city (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982). As noted above, commerce and trade trigger the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies, [1887]2002), thus as commerce expanded in the 17th century, cities also expanded. With this growth in urbanization and adjustment in public life along with technological advancements, land transportation for urban dwellers became more common. However, it was not until the 19th century that urban transportation became affordable even for the poor (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982).

In 16th and 17th century Europe, Paris and London were the fastest growing cities and so they were also the places where hackneys, an early form of the taxi, appeared. The hackney was a horse and coach available for hire that did not follow set routes or schedules (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982). They were the dominant form of urban transportation throughout the 1600 and
1700s. In Paris in the year 1800 a successor of the hackney appeared – the cabriolet – which was a “fast, light, two-wheeled chaise drawn by one horse…The cabriolets were fast, very uncomfortable, and dangerous” (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982, p. 19). Shortly thereafter cabriolets appeared in London, the name was shortened to “cab,” and they soon became more popular than the slower, dirtier hackneys, especially among the growing middle class (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982).

In the U.S. the term *taxicab* emerged just after the turn of the century when Henry N. Allen started the New York Taxicab Association, which had cabs equipped with a “taxi-mètre,” a device used to measure time and distance in order to accurately calculate a cab’s fare (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982). The internal combustion engine as well as the telephone helped the taxi industry take off in the 1900s with faster vehicles and better communication. John Hertz (of Hertz car rentals) was a pioneer in Chicago’s taxi industry in the early 1900s. In 1907 he entered the taxi business by sending traded-in cars from his car sales business to work as taxis. Some of his notable contributions include the cutting of fares making taxis more available to the wealthy and the poor alike, he painted his cabs yellow after learning that the color was more visible at a distance, installed a telephone dispatch system at strategic locations throughout the city to improve communication and increase driver efficiency, and he installed mechanical windshield wipers to improve visibility during inclement weather (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982).

For the most part, taxis were unregulated until the Great Depression. During that time there was an influx of taxis because it was “a readily available job for poor, displaced, unemployed people” (Mathew, 2005, p. 49). As a result there were more taxis but fewer customers and companies across the country began slashing their rates further, operating below cost (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982). Not only did this era create the image of the philosopher-driver
wherein doctors, professors, and artists drove cabs (Mathew, 2005), it also hurt the image of taxi drivers as professionals because many were forced to cheat customers during the Depression in order to survive (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982). People in cities all over the U.S. called for regulation to reign in the cheating and counterfeiting that was happening. In the 1930s regulation began around the U.S., particularly with regard to permits or licensing. Local governments began to issue permits in order to control the amount of cabs on the street according to public demand (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982). Notably, New York City’s mayor, LaGuardia, enacted the Haas Act in 1937 and other such regulations continue to influence the taxi industry 70 years later. These permits are also known as medallions and appear on the hood of cabs often as a metal shield, embossed with a number and sometimes a city seal which allows the cab to be used on the street (Mathew, 2005). Taxis in the U.S. continue to be locally regulated today.

In New York City medallions can be bought and sold, and because there is a limited number of them, their price has increased dramatically. Under the Haas Act, the initial price of a medallion in 1937 was $5 but today medallions sell for closer to $200,000 (Mathew, 2005). Not every city allows medallions to be bought and sold, but in those where they are, medallions are quite expensive. In Chicago, medallions can be exchanged, and between July and August of 2009 they were sold for as low as $38,000 and as high as $185,000 according to city data (Taxicab Medallion Transfer Price List, 2009). The mean sale price, according to this data, was $155,349, but the median price was $175,000. The idea behind regulations like the Haas Act was to break up the industry from mob owners or automobile manufacturer monopolies and to protect those who wanted to make a living as a cab driver. Many drivers at the time were immigrants with little support and protection and so the regulations were meant to help them (Mathew,
Immigrants continue to dominate the U.S.’s taxi industry today, likely because it has low barriers to entry and drivers can begin earning money quickly.

Another major change in the taxi industry has been the transition to leasing wherein drivers lease a car for a specific time-period (e.g. 24-hours) from a cab operator. Prior to leasing, cab companies paid drivers as employees with commission and benefits, but leasing gained popularity in the 1970s (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982; Mathew, 2005). Leasing is beneficial for the cab company because drivers under this system are not employees, thus the company is not required to pay benefits such as Social Security or workmen’s compensation (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982). Moreover this arrangement shifts the job’s risks from the cab company to the driver, who is less powerful (Mathew, 2005). Shifting of risk to the less powerful is typical of neoliberal economics as can be seen in the shifting of developed country companies’ operations to developing countries. As such, Mathew (2005) argues the taxi driver and many parts of the developing world are “connected by more than ethnicity – they are connected by the position they occupy in the long chain of neoliberal economic organization” (p. 82). The decentralization and deregulation characteristic of globalization (Castells, 2000) also took place in the taxi industry throughout the U.S. and so this localized industry has been influenced by global forces.

Driving a taxi in the U.S. is a popular job among immigrants. Immigrants get into the profession for a variety of reasons including lack of other opportunities, independence and flexibility, it can be lucrative even if the immigrant has low English language skills, connections in the industry, and/or previous taxi driving experience in their country of origin (Gambetta & Hamill, 2005). In New York City, for example, first the drivers were Irish and Italian immigrants and today they are largely from developing countries (Skok, 2003; Mathew, 2005). By the mid-1980s many working-class migrants arriving in the U.S. settled, as many had done before them,
in cities. These (predominantly male) immigrants “soon comprised the bottom end of the new service economy, including janitors, gas station and parking lot attendants, newsstand and deli workers, restaurant workers, and taxi drivers” as white, middle class Americans moved into higher wage industries, such as finance and real estate, and needed these low-wage workers to support them (Mathew, 2005, p. 119). The immigrant taxi driver, then, is a common sight in global cities.

In a recent study of Chicago’s cab drivers, respondents came from 76 different countries (Bruno & Schneidman, 2009a). The majority of these drivers came from Nigeria (18.3 percent), the U.S. (9.9 percent), Pakistan (9.8 percent), Somalia (8.2 percent), and Ghana (8.8 percent). This study found that drivers are severely under-paid and over-worked. On average, they work 13 hours per day for approximately $4.38 per hour (Bruno & Schneidman, 2009a). Additionally, it is a dangerous job, for it is not uncommon for Chicago’s cab drivers to become victims of violence (Wisniewski, 2009). In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) found that taxi driving is among the professions with the highest rate of fatality, but unlike other dangerous jobs like police officers, taxi drivers are rarely appreciated or recognized for this aspect of their profession (Luedke, 2009).

Because it is a service job, drivers must adapt their routines to their customers’ schedules. Sharma (2008) found that the Toronto drivers she interviewed synchronize their routines according to other people’s schedules, as in the case of a former engineer from Tehran who chooses to drive his taxi from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. in order to service business professionals like he used to be. In addition to organizing his day around others’ schedules, he takes on the time anxieties of his customers as his own, such as getting to the airport or to a meeting on time. This
kind of synchronization suggests the temporal politics of the taxi in which the taxi functions to keep the global economic system running (Sharma, 2008).

Luedke’s (2009) ongoing ethnography of Chicago’s cab drivers provides valuable information about this population. She is finding that the profession provides an illusion of free time wherein drivers are not chained to a desk, but the strain of having to work long hours to pay their taxi-related fees is damaging (Luedke, 2009). Despite the challenge of making enough money, drivers have a sense of being part of a global system. Many of them are themselves transnationals and with their job drivers feel that they are “a node in a global transportation system and the human exchanges that occur along these trajectories can provide a satisfying sense of engagement, of being at the center of an increasingly small world” (Luedke, 2009, p. 5).

Their cross-cultural skills help them do their job and establish relationships with their customers, however brief those encounters may be. The physical closeness between driver and customer in the taxi momentarily “blur[s] the lines between private and public space…engender[ing] both heightened intimacy and, at the same time, a readier effacement or dehumanization of drivers” (Luedke, 2009, pp. 6-7). Unfortunately, drivers have found that building a relationship with customers outside of the cab is difficult. After the ride is over the separation of the plastic partition in the car seems to extend outside of it preventing the driver and the customer from developing a real friendship. Drivers have expressed feeling “imprisoned” in their own vehicle unable to break that barrier between themselves and customers with whom they would have liked to build a friendship (Luedke, 2009).

Although they may feel socially trapped in their own vehicle, drivers are finding ways to form their own communities. Organization, such as the United Taxidrivers Community Council (UTCC) and the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC), are working to
defend drivers’ rights. However, Chicago taxi drivers are a scattered and diverse group that tends to split up according to national or regional lines (Luedke, 2009). Combining this diversity with the autonomous movement required by their job, organizing them effectively or even researching them can be a challenge.

G. Study Rationale

Taxi drivers, like other low wage workers in global cities, tell the other side of the globalization story. The sanitized version of the story is that globalization makes the world smaller by opening borders and markets, allowing for the free flow of information, goods, and people (Wolf, 2004; Friedman, 2007). But the other side of the story is that globalization only opens doors for some people; the world becomes bigger and borders become thicker for immigrant laborers at the bottom (Ferguson, 1999; Mathew, 2005). Families are separated over vast distances and given the costs of travel and complexities of crossing political borders, reuniting is far from regular, if it happens at all (Mathew, 2005). Even when people do cross borders and start a new life in a new country it seems that barriers continue to exist, as discussed above with the taxicab’s plastic partition.

Unlike many other low wage jobs held by immigrants, taxis in global cities are where the opposite ends of globalization confront each other regularly. Immigrant taxi drivers represent the bottom end of globalization as people who have moved to a new country to work in a low-wage service job. Their customers are likely urban dwellers who can afford the service, or professionals moving around the city and the globe for work. Whereas other service jobs, like nightly cleaning staff, may be hidden from view, a taxi driver is visible, in close proximity to the customer, with that partition physically separating these two aspects of globalization.
Additionally, the job itself ties the driver in with the global economic and transportation system as they move global workers throughout the city and to the airports.

Globalization is more often experienced locally rather than globally. While space becomes empty and stretched out, it also becomes affected by absent processes that people feel and are transformed by locally (Giddens, 1990). Although globalization may seem to be some intangible phenomenon, there is a material aspect to it. Globalization triggers the movement of physical things and people around the world. One such material aspect of globalization is the taxicab as well as its driver. At a time when so much information moves in the ether of cyberspace, taxis are a bit archaic because they move physical things (Townsend, 2000). And yet global cities exist because of the continued need for face-to-face communication (Sassen, 2004) and so taxis and other transportation systems make the movement necessary for face-to-face meetings possible. The continued importance of place makes the taxi a continually relevant job under globalization and the immigrant driver one who straddles different places rather than one who transcends them.

The car is a driver’s mobile workspace and it is a mobile mediated environment (Sharma, 2008). Some drivers may personalize their workspace with sights, sounds and smells from their home country (e.g. prayer beads, ethnic newspapers, incense, CDs, or cell phone conversations in their native languages). They also use technologies, like the cell phone or global positioning system (GPS), to do their work. Various symbols and technologies of communication technologies fill the workspace for drivers to negotiate their lives in the U.S. and to negotiate a potentially ongoing relationship with their home culture and community.

The materials people use can reveal a lot about their culture (Miller, 1998). Materials, like cell phones or cars, and the people using them are not fixed. People change as they adapt to
technology and technology changes as it adapts to the people using it (Horst & Miller, 2007). This project seeks to understand this process of adaptation and the experiences of taxis drivers’ use of these technologies. The technologies that people use invite certain kinds of communication and hinder others (Meyrowitz, 1985), thus, the structure of technology influences their experience. Moreover, not all users experience communication technologies in the same way and assuming they do potentially risks supporting social divisions (boyd, 2009).

In a world where more and more people do not live in their country of birth (United Nations, 2004), small communities, like families, and larger ones, like nations, must be cultivated across borders. While transnationals may be using cell phones, social networking sites, email, newspapers, television, and radio just like citizens of a country, we ought not assume their experience with them is the same. This study proposes to understand a group of transnationals’ communication practices and experiences. Transnational communication is a rising area of research with many avenues for exploration. Studies in this area tend to focus on a particular ethnic group (e.g. Bernal, 2006; Horst, 2006; Burrell & Anderson, 2008; Lampert, 2009), but the present study proposes to examine a particular labor group.

Many times transmigrants have left their country of origin in search of work and may not necessarily be tied to others in their ethnic group, thus examining a labor group will provide insight into the daily work lives and communication experiences without being limited by ethnicity or country of origin. As Burrell and Anderson (2008) have shown, transmigrants use ICTs beyond the goal of connecting them to others in their ethnic group. The Ghanaians in their study also used ICTs “to break out of the boundaries of their sometimes insular communities of co-nationals in the diaspora” (Burrell & Anderson, 2008, p. 221), thus ICT use is more complex than simply linking transmigrants to their homeland.
Information and communication technologies can be a tool for empowerment. Transmigrants in low-income jobs generally are not powerful actors in the global economic and political system. As such, this study also seeks to understand how a generally perceived powerless group of transnational workers may/may not empower themselves in their work and/or social life via information and communication technologies.

Taxis are entrenched in globalization as a mobile node within a larger global system facilitating the flow of people, goods, and ideas. Immigrant taxi drivers represent globalization from below as people who have come to a developed nation from developing ones in search of work, adventure, or a better life. The work of driving a taxi in a global city makes an immigrant driver globally mobile, but also locally mobile as a node in the system of a global city. For a group whose work requires constant movement, community may be cultivated in unique ways. Of course, with the rise of the internet scholars have come to re-envision community as free from the restraints of place and of face-to-face interaction. But for people whose job requires constant movement and planning around others’ schedules, community becomes an interesting question as does what means of communication are used to create it. As such, the following research questions will guide this study: 1. What, if anything, does community mean to a group that is locally and globally mobile? 2. What role, if any, does technology play in the cultivation of community among them?
III. METHODS

These questions are open and exploratory and invite a qualitative approach to answer them. Qualitative research is the “process of making large claims from small matters” (Carey, 1989, p. 64) and qualitative researchers analyze a smaller set of social phenomena in order to develop an in depth understanding of them. These methods are useful in understanding how people construct meaning in their lives. Qualitative research, particularly fieldwork, occurs in situ, where the participants are (Hughes, 2002) and in “the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 12). Qualitative researchers develop “firsthand knowledge about the empirical social world” without pigeonholing data “into operational definitions that the researcher has constructed” (Filstead, 1970, p. 6). These methods, then, are used to understand social phenomena from participants’ own perspectives. Moreover, interpretive approaches within qualitative research value the context within which the research occurs because the context is relevant to the meaning of the social phenomena for participants.

This project enacted a kind of “sociological imagination” in that it sought to link a group of individuals’ experiences with broader concepts, like globalization and community, within a particular historical moment. Every living individual “contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history” (Mills, 1959, p. 6). Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers contribute to Chicago’s society as well as to their country of origin, and the way that they conceive of and act upon these relationships was of interest in this study.

Because the first research question focuses on the meanings that community has for its members, a symbolic interactionist approach is appropriate. As outlined by Blumer (1969), this approach rests on three premises: people act toward things based on the meanings they have for
each person; that meaning is derived from social interaction; and these meanings are interpreted by each person in each encounter. Meaning arises “in the process of interaction between people” (Blumer, 1969, p. 4). The world is made up of objects (physical, social, and abstract) that have meaning for people and they act on them based on the meanings that the objects have for them. Symbolic interactionism puts priority on people’s own interpretations of interaction rather than imposing outside categories. It is a useful approach to take when trying to understand people’s own interpretations of objects or events.

For the purposes of this study, a symbolic interactionist approach means that community has meaning for members of this group and so do the objects involved with community construction. Fernback (2007) used the symbolic interactionist perspective in her interviews with members of online groups to discern whether they perceived their membership to an online group as a community. She argues for the value of the symbolic interactionist perspective in studying online groups because it allows researchers to understand the “institutional relationships, power, nationalism, global information and capital flows, crisis management strategies, and other processes that construct our ‘communal’ practices” (Fernback, 2007, p. 66). Rather than being restricted by a static notion of community, community is enacted “the way we’ve conceived of it” (Fernback, 2007, p. 66) and a symbolic interactionist approach facilitates this understanding of community.

The present study was not necessarily concerned with online community as in Fernback’s (2007) study, but rather with community as it is enacted by transnational taxi drivers. In order to understand community from the drivers’ perspectives I employed a two-pronged methodological approach using observation and interviews. I began by observing and interacting with immigrant taxi drivers in places where they gather such as restaurants, that is, places of immobility. During
the course of my fieldwork I encountered a new area of social research called “mobilities studies,” coming out of sociology from scholars like John Urry, Mimi Sheller, and Monika Büscher, and rooted in studies of globalization, immigration and transmigration, urban studies, and new media among others. At the time I prepared and began this study I was unaware of this budding approach to social research, and yet I unwittingly appropriated some of the “mobile methods” set out within the “mobilities paradigm.” Briefly, mobilities studies takes the approach that the world has become increasingly mobile and this research seeks to connect “the analysis of different forms of travel, transport and communications with the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized through time and across various spaces” (Urry, 2007, p. 6). Mobility, in this paradigm, refers to both physical mobility as well as social mobility, and understands that, in fact, physical mobility may reflect one’s social status and power given the right (or lack thereof) to movement (Urry, 2007). Moreover, mobilities research also emphasizes and analyzes immobility, for it is the vast network of immobile infrastructure and people that “organize the intermittent flow of people, information, and image, as well as the borders or ‘gates’ that limit, channel, and regulate movement or anticipated movement” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 212).

Much of social science research, these scholars argue, has generally been “a-mobile” and this “mobilities turn” fills a gap by seeking to understand the complex connections between travel, transportation, and communication, and the systems and societies therein (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Traditional methods of research, then, need to be adapted in order to access mobilized social phenomena. Mobile methods, essentially, need to be “on the move” as are the subjects of study (Urry, 2007; Büscher, Urry, & Witchger, 2011). Strategies such as observation of movement, participation in movement, and participants’ conducting time-space diaries are
among some of the recommendations (Büscher, Urry, & Witchger, 2011). Participating in movement can entail walking or riding with participants as they go about their movement. This strategy, i.e. riding with drivers in their cabs as they work, was unavailable to me given the risk of drivers losing income or of losing their licenses for having a non-paying passenger in the vehicle. Time-space diaries ask participants to record their daily activities – when, where, and what they are doing as they move throughout a day. While a potentially excellent method for collecting rich data, it was not a method I had considered. Moreover, it may not have worked in this case given drivers’ limited amount of free time and potential language barriers. Observation of movement enables researchers to “see how people bring about face-to-face relationships with other people, places and events” (Büscher, Urry, & Witchger, 2011, p. 8). This is a strategy that I did adopt by observing movement of drivers throughout the city, specifically with a focus on places of slowed movement.

For the present study, in planning to work with the inherent mobility of taxi drivers, I conducted observation and interviews at “places of slowed movement,” (Büscher, Urry, & Witchger, 2011), also a strategy recommended by mobilities scholars. Although not intentionally following mobile methods, the logic of asking how to reach this population led me in this direction. The places of slowed movement where I conducted fieldwork were restaurants frequented by taxi drivers, airports, taxi garages, and city offices where drivers manage regulatory aspects of their jobs such as licensing. Moreover, as Büscher et al. (2011) highlight, material objects move through these kinds of places and they too are ripe for analysis. Thus, while at the research sites I also observed and inquired about relevant material objects such as newspapers, flyers, televisions, calling cards, etc.
In addition to questions about where to meet drivers, I also strategized which drivers to focus on in particular. Bruno and Schneidman (2009a) found that the majority of Chicago’s drivers are immigrants and recent history has shown the job to be commonly taken by immigrants. Focusing on the non-American born drivers not only ties in with issues of globalization and transnationalism, but also enabled me to develop a sample of participants reflective of the industry itself.

While immigrant groups are all different and sometimes it is necessary to focus on one ethnic group in order to develop a better understanding of an issue (Birman, 2005), I chose not to restrict my sample to a particular ethnic group among the drivers. Many studies of transnationals tend to be limited to a single ethnic group, but the present study was already limited to one labor group. Members of this labor group interacted with drivers of many backgrounds, thus further restricting the sample by ethnic group would have limited my fieldwork too much. Moreover, because the research questions addressed whether or not community exists among them, it would have been unwise to assume that a community already exists around ethnicity, an assumption which could have polluted the findings from the beginning. By being open to an immigrant driver of any ethnic group I avoided imposing preconceived categories on the participants. Of my 41 interviews with drivers, 12 were from Pakistan, nine were from Sudan and the rest were from a variety of countries around the world (Algeria, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Jordan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, Peru, Russia, Senegal, Somalia, and Syria). Although Pakistani and Sudanese drivers represent half of my interview population, I also interviewed drivers from around the world, thus reflecting the nature of the taxi driver population in Chicago. My choice of fieldwork locations, i.e. two Indian-Pakistani restaurants, may account
for the higher proportion of Pakistani drivers given food preferences as well as mosque availability, but I met drivers from many other countries at these locations as well.

A. Observation

I began observation at three Chicago restaurants where drivers are known to gather, which I refer to by their pseudonyms: “Indo-Pak Palace,” “Indus Valley Restaurant,” and “Falafel Plus.” Indo-Pak Palace and Indus Valley both serve Indian and Pakistani cuisine while Falafel Plus generally serves Middle Eastern cuisine (see Appendix B for photographs of the restaurants).

Observation as a qualitative method not only involves the act of observing, it may also involve interaction with participants being observed (Karp, 1980). Researchers in the past have used this method to understand social phenomena. Humphreys’ (2005) used observation along with interviews to explore people’s use of cell phones in public spaces. Karp (1980) also used observation to understand people’s behavior in a public places, focusing particularly on Times Square in New York City. But observation need not always occur in public settings. Tamale’s (1999) study of gender relations in Uganda’s Parliament is an example of observation in a semi-private setting. A case of observation and technology use is Wakeford’s (2003) analysis of independently owned cybercafés in London in which she sought understand the culture among the staff and customers. Humphreys (2005), Wakeford (2003), and Tamale (1999) all used interviews to compliment their observation and the present study also used this approach.

Observing taxi drivers at cafes and restaurants was an opportunity to begin talking with them in their own everyday settings. Observation and interviews took place over the course of 18 months beginning in April 2010 and ending in September 2011. I had hoped to utilize local contacts familiar with the taxi community to introduce me around at the restaurants and ease my
entry into the community. Unfortunately, this plan did not materialize and so I began observation by walking into Indo-Pak Palace alone one afternoon in April 2010. A local contact had recommended this location to me, and so the day before I entered, I walked past to see it in person. I often conducted this type of reconnaissance, as it were, in order to judge the safety of a potential location and develop a clear sense of its location. As a woman entering the restaurants alone I considered this a necessary safety measure and, in fact, I walked past a number of other restaurant locations nearby that I felt might be unsafe and so I did not include them among my fieldwork locations. Qualities that made me feel the location was safe were windows allowing me to see inside before entering, the street location was relatively active with other businesses and pedestrians nearby, walking distance from public transit, and/or signage encouraging customers to enter (e.g. Indus Valley had signs promoting a student discount).

Over time, I developed connections with several non-driver industry professionals who were crucial in helping me gain access to the additional research sites like the airports, the garage, the dispatching office, and city offices. Officials from the City of Chicago’s Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) office provided permission and access to city offices and the airports. It had been a struggle to get to the airport lots because they are not accessible by foot or public transit and, as I later learned, non-drivers and non-city or airport employees may not enter the lots without clearance. Moreover, I was able to spend time at a dispatching office and a company garage through the editor at the “Hackney Monthly” who kindly put me in contact with people at “Broad Street Taxi” (BST)\(^1\).

At the field research sites I observed verbal and non-verbal communication as well as materials such as food, prayer areas, newspapers and flyers, televisions, and calling cards. I

\(^1\) Both of these names – Hackney Monthly and Broad Street Taxi – are pseudonyms.
obtained permission to take digital photographs at two restaurants as well as the BST garage and at O’Hare’s taxi lot that document the locations’ appearance and unique qualities. All identifying information in these photographs has been removed. Generally at the restaurants I began by entering in the afternoon while it was still light out – after lunch and before evening rush hour when drivers would need to be working. Early on at each restaurant I obtained permission from a manager to observe and interview drivers at the site. Most often I ordered a cup of tea, and sometimes food, and I would try to sit at a table that gave me a good view of the dining area. I would often read a newspaper that I brought with me or pick one up at the restaurant, which gave me something relatively unobtrusive to do while observing. Moreover, reading the ethnic newspapers at the restaurants gave me an understanding of community events as well as conversation topic if necessary for non-interview conversations. I would observe the patterns and behavior of those coming and going, people dining and socializing, as well as the communication materials on site.

At the airports I started out in the indoor locations (stamp office at Midway and the grill at O’Hare) to stay out of the cold during the Chicago winter of 2010-2011 (see Appendix E for photographs of O’Hare’s taxi staging lot). There I would observe the surroundings, the patterns of human and vehicle movement, listen to the conversations and loudspeakers directing traffic, and read the bulletin board announcements. When the temperature warmed up I generally stayed outside at O’Hare near the main building where drivers purchase stamps, get food, pray, and/or socialize. I would also stroll the fire lanes to observe drivers who stayed in or near their cars or who were walking to stretch their legs.

At the dispatching office I was given a tour of the facility by the manager and was allowed to observe the dispatchers at work taking calls and inputting the information into a
computer system as well as the large screen monitors tracking all the taxis and dispatchers on duty. I did not spend as much time at the BST garage, but while there I was given a tour of the premises by the manager and was later able to observe the patterns of movement and behavior, the conversations, as well as the technology and entertainment devices in the lounge such as a television, computers, vending machines, pool table, and arcade game (see Appendix F for a photograph of the BST lounge).

Sometimes drivers would come talk to me and we would discuss topics like religion, cultural differences, and/or current events in a non-interview context while others ignored me completely. I considered these casual conversations to be useful for building rapport, though not directly relevant to my research questions. If the conversation turned to my research and the driver was interested in and able to do an interview at that time, I would pause for the informed consent procedure before beginning an interview. Usually drivers who approached me would ask if I like the food at the restaurant, if I live near the restaurant, or (at the airports) if I was selling insurance. During the course of research I learned that some of the men did not want to talk to me either out of fear that I am a government agent or fear of community judgment because I am female among, for the most part, Muslim men. These issues of culture, gender, and insider/outsider status will be discussed in greater detail below.

Observing immigrant drivers’ communication and community-building practices in these locations provided me with a contextual understanding of their communicative environments. I started out the project going to the research sites two to three times a week for approximately three hours at a time. As I met more people and became more familiar with the site I went more often and sometimes stayed for longer or for less time, depending on the day and my own comfort level (there was the occasional uncomfortable day in which I felt unwanted or sexually
harassed to some degree in which case I would leave). For the most part, I conducted fieldwork Monday through Thursday, and occasionally on a Friday. Generally, drivers are busy working or taking a day of rest Friday through Sunday so there was likely to be less activity at the research sites.

As mentioned above, I was unable to ride along with the taxi drivers and observe their work lives on the road because it would have put them at risk of losing potential income and/or of losing their license for driving a non-paying passenger. Such risk would have been unethical and would have endangered participants’ livelihoods. As such, my observation was limited to places of slowed movement – where drivers choose to, or are forced to stop moving temporarily during their otherwise mobile shift.

B. Interviews

During the 18-month research season, I also conducted 48 short and in-depth interviews with immigrant drivers and non-driver professionals in order to gain a deeper understanding of what community means to the participants. I adopted an innovative two-tiered approach to the interviews. Drivers’ livelihood depends on them being on the road, thus finding time to sit down for a one to two hour interviews was not always possible. Instead, I prepared a series of questions to ask drivers that took about 15 minutes. For participants that had more time, I had additional, more in-depth questions. All interviews took place in public places that were convenient for the drivers, such as the restaurants and the taxi lots, where the participant and I could converse for an extended period of approximately one to two hours. At the restaurants we sat at a table and at the airports we generally went to the driver’s parked vehicle to sit inside or stand nearby. At the end of fieldwork I had completed 34 short and eight long interviews with drivers, and five long and one short interview with non-driver professionals.
I also interviewed six non-driver industry professionals who provided different perspectives on the taxi industry in Chicago from how a garage or dispatching office operates, to the function of the taxi school for the industry and the drivers, to the role of an industry-specific newspaper. For the most part, these interviews were long, save for one, and they were all conducted in these professionals’ offices. Because it was not always easy to gain access to these folks, I prepared questions a day or two before each interview once I knew the meeting was scheduled. Moreover, having a series of questions tailored to each interview was beneficial in that each professional I met had a different role and set of responsibilities within the industry, thus the same questions would not apply to all.

I had hoped to record each interview with a digital audio recorder, but only one individual consented to the recording. Professionals and drivers alike were wary of being recorded. During the one recorded interview, the participant asked me to turn off the device temporarily as he shared information with me that he did not want recorded. I, of course, complied and when he was ready resumed the recording. In order to record data I took brief written notes during each interview as well as mental notes, and immediately after each interview I wrote down more comprehensive notes on the participants’ responses as well as my own observations and interpretations of the experience. Upon returning home from fieldwork I typed up all field notes – interviews and observations – and saved them on password protected Word files.

Interviews have been shown to be a useful method when researching taxi drivers. Sharma (2008) used interviews to gather information about Toronto taxi drivers finding, among other things, that drivers organize their routines around other people’s schedules. Other studies of taxi drivers tend to be quantitative, for example Bruno & Schneideman’s (2009a) analysis of the
working conditions for Chicago’s cab drivers, or more practical such as studies of taxi drivers’ seat belt usage (cf. Ferguson, Wells, Williams, & Feldman, 1999; Fleiter, Gao, Qiu, & Shi, 2008). Gambetta and Hamill (2005), however, used an ethnographic approach in their comparative analysis of trust in the taxi-driving game in Belfast and New York City. They conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observation with drivers, dispatchers, and passengers finding this qualitative approach to be more relevant to the complex cognitive process involved in trust decisions.

The short interviews with drivers were unstructured and the longer ones were semi-structured, and both had prepared interview guides that I refined and expanded during fieldwork as I learned more (see Appendix A for Interview Guides). And, as mentioned above, the interview questions for professionals were developed as needed based on the participant’s occupation in the industry once I had scheduled an interview. Using this informal approach to interviews gave me flexibility and latitude to ask the questions differently in different situations and with each participant. The “social dynamics of interviewing change from one participant and context to the next,” making flexibility in asking questions preferable (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 195). This study involved interviews with immigrant taxi drivers who are constantly moving in search of a new fare. As such, flexibility was necessary to accommodate this mobile population and the two-tiered approach aided in research flexibility.

In order to recruit driver participants at restaurants I generally approached someone who was sitting alone and not on his phone. At the airports I generally approached someone who was not in conversation with another person. I adopted this approach because I did not always know what was being discussed in groups and so I did not want to unintentionally interrupt a private or sensitive conversation. I would introduce myself, offer my university-issued business card,
explain my research, and ask if he was interested in taking part in an interview. I had about a 50 percent response rate; about half the time an interview was granted and half the time it was declined. After the consent process I would begin the interview. Sometimes drivers would approach me to find out why I was at the location and, after discussing my research, he would agree to an interview. Other times a driver would say he could do an interview another day and a few times we were able to schedule a time to meet. The participants would tell me how much time they had and I would proceed with my questions based on their availability.

C. Data Analysis

Analysis of a project like this is, to some extent, subjective with the researcher as the analytical tool. Nevertheless, I systematically analyzed the collected data in order to reach my interpretations. I manually coded my field notes for analysis. I began the final analysis by reading through all of my field notes twice. During the first full reading I began coding the notes, using Word’s track changes function, for important themes, quotes, and illustrative events relevant to the research questions. I then began a second full reading of the coded notes in which I concurrently created an Excel document to organize and categorize the coded texts. I created two thematic sheets in the Excel document based on the analysis and research questions – community and globalization. I also created a methods sheet in which I logged all materials having to do with that topic. Additionally, I created a fourth sheet logging the interview response rate, the pseudonym, age, country of origin, and date of all interviews as well as key information learned from each interview to complement the other sheets in the document. The second full reading and concurrent charting of findings provided me with an in-depth understanding of my data as well as an organized chart to refer to for continued analysis and reference throughout the writing period.
It is helpful to begin analysis while still in the field so that researchers can begin developing findings and then test them with participants by asking them directly or by keeping an eye out for a particular behavior. According to the Twenty Percent Rule, analysis of interviews begins after approximately 20 percent of the expected total interviews have been completed (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2008). This allows researchers to make adjustments early on so that future interviews can be more successful. Moreover, this allows one to start noting themes, which can be followed up on in the later interviews. Interviewing is a process that evolves and it is best to begin analysis shortly after the data gathering begins in order to reflect, adjust, and evolve as needed (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2008).

As such, at about four months into the field research, I began preliminary analysis, which proved crucial to the development and refinement of my methods. This early analysis enabled me to begin seeing themes and connections that were emerging from the data allowing me to refine my interview questions, better track patterns of behavior during observation, as well as acquire participants’ input and perspectives on my early findings to ascertain if I was correct. For example, this early reflection and analysis allowed me to begin developing and further understanding the collaboration theme discussed in Chapter IV. It also led me to discover mobilities research, discussed above, which further supported my methodological choices as well as provided me with another conceptual framework for the study. Although I did not change my theoretical framework midway through the project, access to this new research did help inform my findings and raise exciting questions and approaches for future research projects.

There was some overlap in this two-pronged methodological approach because observation involves talk and interviews involve observation, but when a conversation during observation started moving into interview questions I would pause in order to obtain informed
consent for a potential participant. Combining observation with another method, like interviews, brings out the greatest benefit of observation, particularly as a way of checking and rechecking findings in different settings (Adler & Adler, 1998). By prioritizing one or the other method at different times in the fieldwork I developed a more comprehensive insight based on the benefit that each method brings. There is no single, static, or entirely true interpretation of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). By using a two-pronged approach I attempted to understand participants’ realities from two perspectives with the goal of reaching more thorough conclusions than only one approach can bring.

A qualitative researcher is attempting to understand a cultural code(s). In working through these puzzles s/he writes many “thick descriptions” of incidents and experiences in the field (Geertz, 1973). Ultimately, these descriptions are the researcher’s own interpretations of the participants’ interpretations of what they and their peers are doing (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative interpretive analysis is the researcher’s own interpretation, but one that is rooted in the participants’ perspectives. This means that the researcher is essentially the analytical device.

This kind of cultural analysis involves “guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses” (Geertz, 1973, p. 20). The process of guessing meanings and assessing them involves coding gathered data so the researcher can organize findings. While coding, I looked for patterns and key words or phrases that connect and then, in interpreting, for example, a participant’s usage of the cell phone versus the Gandalf, I would relate how that connects to larger themes of collaboration and then community. It is the role of the researcher to take these kinds of small examples and accounts and link them to larger themes and issues within the framework of the study and research questions. Most of my interview questions had to do with understanding how the participant uses a particular
technology or set of technologies. In analyzing their responses about their behavior, combined with my own observation, I could identify patterns and make connections little by little from the individual example to larger concepts. As I began to identify these common individual experiences in my preliminary analysis I was able to refine my questions as well as inquire with participants if I was understanding their patterns of behavior accurately. I have drawn my conclusions, then, based on not only interviews and observation, but also on responses from participants regarding my conclusions. That is, I conducted analysis and re-analysis that have informed my conclusions based on the subsequent “better guesses.”

In the end, the findings here are my own interpretations of participants’ experiences, but they are rooted in “thick descriptions” of direct experiences in the field with the participants. I have done my best to use the participants’ voices as much as possible which may help overcome the possible limitation of researcher interpretation, but having not been permitted to record most interviews I was not able to gather as many direct quotes as I would have liked. Nevertheless, the participants’ voices bring value and vibrancy to the findings and allow the reader to better understand how I came to the interpretations that I have in the chapters that follow.

No qualitative interpretation is necessarily correct or incorrect; each is merely a different representation of the topic of study. This does not mean that these interpretations are useless simply because there is no scientific proof of tested hypotheses: “A good cultural study can provide useful guidance for understanding and communicating with members of that culture. That is not the same as scientific proof – but humans would take very few actions if they only responded to scientifically tested propositions” (Whyte, 1993, p. 370). Whyte (1993) encountered criticism for his sociological study of “street corner society” in an Italian neighborhood in Boston, which he called, “Cornerville.” Boelen (1992), for example, criticized
Whyte’s (1993) study because he was an outsider, did not speak Italian, and misunderstood/misrepresented many facts about the neighborhood he studied. Her critique and Whyte’s response in the April 1992 issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* overlook the simple fact that there can be no single, permanent interpretation of Cornerville or any such research site because there will always be multiple perspectives on the same issue and of the same site of study (Denzin, 1998). Qualitative analysts are involved in constructing interpretations based on participants’ perspectives and then translating that to larger themes. Different researchers are likely to come to different conclusions.

Another researcher studying Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers may reach slightly different conclusions if, say, he or she conducted fieldwork in different locations and/or if the researcher was of a different gender or race than myself. His/Her interpretations would be based on different experiences, but both would be valuable representations of the same topic. Unique challenges based on the researcher’s gender or insider/outsider status will be discussed further below.

Qualitative research is never complete (Geertz, 1973). The more one learns of the participants the more one realizes s/he needs to learn. As Whyte (1993) reflected on his study of the Cornerville community, “the study of a community or an organization has no logical end point. The more you learn, the more you see that there is to learn” (pp. 325-236). This reminds us of Fernback’s (2007) notion of community as an ongoing process. Whyte (1993) points out that there can be no complete study of a community, partly because it is such a complex entity that there will always be another angle to take. Community studies are also never complete because the communities themselves are never complete; they are always evolving and changing through time. Researchers are faced with the challenge of understanding an evolving phenomenon. In the
present study, not only is the community of study itself always in flux, the participants themselves are also in constant physical movement given the nature of their work. It was challenging to decide when to end the fieldwork because it seemed there was always more to learn from the participants. However, I ended at a point where I felt I had exhausted the potential for learning new information regarding the research questions for this particular study. Certainly I have many questions remaining, but they are better suited for a follow up study that adopts a different perspective and/or different methods.

D. Consent/Confidentiality/Incentives

Informed consent is an ongoing process between researcher and participant (Birman, 2005) and so I made an effort to ensure it was understood throughout the process. During the first half of fieldwork I obtained written consent from all interview participants once I explained the project, explained that their participation is voluntary, that the research will have no impact on their job, that they can withdraw at anytime without penalty, and allowed the participant to ask questions. However, having encountered a number of interested potential participants who then rescinded their interest upon learning that they had to sign a document, I obtained university permission to alter the protocol and obtain consent without a signature (non-documentation of informed consent). Subsequently, I went through the same informed consent process, but participants did not need to sign the paperwork. In the end, this lack of documentation further protects participants’ anonymity because there is no record of their name. For those that did sign earlier in the fieldwork, I have stored the documents in a locked file box to which only I have the key. The consent paperwork was written in simple English and according to university procedures. Basic literacy in English was presumed because it is a city requirement for one to become a taxi driver in Chicago. Most drivers I met had good English skills, while others
struggled somewhat. It is possible that some of the potential participants who declined to participate did so for fear of admitting to me that it would be too hard or take too long to read the document.

Generally, interview participants read the document and asked me questions, which we took time to discuss, and then agreed to proceed. Thus, my findings may be skewed to drivers with better English skills and/or who were not intimidated by paperwork. The documents made for an awkward moment in a conversation by making it official in a way. Informed consent was nevertheless necessary to ensure that participants were fully aware of my research and their rights as part of the study. For immigrants coming from different cultures to a country where, unfortunately, they are not always treated well it is understandable that some of them declined to proceed with what was to become a more official or formal conversation. In the cases where participation was declined I simply thanked the individual for his/her time and we parted ways.

For the most part a potential participant either accepted or declined and we proceeded from there. However, I encountered two unusual incidents with regard to informed consent. First, I met an individual driver at O’Hare and after initial introductions, I explained my project and asked if he would be interested in doing an interview. He agreed and so I proceeded with the full informed consent. He read the document carefully and then agreed to the interview. About ten minutes into the interview the individual suddenly asked for reassurance that I work at my university. I assured him that I did and offered to show him my student identification card. He felt my question about what kinds of technology he brings with him to work each day were too personal and could not understand why anyone would care about that. I explained my reasoning behind the questions and said that he does not have answer the questions. He said it was all right and so I moved on to different questions. But a couple minutes later he got nervous about my
questions again and seemed to think that I work for the U.S. government as a spy of some sort because it did not make sense to him why anyone but a spy searching for terrorists would be interested in such things. I tried to assure him that I am a student and offered to show him my state ID as well as my student one, but he insisted that the government would have given me fake IDs.

Despite the fact that this participant was fully informed of the study before he agreed to participate, he became so uncomfortable in the course of the interview that I decided to end it right then. I thanked him for his time, offered him a gift card since it was meant to be a longer interview (which he declined), and I walked away. This interview occurred about a week after the assassination of Osama bin Laden, which may have stirred up fears about terrorism and witch hunts for terrorists among Muslim immigrants within the U.S. This incident illustrates that although he did consent, his fears about me and discomfort with the questions suggested that, as the researcher, I needed to end his participation immediately.

The second incident regarding informed consent emerged at the end of fieldwork. I had met a female driver through a contact and after telling her about my research and asking for an interview, she said she wanted to think about it. We exchanged phone numbers and she said she would call me in a couple days with her decision. Indeed, she called later and we arranged a meeting on a day and time that was convenient for her at a café near one of the restaurant field research sites because I knew the location would be convenient and had free parking. There are very few female taxi drivers in Chicago and so I was interested to obtain a female perspective on the industry. Before beginning the interview we talked about my study again and I explained the informed consent process, asking her to read the document carefully and ask me any other questions she may have before finally deciding whether or not to participate. Unfortunately, she
declined to participate after reading the document. She understood my study to be a “thesis” for school and when she saw it referred to as “research” in the consent document this frightened her. Confused, I said that I respected her decision and would not try to change her mind, but I asked her to clarify what she perceives to be the difference between a thesis and research. Unfortunately, her response did not help me understand the distinction much better, though it seemed that “research” for her implies taking advantage of people. Given such a perspective it is understandable that she would decline to participate. I thanked her for her time, apologized for any confusion I may have caused for I had not intended to mislead her, and we parted ways.

As this story illustrates, despite my efforts to create a readable informed consent document for participants that also met university criteria, something like word choice can make a difference. I tried to understand the distinction she perceived, but I never fully grasped it and after a couple attempts to get clarification I decided to let it go because I did not want to take up any more of her time. Perhaps this misunderstanding stems from cultural differences in educational systems in the U.S. and her country of origin. Or, perhaps it stems from personal experience of ill treatment during a study. Or, it may have been a variety of factors. As the only person to point out this wording issue with me, I cannot know if the use of the word “research” frightened other potential participants into declining participation.

In addition to acquiring informed consent from all interview participants, I also obtained oral consent from research site managers to spend time at these locations and talk with drivers. At the restaurants I asked the managers, at the airports I had clearance from the people in charge of ground transportation, and at city offices I had clearance from a city official. As I met drivers at these locations during observation I would tell them about my study and sometimes these
casual conversations turned into an interview while other times interviews did not result from observational meetings.

Participants’ identities have remained confidential. I only have one transcript from the one recorded interview, which I transcribed myself and is stored on a password protected Word file. I have changed all participants’ names in order to protect their identities. Occasionally a participant revealed sensitive information (e.g. illegal activity) that they did not want noted and so I did not record or report on this information. Others revealed information that could hurt them (e.g. cell phone usage) and so using pseudonyms protects their identities. All field notes have been recorded by hand and then subsequently typed on password protected Word files and stored on my personal computer. My personal notebooks that I used to record data while in the field as well as signed informed consent documents before I obtained the waiver of documentation, are stored in a locked file box to which only I have the key. Pure anonymity is not possible since I met the participants face-to-face, but protecting their identities from others does ensure confidentiality. I gave assurance of confidentiality to all participants, though most participants were not that concerned about it.

I provided a small incentive to drivers who participated in longer interviews because it was a greater time commitment than observation or the short interview. The incentive was a $10 gift card to a local gas station quick market. These cards can be used for fuel and for snacks at the market when they stop for gas. A gift like this is small, but was enough to get drivers interested in participating and to help compensate them for the time spent not working.

E. Limitations

There are limitations with observation and interviews. First of all, the sample size is small and thus not representative of all immigrant taxi drivers in Chicago, let alone in the U.S. The
study has, however, provided an in-depth look at these drivers’ experiences. This study took an interpretive approach to understand community among these taxi drivers, but ultimately the study itself is an interpretation as well. This does not mean that I have fabricated findings. Rather, the interpretations are my own but are constructed in terms of the “interpretations to which persons of a particular denomination subject their experience” (Geertz, 1973, p. 15). In other words, my findings are grounded in the information gathered from the participants themselves. As explained above, data analysis occurred concurrently with fieldwork, which gave me a chance to explore the validity of initial findings while still in the field.

In addition to limitations of sample size, I also faced limitations with regard to accessing the population given their constant state of motion. My methodological choices attempted to work within a mobilized environment, particularly by focusing research sites that are places of slowed movement (as discussed above). However, I lacked the ability to ride along with drivers, which would have provided a deeper understanding of their day-to-day experiences and communicative behaviors. It was a struggle to find drivers who had enough time for an interview, even a brief one, and riding along may have helped overcome this time barrier. But, risking a driver’s employability was not an option. As a result, critics could argue that my time spent in the field was somewhat superficial or fleeting because my contact with drivers was not as intimate or prolonged as in other qualitative studies, especially ethnographies. Limitations with regard to regulations on drivers as well as the need to not impose or obstruct their ability to earn a living had to be taken into account and the study proceeded according to the best possible plan given these access and space/time limitations.

Aside from sample size, access, and space/time limitations, my status as an outsider cannot be ignored as a potential limitation. I am a white, American woman and was working
with immigrants, predominantly male, and predominantly Muslim. Therefore, I was an outsider in terms of gender, nationality (aside from non-driver professionals), and culture and this cannot help but influence fieldwork and, ultimately, findings in conscious as well as unconscious ways. Being an outsider can have benefits in that I was free to ask taboo questions that an insider could not, or to ask questions with seemingly obvious answers because, as an outsider, I was expected to understand (Merriman, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001). Indeed, an outsider’s naïveté about local customs allows him or her to ask questions and break tradition while still preserving “a tenable research position in the society” (Vidich, 1970, p. 167).

Moreover, I found that sometimes in these places of immobility there was some curiosity about my presence leading some to come talk to me and learn why I was there which was helpful for breaking the ice with other, perhaps less gregarious drivers interested to talk with me. Another possible benefit of my outsider status may have been gender. It is possible that as a female I appeared to be less threatening than a male might seem, making some feel at ease talking to me. I found that often times the male drivers and non-driver professionals engaged in chivalrous behavior – trying to buy me a tea\(^2\), providing me with a chair when there was limited seating, apologizing for foul language or a dirty car or work space. While chivalry is appreciated to some extent, I worried where the line crossed over into a certain perceived female weakness and a male need to dominate a situation. This concern leads me to the challenges I faced as an outsider.

Being an outsider presents complications in fieldwork for a variety of reasons, such as ability to understand cultural norms within the group. The kind of data a qualitative researcher gathers is partly dependent on how the group being studied perceives him/her because this

\(^2\) I always politely refused offers to buy me food or drink, but on occasion a cup of tea was thrust into my hands despite my objections in which case I would accept fearing that refusing at that point would be rude.
perception influences their responses (Vidich, 1970). For example, if the people being studied feel threatened or uneasy with the researcher, their responses, if any, will likely be guarded.

Despite possible benefits of being an outsider, during this study I found that it also created obstacles in terms of access to locations, information, and people, as well as challenges in overcoming cultural and gender differences. Learning which restaurants to go to was not too difficult given some advice I received early on as well as my own observation. However, accessing city offices and airports did take time, patience, and a bit of luck in finding the right people who helped along the way. After learning about the newspaper, the *Hackney Monthly*, I reached out to the editor who was very helpful and informative. He provided me access to a contact that led to the BST organization, but negotiating those interviews also took time and patience. Information about the taxi industry – the structure, the drivers, non-industry professionals – is not always readily available. Granted, the BACP provides a great deal of regulatory information online and the *Hackney Monthly* regularly publishes industry-related news, but I found that sometimes this public information is built on an assumed body of knowledge about the industry which I did not have at the beginning of the project in 2010. Moreover, accessing particularly valuable informants like a garage or dispatch manager is difficult without the right contact. Lastly, the drivers’ mobility made accessing them a challenge even when knowing which restaurants to visit. It took time in the field to learn how drivers schedule their shifts to determine the best days and times to meet them. Being an outsider, then, had drawbacks in terms of access.

Just as gender may have been a benefit in terms of building rapport with participants, it was also a hindrance at times. As I have noted, for the most part the people I encountered in the field were kind and respectful or at least neutral towards me. Unfortunately, I did encounter
harassing situations on occasion. I was occasionally asked if I was single or asked out on dates, asked if I was looking for a husband, and watched as a man would eye me up and down. A particularly disturbing moment was when one participant asked me if I was a virgin. On another occasion a restaurant worker asked if I had friends in Chicago and then asked if I wanted another “friend,” then insisted I join him for drinks later that evening and gave me his phone number. The encounter felt like he thought I was a prostitute and was, of course, very upsetting. I left fieldwork early after both of these encounters because I was shaken up, uncomfortable, and angry. Most of this harassment occurred at the restaurants and while I happened to be engaged, which I always explained to the men when personal relationships came up, sometimes showing them a picture of my fiancé that I had on my cell phone. I did not encounter such harassment at the airports, garage, city offices, or dispatching office but these other places of immobility are monitored by supervisors or security. Moreover, by the time I had made the contacts to gain access to and spend time at these official locations I was married. Perhaps the surveillance and the fact that I was married rather than engaged played a part in how I was treated by men who might have otherwise harassed me.

My gender was a barrier in these unfortunate cases of harassment because it meant that the people I was interacting with did not take me seriously as a professional and therefore I was unable to learn anything from them related to my research questions. Moreover, their comments and looks made me feel uncomfortable, if not threatened, to the point that I would leave fieldwork early when necessary, sometimes taking the following day off to mentally recover, regain my confidence, and stop being angry. In other words, the harassment slowed my fieldwork at times because I had to take time off after the few especially disturbing encounters I faced.
Aside from the challenge of sexual harassment, gender also became an issue when I encountered male participants who seemed to adopt a patriarchal attitude towards me. For example, on several occasions a driver would agree to participate but then criticize my research and my methods and proceed to tell me how he thinks I should be conducting this study. I did not object to the criticism; what I did object to was that in these situations my attempts to explain the reasons behind my choices in the study were ignored. That is, the conversation became one-sided, as if I was expected to be deferent rather than engage in a productive, intellectual discussion about social research and qualitative methods. Usually I was able to steer the conversation back on track to get some of my interview questions answered from such a participant, but it was a struggle. I cannot know for sure, but I suspect that gender and class played a role in these situations in that perhaps the men who wanted to dominate the conversation and criticize my work without allowing me to respond may have felt threatened by me and so found ways to exert control and authority over the situation. As will be discussed in Chapter IV, being a taxi driver for many of the men is shameful and a job they hope will be temporary. Given such negative attitudes about their own job situations, it may be uncomfortable to then talk to a female about their work. I had hoped that my “student” status would allow the participants to see me as less powerful, and therefore less threatening, which may have been in the case with some participants, but with others it seemed a difficult barrier to overcome.

Gender and culture, specifically religion, was a challenge in that some Muslim men are not in the habit of approaching or talking to women. In some of their cultures, they could risk serious retaliation for speaking to a woman who is not a family member and/or a woman who is not accompanied by a man. This made for a difficult time in getting people to talk to me. Some of the drivers that I approached for an interview and declined may have done so due to this
gendered cultural practice, or they may have done so for a variety of other reasons. There was one man I talked with during observation, but was unable to interview. As we parted ways I thanked him for his time and said it was nice to meet him. I offered my hand to shake but he refused saying, “I’m Muslim” and then left. I inquired with others in the field about this and they informed me that some Muslims follow a practice in which a male cannot touch a woman who is not his wife or family member, which may have been the reason that the man refused to shake my hand.

Gender, in these instances of harassment, conversational dominance, cultural differences, and perhaps in other ways, influenced the research despite the fact that it was not a topic of study. Cross-gender research interactions have been explored by many scholars (c.f. Gurney, 1985; Sallee & Harris, 2011; Williams and Heikes, 1993), for such interactions can shape how a participant “does gender.” West and Zimmerman (1987) famously argued that traditional gender constructs wherein men “do dominance” and women “do deference” can reinforce and legitimate socio-behavioral and institutional constructs of “‘natural differences’” between men and women (p. 146). When an individual does not “do gender” in a traditional way, he or she is questioned rather than the constructs themselves. Because the kind of data collected depends partially on how participants perceive the researcher (Vidich, 1970), cross-gender research interactions become important to consider with regard to how the researcher and the participant(s) perform gender. For example, as Sallee and Harris (2011) found, male participants made assumptions about how they ought to present themselves to the female researchers and thus performed gender according to that perspective. While I was not actively studying gender, it is likely that some of the participants perceived me as not performing gender in a traditional way – I was an unchaperoned female spending time in predominantly male-occupied spaces and seeking the
attention of those men for research purposes. It may be that those who questioned my research, harassed me, or tried to turn me into a potentially romantic partner were un/consciously questioning me as an individual rather than the gender constructs themselves. It may be that these individuals behaved this way towards me in order to perform their masculinity and attempt to realign the traditional gender balance. While I tried to be sensitive to these different perspectives and tread carefully in the field, it was sometimes a great personal challenge to overcome and develop a positive rapport and eventually collect data. I was not successful in overcoming gender barriers in the instances of harassment, except for the fact that I returned to the field to try to meet other participants.

Aside from gender, being an outsider was a challenge on other fronts such as cultural issues. There seemed to be a general fear of outsiders among drivers that I sensed, and was later confirmed by the editor of the Hackney Monthly. Tensions around immigration, terrorism and a perceived connection with Islam in the U.S. make people like immigrant taxi drivers who happen to be Muslim on edge. Combine this with the injustices they face as part of their jobs (see Chapters IV and V) and one can understand why they may be wary of an outsider coming to talk with them, in particular to ask about with whom they communicate in the U.S. and abroad and how they go about this communication. I learned on a couple of occasions that people thought I worked for the Central Intelligence Agency or some other government agency. Despite these fears, over time I gained enough trust in some to be able to conduct interviews and gather data.

Language was also a barrier at times, especially with observation. Because there are drivers from so many different countries and villages therein, there was not a single dominant language that I could have started learning. I overheard many conversations during fieldwork observation, but not knowing Urdu, Arabic, or one of the many other languages being spoken, I
was unable to understand the content. Additionally, as noted earlier, some drivers may not have been as comfortable speaking in English as the ones that I did interview and so I may have missed interview opportunities due to this barrier. Nevertheless, all drivers in Chicago must have some competence with English in order to attain a chauffeur license and communicate with passengers so language was mostly a barrier in terms of observation.

Insider and/or outsider status is a concern that any researcher must face. Researchers must recognize their status as insiders or outsiders as an “ongoing interactional accomplishment” (Best, 2003, p. 909). During fieldwork I made attempts to minimize my outsider status when possible, such as by avoiding taking many notes while in the field if possible, expressing my interest in their culture and/or religion (e.g. learning about Ramadan), learning the common Arabic greeting that Muslims exchange, and exhibiting a willingness to answer questions about American culture when asked. Using my outsider status and perceived naivete to ask questions about the culture helped to build rapport with drivers and led to some successful interviews. Conversely, at times I was regarded as knowledgeable about American culture, particularly about higher education, and drivers would ask me about American customs, things a passenger said or did, and about pursuing higher education degrees at various Chicago-based institutions. I believe these conversations, though not directly relevant to my research questions, also contributed to positive rapport and trust building with some of the drivers.

In the next two chapters I discuss the results of my analysis. The first of these chapters relates to issues of community among the drivers and the second relates to issues of globalization. Following these next sections is a final chapter in which I summarize the findings as well as further discuss limitations to the study and future research possibilities.
IV. THEMATIC FINDINGS – COMMUNITY

Community emerged as an over-arching theme throughout the research. As discussed above, within the context of this study, community is understood to be a process of social interaction in which information, knowledge, beliefs, and practices are shared. It is an ongoing process that evolves as people continue to take part in its construction of meaning (Fernback, 2007). Community can be constructed through face-to-face interactions as well as mediated ones using digital technologies. In the case of Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers, I found that my participants often used a combination of face-to-face and communication technology to develop and maintain community. In this section I will discuss the ways that participants created and engaged in community, specifically in terms of building professional ties. Moreover, I will discuss the challenges participants faced in developing these connections, both within their profession and socially as a labor group within the city.

In this study, it is through the use of both strong and weak ties and through the use of networked technology that participants build and maintain community. The classic notion of strong/weak ties as developed by Granovetter (1973) characterizes people’s social relations as being more or less strong, weak, or absent. Strong ties are, for example, family members, weak ties are, for example, colleagues, and absent ties are, of course, non-existent. As Granovetter (1973) argues, weak ties in one’s social circle can be valuable for activities like job hunting because of their diffuse quality and ability “bridge” different groups. He imagines a community made up of cliques, or small groups of strong ties, and argues that if these cliques lack weak ties connecting them to others, maintaining a larger community is likely to break down, as Granovetter (1973) speculates happened in Boston’s West End community. But, when a community has a series of weak ties bridging the cliques, information, ideas, and
communications can be distributed quicker thereby facilitating its maintenance. By examining
the relationships between ties in individual networks, he argues, researchers can learn about
larger organizations like community. I apply the terms strong and weak ties loosely in order to
contextualize community among immigrant taxi drivers in Chicago. In terms of strong ties, I am
referring to ethnic-based ties and weak ties refer those outside one’s ethnic group.

While the present study’s focus was on community, it was through learning about
individual communication with various ties in one’s network that I learned about community.
Moreover, a focus of this study was on communication technologies and their role in community.
The capability of technology to facilitate community has been a topic of discussion among
scholars for some time. In recent years with the growth of the internet researchers have been
asking how new technology affects community. While some have argued that newer
technologies like the internet may threaten community (e.g. Meyrowitz, 1985; Putnam, 2000),
many others have argued that communities can flourish with the integrations of new technologies
(e.g. Baym, 2000; Jones, 1998; Rheingold, 1993) and this study falls within the latter line of
thinking. Communities exist in multimediated environments, though the notion of community
itself may change. After all, communities evolve (Fernback, 2007) and so must our thinking
about them. Physical proximity is not necessarily a determining factor of community any longer
and focusing on physical proximity leads researchers to make a priori assumptions about their
participants (Wellman, 1979). Groups of strong ties may flourish due to their likely use of
multiple media to stay connected (Haythornthwaite, 2001) despite physical distance. Weaker ties
that may have been dependent on external factors like proximity or social hierarchy are adapting
and overlapping.
Digital technologies have contributed to the rise of a network-based society in which communities exist in terms of person-to-person relationships rather than place-to-place and the growth of mobile technologies make this change all the more palpable (Wellman, Boase, & Chen, 2002). Wellman, Boase and Chen (2002) term this change “networked individualism” wherein social systems have transitioned from being bounded by hierarchical, homogenous groups to being organized as social networks. According to this argument, “Rather than relating to one group, people live and work in multiple sets of overlapped relationships, cycling among different networks. Their work and community networks are diffuse and sparsely knit—with vague, overlapping, social, spatial boundaries and many of the people they deal with do not know one another” (Wellman, Boase & Chen, 2002, p. 160).

Given the networked nature of modern life involving the internet, cell phones and mobility, nature of community has adapted enabling people to “personalize their own communities” (Wellman, Boase & Chen, 2002, p. 161) through networking and communication technologies. Understanding community to be a process and always evolving (Fernback, 2007) and that communication is crucial to its maintenance (Dewey, 1927), it is logical that communities adapt as new communication technologies emerge and become incorporated into the practice of community. For Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers, communities exist through a mixture of mediated technologies (e.g. cell phones, newspapers, internet) and face-to-face meetings (e.g. praying or eating together). Place, like other communities, is not a decisive factor, but specific places along with communication technologies did contribute to community and were particularly helpful in cohering this mobile, dispersed group. I did not ask specifically about the strength of participants’ ties, but I did learn about individual communication and
networking practices for most. In the following section I will discuss personal and professional aspects of community as I learned about them from this particular labor group.

A. Collaboration

Community among Chicago’s taxi drivers does not exist in the sense of a *Gemeinschaft* (or close knit) community that Tönnies ([1887] 2002) describes, but it does appear to exist in the way that Wellman, Boase, and Chen (2002) describe of personalization through networking technology. These personalized networks are also supported by face-to-face communication in strategically located places. In this first section I focus on the existence of community via media and the later sections focus on non-mediated practices of community development. Through learning about individual networks I have been able to learn about the larger professional community. Collaboration is a particular behavior that I have identified as contributing to community development among Chicago’s taxi drivers. For this professional community, collaboration relates to the interaction and sharing of knowledge, beliefs, and practices among its members.

Taxi drivers are among the most “plugged in” people in the city, many driving vehicles with computerized dispatch systems, Citizens’ Band (CB) radios, global positioning systems (GPS), cell phones, credit card machines, and sometimes even a laptop, iPod, and/or camera. Like many high-income, jet-setting workers, taxi drivers work in a mobile environment and need technology to help them perform their jobs more effectively. The difference is that taxi drivers stay in the city, escorting the high-income workers to places like train stations and airports that get them moving about the globe. Drivers in Chicago collaborate with their respective taxi companies and dispatch services as well as with each other toward the common goals of job efficiency, stress reduction and earning a living through daily communication in a mobile work
environment. The technologies that they use for this collaborative communication, however, are not always permitted. As such, I have labeled these kinds of mediated communication as either official or unofficial. The technologies used to communicate among this mobile population facilitate the maintenance of a professional community by helping each other do their jobs.

1. Official Collaboration

Official collaboration refers to communication that occurs between drivers and their companies or dispatching services. Larger taxi companies can afford to offer 24-hour dispatching services while small companies rely on the traditional citizens’ band (CB) radio, often only offered during regular business hours. Independent, medallion-owner drivers can pay a fee to affiliate with a large company and they will receive a variety of benefits such as paint to match the other cabs in the fleet as well as dispatching services. Such drivers who choose not to affiliate operate fully alone without dispatching services or CB radio and so they rely on street hails. The majority of drivers I interviewed had access to dispatching services either through the company they lease their vehicle from or that they affiliate with as a medallion owner.

I refer to this kind of collaboration between drivers and companies as “official” because it is legal for drivers to use. Collaborative communication through a dispatching service involves a CB radio and/or a technology that most participants called the “Gandalf.” All taxis have a CB radio and some have both a CB and a Gandalf. The CB functions on a radio frequency so that dispatchers and drivers can send voice messages to all people tuned into the frequency. It is a one-to-many communication device but few drivers spoke about using it. According to “Daniel,” editor of “Hackney Monthly” and former taxi driver, the CB was used more in the past for both collaboration and socializing. He recalled what it was like using the CB radio:
anybody could talk to anybody, so you had guys on the radio: ‘Hey, let’s go meet at this place and play some pool’ or something like that, and everybody could hear us, whoever wanted to go went…you had this communication back then, where a lot of people could talk to a lot of people and it kind of went away with more technology because along with the benefits of that [the radio], there was also a lot of noise, everybody talking at once so that was kind of problematic

Use of the radio has waned as newer official technology has been incorporated into the industry, such as the Gandalf. While the radio had benefits, it was difficult to hear specific messages at times with many people talking at once.

“Jonah,” a 40 year-old Ghanaian man, drove a cab without a Gandalf when we met at O’Hare and so he used the CB radio to get information about traffic and fares. He demonstrated its use by putting out a call into the microphone: “O’Hare information please,” he said. It took three tries to get a response when a voice grumbled through with an update on how the lines were moving at the airport taxi staging lot. It was difficult to understand the response, which is likely particularly difficult for non-native English speakers. Unfortunately, the company that Jonah drives for does not offer 24-hour dispatching as do larger companies and so when he works at night he said, “I have to cruise around” to locate fares. “It’s better if you have Gandalf,” he explained, “because it gives you more information.”

The Gandalf is a computerized data terminal attached to the dashboard of a cab (see Appendix C for photographs). It is not entirely clear why this technology is generally called a Gandalf, but it seems that a company called Gandalf Mobile Systems Incorporated originated the radio-based data communication terminals and was eventually bought out by a series of companies, ending with Mobile Knowledge who is now a leading producer of this technology. Mobile Knowledge is among the approved vendors in Chicago for credit card systems, which on Mobile Knowledge devices, is integrated with the mobile data terminal, or MDT (City of Chicago, n.d.). The occasional non-driver industry professional that I interviewed would refer to
“MDTs” when discussing the technology, but the drivers I met consistently called it by the more whimsical name, Gandalf. The technology works by using either radio frequencies or digital signals. “Paul,” the manager at a dispatch office that I visited, said their systems work on radio frequencies (some for talk and some for data transmission) because they are a large enough organization to be able to pay for these frequencies. Smaller dispatch companies or companies that do a lot of long distance or cross-state dispatching may prefer the more expensive wireless cards on each MDT device rather than buy an entire radio spectrum for only a few drivers or for drivers who will not remain local enough to stay in the same radio spectrum.

A driver logs into the Gandalf with a specific coding system based on his location in the city and will see a list of fares awaiting pick-up in that zone. Dispatchers in a remote location receive calls from customers and these requests are entered into the system from a desktop computer and placed in a queue for the respective zone where the customer is located. This queue is the list that a driver sees when he logs in from the vehicle. If a driver decides to accept a fare he will go through a series of prompts ending with the customer’s address. If a driver sees that all the fares already have assigned drivers, he will be placed in a queue in order to receive the next fare in that zone, assuming he does not drive out of the zone. All Gandalf systems that Paul’s company dispatches for contain GPS tracking so that when a driver leaves a zone, he will be knocked out of the previous zone and logged into the next one automatically. This allows the dispatching company to track where all the cabs are located and also prevents drivers from logging into an ideal zone (e.g. a wealthy neighborhood) to get into the fare queue and subsequently driving in other zones to pick up street hails while awaiting a fare in the ideal zone.

3 Although there is a small percentage of female taxi drivers in Chicago, I was unable to interview any of them. Therefore, all of my taxi driver participants were male and so for the remainder of the paper I will use masculine pronouns to refer to drivers for ease in reading.
When awaiting a fare in a particular zone a driver may continue to “cruise” the street looking for fares. Should he pick up a passenger from the street before getting a Gandalf fare, he will be logged out of the Gandalf queue when he starts the meter for the street passenger.

The dispatch office that I visited serves a number of taxi companies in the city and is remotely located at the edge of Chicago in an office park full of single story buildings that house other businesses like law offices and optometrists. Inside the dispatch office there is a small break area on one side, the manager’s office in the middle with glass walls, and a large open area on the other side containing about 10 work stations with four desks/cubicles at each station. Each individual desk has a desktop PC computer, a phone, and an employee to take calls. The physical structure is reminiscent of a network itself, each station being a node in this dispatching network. It is a clean, neat area and was abuzz with chatter, ringing phones, and fingers dancing across keyboards. At the end of the dispatch area there are a couple of large, flat screen TVs mounted on the far walls. One is to track which dispatchers are logged on and working and which are not, and another displays the GPS location of every logged in cab that they service. The GPS map is useless at a certain point, as Paul pointed out, because with so many cabs working, it winds up looking like a blob of small, car-shaped dots on a colorful map. The dispatchers in this office primarily take calls from customers and input these requests into their system, but they also help with taxi drivers that experience technical problems. For example, if the Gandalf is malfunctioning, people in Paul’s office can talk the driver through some troubleshooting to see if it is an individual problem or a system problem and possibly help the driver fix the issue.

The advantages of this centralized dispatching structure are reduced costs for taxi companies by outsourcing this service and the ability to “cross-train” employees for numerous taxi companies. The dispatch office contains no visual cues that I could see indicating which
employees or sections are for which taxi company. Though dispatchers tend to take calls primarily for one taxi company, they are trained to take calls for all companies if, for example, one company is getting a lot of calls and another is not.

The Gandalf is a collaborative technology because it enables the dispatching company to connect with drivers and subsequently to customers who have requested a taxi. It helps drivers do their jobs more efficiently and, ideally, earn more money by offering an additional link to customers rather than simply finding people on the street. However, the Gandalf does more than one-to-one dispatching as described above. Taxi companies can send out mass messages to its drivers through the Gandalf with important information like, “O’Hare needs taxis,” in case the airport is short on cabs. This technology, then, can be used for one-to-one communication as well as for one-to-many communication, which aids in industry efficiency by ensuring that cabs are available where they are needed in the city.

The manager, Paul, estimated that 95 percent of drivers get their business from “street hails” and the dispatching service is “complementary” to help them find other sources of income. He explained that his organization primarily dispatches taxis for events and neighborhood pick-ups. Some drivers, he said, are “heavy” users of dispatching, while others do not use it at all. Often drivers who prefer not to work downtown due to the high stress level will utilize the dispatch service in the outer neighborhoods to help them locate fares. Interestingly, then, despite all the technology in Paul’s office that is used to communicate with drivers, i.e. the Gandalf, the computer work stations, the telephones for dispatchers, etc., only function for a relatively limited amount of the taxi business in the city. Much of the work that drivers do may be low-tech street hails.
I found mixed feelings among the drivers about the Gandalf’s effectiveness. Some drivers prefer not to use it, like “Aakif,” a 35 year-old Sudanese man who has been driving a taxi for several years. He finds that it takes too long for customers to get out of their houses/apartments or they simply do not show up at all. For drivers like Aakif the low-tech option of cruising the streets is preferred. Many of the drivers I met had a neutral impression of the technology, mostly using it to locate fares in underserved areas of the city. There is a policy in Chicago that taxi drivers must attempt to pick up at least one fare per day (or seven per week) from underserved areas of the city, an attempt to improve taxi service to these areas (City of Chicago, 2008). Rather than cruise in these neighborhoods, drivers find these fares through the Gandalf. All attempted customer pick ups (whether the customer showed or not) are logged with the dispatching service. Paul explained that he provides the city with a monthly report of how much the drivers and companies he dispatches for are taking requests from underserved areas, which allows the city to track performance on this policy.

According to the 2008 version of the Public Chauffeurs Rules and Regulations, section VI, taxi drivers must meet this quota in order to renew their chauffeur licenses each year (City of Chicago, 2008). The underserved areas include those in the far north and far south ends of the city, as well as the western neighborhoods, the Grand Ballroom of Navy Pier, portions of McCormick Place (a convention center) and any pick up of a passenger participating in the Chicago Transit Authority Taxi Access Program4 (City of Chicago, 2008). Essentially, the underserved neighborhoods exclude the Loop (i.e. downtown), the neighborhoods close to and north of the Loop, and the two airports. According to this definition, there are quite a number of bustling neighborhoods included as an underserved area (such as the University of Illinois at

4 The Chicago Transit Authority Taxi Access Program (CTA-TAP) allows disabled passengers to ride in Chicago’s taxis for a reduced fare rate.
Chicago) to make meeting this quota requirement manageable in all likelihood. According to Bruno and Hewitt’s (2010b) analysis of driver residential zip codes, most drivers live in underserved neighborhoods and so drivers may be able to meet their daily quota near the beginning of end of their shifts close to home.

Other drivers, like “Babu,” are passionate about using the Gandalf. Babu is a 36 year-old man from India who has been driving a taxi in and around Chicago on and off for four or five years. On the day we met his leased cab did not have a Gandalf system, but he said the taxi company he drives for plans to install them soon. He exclaimed, “I love it [Gandalf]!” when recalling his use of the technology in the past. In comparing it with the old radio technology he explained that with the radio, the “dispatcher is commander” but with the Gandalf “satellite is commander.” In other words, the Gandalf is more democratic in assigning fares to drivers, an advantage noted by many of the drivers I met. When a human being is assigning fares to drivers s/he may favor friends by assigning them ideal fares (e.g. to an airport) and assigning less desirable fares (e.g. short distances) to other drivers. Since the Gandalf works by assigning fares to drivers based on their position in a queue, it minimizes the potential for favoritism.

Interestingly, the seasons in Chicago can also influence preference for Gandalf use. “Alek,” a 25 year-old rookie driver from Russia, mentioned that at the time we met (end of November 2010) he found himself relying more on the Gandalf to find fares than a few months prior due to the colder weather and less people walking the streets.

The official collaboration that occurs via the Gandalf or the CB radio is not as personalized as we shall see that it is with cell phones. Drivers cannot personalize the communication between that they engage in with these technologies, unless they use the radio to communicate directly with a dispatcher, which seems to be uncommon. While the official
collaborative technologies support a professional collaborative network of mobile drivers, they are less effective with supporting a professional collaborative community of drivers and drivers have little control over these devices and the communication that occurs with them. That is, information is exchanged (mostly one way/top down), but reciprocal interaction is minimal and the communication that occurs does not appear to include beliefs and practices. Perhaps the CB radio, with the ability to put out social calls as Daniel described, had the potential for building community, but the move to MDTs minimizes that potential from an official device. Likely, this lack of communion, as it were, is also because the official methods of collaboration support a hierarchical system wherein dispatchers and taxi companies are gatekeepers of information that gets passed down to drivers. Moreover, these are city-approved devices further characterizing them as hierarchical. The community supported using these technologies is an imposed community in which the city and the taxi companies establish the boundaries. Smaller, more organically formed communities appeared in conjunction with cell phone usage among immigrant drivers, which will be discussed further in the next section. Official communication devices, then, are imposed and the unofficial devices are personal choices. Despite their official quality, the Gandalf and CB radio provide valuable information for drivers and, when used in conjunction with a more personalized network device like a cell phone, drivers can develop a strong sense of the city’s movements and rhythms as they relate to acquiring fares.

2. Unofficial Collaboration

Ask most Chicagoans about taxi drivers in the city and the responses will likely include a comment that drivers are always on their cell phones. The cell phone is taxi drivers’ main tool for unofficial collaboration. Use of a cell phone while driving is a violation of the rules and regulations for public chauffeurs in Chicago (City of Chicago, 2008); it is considered a risk to
public safety. Nevertheless, many drivers do use their cell phones while driving and on work breaks. Since it is not a permitted communication technology for the study participants, I have deemed the collaboration that occurs via cell phones as “unofficial.” As a result of this city policy and drivers’ fears of losing their public chauffeur licenses (and, hence, their jobs) it is possible that some participants were not entirely honest with me when asked about their cell phone use on the job. Despite this possible obstacle, I did gather interesting information about cell phone-based collaboration on the job.

The general pattern of heavy to light cell phone use seemed to depend on a driver’s experience. The more experienced the driver, the less often he said he used the cell phone at work. “Abdul,” a Pakistani man in his 40’s and veteran driver, prefers not to use his cell phone at work because it is not permitted and because he does not find it helpful. Like many experienced drivers noted to me, Abdul has observed that if one driver on the phone recommends a place to pick up good fares, then every other driver in contact with him will go there. Abdul has found in these situations, that by the time he arrives the fares are gone and so he instead relies on his experience to find fares. Similarly, “Shahzad,” a 50 year-old Pakistani man and also veteran driver, rarely uses the cell phone for work, relying on his experience and his mental map of the city – a GPS system he described as being “in my head.”

An important reason for talking on a cell phone while driving is that less experienced drivers are seeking work advice such as directions, tips on where to find fares, and traffic updates. A few drivers also said they use the phone to socialize on the job (companionship is important in a lonely job such as this). For example, “Zak,” a rookie driver from Somalia in his 20’s, recalled that during his first two months on the job he often used his phone to get directions from friends/colleagues. After that time he knew the city well enough that he transitioned from
asking directions to getting fare advice. He makes phone inquiries for tips on “small events” (e.g. a club letting out) that will have taxi customers. He said the Gandalf provides information on “big events” (taxis needed at the airports) though mass messages, but his phone network provides tips on smaller, more local activities throughout the city.

Similarly, “Zayd,” a Pakistani fellow in his 30's, exclaimed “Thank God for the cell phone!” when I asked him about using the phone at work. Zayd had been driving a taxi for five months when we met at O’Hare and his cell phone has been a huge help to him while learning the job. The taxi he leases does not have a Gandalf, only a CB radio, and so the cell phone is his most useful tool. He thought about a time, not too long ago, when cell phones were not as ubiquitous as they are today and he said, “I learned [the job] the easy way,” since he has the advantage of being able to call a friend for directions and other kinds of help on the job. A few rookie drivers marveled at the thought of how drivers used to learn the city streets without a cell phone connecting them to experienced colleagues when in need of assistance. As difficult as the early learning period can be for new taxi drivers, Zayd says he does not want a GPS device “because I won’t be able to remember [the streets].” He is determined to learn the city by heart rather than through GPS technology, but having access to colleagues via cell phone while he learns is critical for him. This collaborative strategy of using the phone for work advice helps with improving drivers’ incomes as well as job efficiency by getting cabs where they are needed, and aids in the challenging first few months for new taxi drivers.

Occasionally taxi drivers use their cell phones to collaborate with other workers as well. “Thamar,” a middle-aged Sudanese man recalled a day when he dropped off a male passenger at a downtown hotel and then picked up a woman going to the airport from the same hotel. As he pulled away he noticed the woman looking at a man’s “purse,” as Thamar called it, and he
snatched it from her realizing it belonged to the man he just dropped off. Upon inspecting the purse he saw many $100 bills and credit cards he had “never seen before.” While driving to the airport, Thamar used his cell phone to call the hotel and ask them to find the man, which they did. After dropping off the woman he returned to the hotel, rather than picking up another customer, in order to give the man his lost belongings. When Thamar pulled up he was greeted with “applause” from the man, the doorman, and some hotel staff, and apparently the man started giving out $100 bills to all those who helped him retrieve his bag. In this case Thamar collaborated with other service worker via his cell phone in order to do his job more effectively.

Taxi drivers are, unfortunately, often victims of violence in Chicago and being on the phone with another driver can be a comfort as well as provide potentially life-saving assistance. “Saleem,” a 36 year-old Pakistani man, is a co-owner of Indo-Pak Palace and was a taxi driver in Chicago for eight years before opening the restaurant with his brothers a few years ago. He told me about a time when a customer pointed a gun at his head from the back seat while he was driving, demanding his money and cell phone. Saleem happened to be on the phone with his brother, also a taxi driver, who had an idea of where Saleem was and, upon hearing the incident over the phone, was able to find his brother. Meanwhile, Saleem intentionally crashed the car into a parked vehicle and escaped, and the attacker ran off. The owner of the parked vehicle ran out hysterical. Saleem explained what happened and asked if he could use her phone to call the police. The woman agreed, but warned that the police will not come. The attack happened in one of Chicago’s south side neighborhoods, a largely African American, poor, often violent part of town. Saleem’s brother arrived a few minutes later to help, but he said they waited two hours for the police. By being on the phone at the right time the brother was able to aid with stress/anxiety reduction upon finding Saleem, making the cell phone a collaborative work device.
Interestingly, among those drivers that do talk with colleagues while driving, they say they talk to the same people. At first I envisioned this as working in teams, little mobile nodes of two or three men helping each other during their shifts. But, while talking with “Radhi,” a Sudanese driver in his 30’s, he mentioned that, “I cannot live without three-way calling.” When asked to elaborate he explained that he will talk on the phone with two drivers at the same time, and those two drivers are on the phone with two others, and so on. Rather than a small network of about three people, it seems some drivers form a larger collaborative network – a kind of elastic, mobile network of taxis covering Chicago. Radhi’s strategy for using this network to his advantage is to call in when he needs tips on locating fares, traffic, etc. He said that at the beginning of his shift and during rush hour periods few drivers are calling each other because they are busy with customers. Radhi and other drivers using their phones in this way are making their phone work as a supplementary source of professional information to increase job efficiency and their incomes.

However, drivers need not necessarily rely on each other or dispatchers to locate fares. Rashid Temuri (@ChicagoCabbie), a veteran cab driver, joined Twitter about a year ago to try to bridge the gap between drivers and customers (Cheng, 2012; McLaughlin, 2011). In the process, he has developed a following of customers who will tweet him directly to arrange rides, follow his location in the city via Google Latitude, and Temuri also offers fare discounts to customers via Twitter. As an added bonus, he offers free wi-fi to iPhone and iPad users in the vehicle (Cheng, 2012). In this case, Temuri skips the dispatching service as well as collaboration with other drivers in order to communicate directly with customers via social media on this smartphone. He is unique in his ability to connect with customers, likely due to a combination of
technological skill and access as well as personality, and so his story is not a common one in the industry from what I learned in the field.

The cell phone is also a tool for socializing on the job. Driver, “Jalil,” a Kenyan man in his 30’s, said that while he uses his cell phone for work advice at times, he primarily uses it for socializing, leaving the Gandalf for work communication. “I get bored…I get sleepy,” he explained, and his smartphone’s social capabilities for talk as well as internet browsing and social networking (while parked) help him to stay awake. Similarly, when I asked “Lisimba,” a 27 year-old Kenyan man and taxi driver of three years, about his cell phone use, he hesitated, but then proceeded to explain that he is always on the phone because it helps him feel more alert while driving. Driving a taxi is a lonely job despite being around people all day/night. Taxi drivers rarely form relationships with customers and Luedke (2009) has found that in the rare cases when drivers have tried, the relationship often does not last. These issues of isolation will be discussed in greater detail below. Having access to a network of colleagues not only aids in drivers’ work efficiency and profits earning, it also helps with the psychological strains of a lonely job by enabling them communicative access to friends and colleagues, such as others might have at the proverbial water cooler or on a social networking site.

The cell phone, then, is a driver’s tool of access to a collaborative community of colleagues while on the road. Not every driver is plugged into a large group such as Radhi described, but all are connected in some way. As discussed above, cell phone use while driving is a violation of city policy and a driver risks losing his chauffeur’s license, and therefore his job, if he were discovered. It is possible that participants were not entirely honest with me about the extent of their cell phone use in order to protect themselves. However, based on my time spent in
the field, I sensed that for the most part they were honest about cell phone use and it was a matter of experience on the job that affected level of use.

This unofficial collaborative device allows those who use it to supplement or simply disregard official collaborative communication devices in order to do their jobs better. Being at the bottom of the industry hierarchy (see Chapter V for more details), the cell phone gives drivers who need it a way to empower themselves with information. As Ling and Horst (2011) argue, the cell phone has the capacity to help users, intentionally or not, rearrange existing power structures, though not necessarily eradicate them. The authors are speaking more specifically about gendered power structures, particularly in the global south, but the concept holds true in the case of Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers. My participants were not changing the existing hierarchy in which the city, the taxi companies, dispatching companies, taxi garages, etc. are all a step above drivers. But, my participants who used cell phones for work were shaking up the system by empowering themselves with communication and information despite their relatively powerless position in the industry (see Chapter V for a more in depth discussion of power in the industry).

The device aids in the development of a collaborative community by allowing drivers to share personalized and timely information and knowledge as well as beliefs and practices. They share information on directions and fares, experienced and knowledgeable colleagues help rookies learn the ins and outs of the job, and drivers share thoughts on professional beliefs and practices. It also facilitates companionship among members of this mobile, dispersed professional community. Interactions via the cell phone are more reciprocal than they are with the Gandalf and the contacts are of the driver’s choosing. In other words, drivers organically develop these smaller communities within the larger taxi community through friends and other
people they meet on the job at restaurants and other places of immobility. Communication through imposed technologies does not always meet drivers’ needs and so these smaller groups work together to push against those restrictive forms of communication and community, through they do not entirely change the system. Additionally, as I explain later in this chapter, there is some ethnic isolation among the drivers leading me to believe that the ties formed via cell phones are relatively strong. As a result, in subsequent chapters I question the extent to which there is a strong labor community of drivers made up of both strong and weak ties.

3. Personalization of Information

Official and unofficial forms of communication do not operate independent of each other for the drivers. Rather, drivers select which tools to use based on personal preference and context. The Gandalf is most useful for formal dispatching and mass messages sent to drivers from taxi companies. In other words, the Gandalf is an official device intended for mass communication and interaction between message senders and message receivers through the device is limited. It supports an imposed, hierarchical community. The cell phone on the other hand, for those that choose to use it to collaborate, provides more personalized and up-to-the-minute information about activities in the city that impact taxi drivers. For example, drivers can learn about current traffic conditions from the airport and adjust their route accordingly. The cell phone in this case supports the creation and maintenance of more natural and personal forms of community within the larger, hierarchical taxi community.

Moreover, for those with the right technology, the cell phone acts as a GPS device should a driver need point-to-point directions. In discussing the cell phone/Gandalf dynamic with “Moutasim,” a 28 year-old Senegalese man, he pointed out that the two technologies are “related, but you can do more with the cell phone.” He uses his cell phone for GPS directions.
While a driver can contact the dispatch for driving directions, the cell phone makes the same task easier and faster. To get directions from the company Moutasim explained that he has to code in a specific location number into the Gandalf, and then dispatch tells him which channel to turn the radio/Gandalf to for voice communication. If a driver is looking for directions then he will have to wait for someone at the other end of the radio to be available to flip through a map/find one online and relay driving directions. Getting directions on the phone, whether via phone navigation or from a more experienced colleague, skips all of those in between steps required by the official technology. Moreover, having access to a GPS can help improve earnings. Babu, who is passionate about using the Gandalf though his leased cab did not have one at the time we met, has benefitted from having GPS capabilities on his phone. On occasion while in the queue at the airport terminal a customer needs to go to a destination (e.g. the suburbs) that the driver ahead of Babu does not know and does not have GPS technology. In such a situation, Babu has been able to jump in front of that driver because, although he may not know how to get to the destination, he will be able to find it using his phone.

As Moutasim summed up, “You can get more information from the cell phone” than one can from the Gandalf. Certainly the official communication tools are far from useless to drivers. However, based on participants’ stories it is clear that access to both official and unofficial communication tools enhances drivers’ sense of productivity by providing access to a variety of information sources, allowing them to best navigate between the imposed and the personal communities that help them do their job.

4. Managing City Spaces

The taxi driver community exists within the larger urban society of Chicago and, in fact, is dependent on it. As such, it is important to examine how members of the taxi driver
community relate to and work within Chicago as a city and a work environment. All of the communication technologies to which drivers have access help them do their job by providing information that enables drivers to strategize how they manage Chicago’s spaces. Many drivers described their routine for beginning their shifts: log into the Gandalf to check for fares at the beginning of the shift, cruise downtown looking for fares, go to airport or some other strategic location when a break is needed. “Aram,” a middle aged Syrian man, for example, begins his shift by logging into the Gandalf and looking for fares near his home. Interestingly, he explained that the majority of cab drivers live in the underserved areas of the city so he says the best strategy (at least his strategy) to fulfill the daily quota of underserved fares is to sign into the Gandalf when he starts his shift driving at home. Aram says he often finds people there in need of a ride to work. Similarly, “Nick,” an African man (he was vague about from which country he comes precisely) in his 40’s, starts his shift by logging into his Gandalf. However, Nick said he tends to start downtown by the hotels looking for business people needing very early morning rides to the airports or work. He will then use the Gandalf again later in the day to get his daily fare from an underserved area, but explained that he tends not to use the Gandalf much throughout his shift.

“Alder,” an Algerian man in his 30’s, expressed that he spends about 80 percent of his shifts working downtown (primarily business and tourist neighborhoods) and the other 20 percent working in the north side (primarily wealthy residential neighborhoods). These two regions (downtown and north side) tend to be the busiest areas for cab business given the dense population of business people, tourists, and wealthy residents and, as such, are the areas near to which drivers like to stay. After all, dropping off a passenger in one of these neighborhoods means that a driver is likely to find another fare rather quickly nearby. Having to drive outside of
these two regions may mean a driver will not find another fare in the outlying neighborhood and thus use up precious time and fuel. This is likely why there are underserved areas of the city and the 30 underserved fares/month policy is meant to help offset this pattern. This downtown and north side neighborhood preference seems to be a relatively new development, as Luedke (2009) found that older drivers recalled being able to earn a living primarily working in Chicago’s south side during the 1970s, but the area is now considered underserved.

This socio-economic urban space dynamic plays a part in more than simply where drivers prefer to spend their working hours. It also influences the location of taxi driver-serving businesses such as the restaurants where I spent many field research hours. The three restaurants where I conducted fieldwork are located just a few neighborhoods north of downtown in the north side area giving the drivers who frequent these restaurants easy access to the most profitable neighborhoods while breaking for a meal and/or prayer. Moreover, they are located in areas where parking is relatively easy and, ideally, free for drivers. In fact, Indo-Pak Palace and Falafel Plus have the easiest parking, a feature many drivers cited as an important reason that they dine there while working. Indus Valley has metered street parking and a small lot in the back. Often when I arrived, especially if it was during a prayer time, I would see cabs lined up along the street with flashing lights and many would take their food to-go, more so than at the other two locations from my observation.

Other strategies for managing the city’s spaces include personal relationships. “Akbar,” a 56 year-old Pakistani man, strategizes his trips to the airports to times when he needs a long break and when his wife and children, who live in the U.S., will be available to talk on the phone – usually around 7:30 p.m. Akbar, in other words, strategizes his placement in the city based on the best time for him to break and contact his family. A number of other drivers used a similar
strategy, whether or not their families live locally or internationally. The cell phone, then, is more than just a work device; it can also be an intimate technology that facilitates the maintenance of strong ties as easily as it does weak ties.

Taxi drivers, it seems, view the city as divided up into zones of more or less profit. The Gandalf encourages such division with each company assigning zones to various neighborhoods. It is also a prime resource for obtaining underserved fares and helping to alleviate an imbalance in the amount of service provided to certain parts of the city. The cell phone does not come with the requirement to understand a zoning system for the city the way that the Gandalf does. Rather, it allows flexibility with regard to obtaining information based on a driver’s location in the city. Moreover, it facilitates the maintenance of personal and professional relationships regardless of spatial positioning. Nevertheless, a number of drivers will strategize their positioning in the city based on the best times to call family on the cell phone. Drivers prefer to break in strategically located places, such as restaurants and airports, that provide them with easy access to desirable fares once their break is completed.

5. Other Collaborative Technology

The discussion about collaboration thus far has centered on newer technologies – cell phones and the Gandalf. However, taxi drivers in Chicago also have a more traditional collaborative technology available to them: a newspaper called, “Hackney Monthly.” It is a print and online a monthly newspaper that serves Chicago’s public chauffeurs (including taxi drivers) as well as the general public. The editor, “Daniel,” started the paper after 9/11 as a way to centralize information in the industry. He explained, “I saw the need to facilitate communication in the industry and I saw the opportunity to actually make it into a business, something that would be sort of self-sustaining… There was definitely a need for communication at the time.”
Daniel, who was a taxi driver at the time of 9/11, heard many rumors and conspiracy theories about the industry while waiting in the taxi lot at O’Hare and he noticed that individual restaurants would pass out flyers with coupons to dine there as would medallion owners pass out announcements about the need for a driver. *Hackney Monthly* was born out this need to have a single place to collect information, to professionally investigate and vet rumors that may be discussed among the drivers, as well as to provide relevant stories and information to the industry. As Daniel elaborated:

I was a driver so obviously I was pro-driver issues, but given a lot of the things that were going on at the time, there were just a lot of problems that the industry as a whole was having. It [the paper] was something that was open to everybody who had an interest in the industry – drivers, owners, affiliations, the city. Anybody who had something to say, this was a place for them to say it. If they had a problem with something I had written, I published it because that was the point of the paper – to be an open forum for the whole industry.

About ten years later this publication remains a relevant information source for drivers and aids with driver collaboration in a variety ways. For example, the paper publishes medallion sales prices, a monthly events calendar, and investigates driver issues such as following cases of victimized drivers, the introduction of new technology, industry policy changes, etc. The events calendar is a source of pride for Daniel. He recalls designing *Hackney Monthly’s* calendar based on his own experience as a driver:

We organize our calendar of events based how many delegates are at a particular convention. I designed the calendar myself because, when I was driving back then, there were calendars out there that people would put out, maybe different cab companies and affiliations, and I didn’t like them. I wanted to know…‘I am driving right now [so] I want to know what’s happening and where it’s happening.’ I designed a calendar way back in 2002 to be structured the way I, as a driver, would find it most useful based on the number of delegates and then, for events that had show times, it was based on order of time.

In addition to highlighting specific events that could provide good business, the newspaper has also been successful in advocating for drivers’ rights. Early on in the paper’s history they had gotten complaints from drivers about the state of the restrooms at O’Hare’s taxi staging lot – no
hot water, no soap, broken toilet seats, and general filth. Daniel investigated, visiting the bathrooms, taking pictures, testing the lack of hot water, and called the city for a reaction to the situation. However, the city representatives at the time did not respond to or fix the problems. As a result, Daniel published a front-page article about the filthy restrooms, complete with pictures, ensuring that the paper was delivered to as many people, including city officials, as possible. Not surprisingly, the bathrooms had hot water and new soap dispensers a couple days after the story was published. Daniel recalled:

They [taxi drivers] could call and complain, but so what? Nobody was doing anything to solve their problems…And when we put out that publication, everything got fixed…Every month, every alderman gets a copy of our paper, the mayor gets a copy of our paper, the Commissioner [of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection] gets a copy of our paper…We make sure that people know about these things. And the more important an issue, the more likely we are to make sure that it gets in the right people’s hands. The advantage of Hackney Monthly over other newspapers in the city is its focus on the taxi industry. After all, the Chicago Tribune is unlikely to care much about the taxi driver bathrooms at O’Hare, much less make it a front-page story. The paper, then, serves a tool for drivers to have their professional concerns and issues heard and published in a way that other publications in the city are unlikely to address.

The print version of the paper is distributed at sites throughout the city where drivers will find them such as restaurants, airports, and city offices. There is also an online version of the paper and Daniel spoke about implementing a text message service to get updates to drivers, such as warnings about a robbery. A driver can text “TAXI” to a specific number and then receive an update. It was not clear how much, if anything, this text service would cost an individual. Daniel also used to have an AM radio show for the paper, but it was difficult for drivers to receive the signal, especially downtown. At the time we met he was working on starting an internet radio show to which drivers can listen either via computer or by calling a
number on their cell phones. I did not get a clear sense of how much readers take advantage of these additional distribution methods, but I was able to observe the popularity of the print version of the newspaper. While at the airports and restaurants I often observed drivers reading *Hackney Monthly* if I happened to be there on a day that the paper was delivered. Copies of the free paper rarely sat around long at these locations, seemingly scooped up by interested readers. I did not have an opportunity to ask drivers about the paper. Observation, however, suggests that the paper is valued among its intended audience given that large stacks of the paper did not go ignored.

*Hackney Monthly* helps to establish a community among taxi drivers given its role in publicizing driver-specific issues. Community, in this sense, is “imagined” in the way that Anderson (2006) describes. As Innis (2007) shows occurred throughout history, written records and print generally are sources of power for small communities to be “written into large states” (p. 30). Newspapers specifically empower readers with information and, in the case of the U.S. Revolution, helped to unite the colonies against their enemy – a power recognized in the subsequent establishment of the Bill of Rights guaranteeing the freedom of the press (Innis, 2007). As discussed in Chapter II, newspapers played an important role in the formation of the imagined community of nation in the newly formed and growing United States by “weav[ing] invisible threads of connection among their readers” (Starr, 2004, p. 24) who were increasingly spread out across a vast land as the country expanded west. Much later during the Industrial Revolution in the U.S. progressives like Charles Horton Cooley explored the value of communication technologies, such as newspapers, for their capacity to bring into one’s imagination previously unknown persons (Quandt, 1970). Newspapers, Cooley believed, “promoted a sense of community among people unknown to one another” (Quandt, 1970, p. 60).
Hackney Monthly serves a similar function by providing relevant information to a group of people united by (in this case) a type of work and, importantly, providing information to a group of more than 7,000 mobile people who cannot all know each other. Yet, the paper brings colleagues into each other’s imagination by publishing the triumphs and tragedies that occur among drivers as well as practical information such as regulatory updates and event schedules that can lead to increased incomes. Prior to 9/11 industry-related information was scattered and often based on rumor. By establishing a publication dedicated to collecting, investigating, and reporting on these stories the editor and his co-workers began the process of “weav[ing] invisible threads” (Starr, 2004, p. 24) connecting readers largely unknown to each other and building an imagined community of taxi drivers.

6. Competition

Hackney Monthly provides a form of indirect collaboration given its role in publicizing each month about driver issues and concerns that can help them do their jobs better whereas the cell phone and Gandalf provide more direct collaboration with daily information updates that help drivers on the road. But, driving a taxi is not all about working together. With collaboration is bound to come its opposite: competition. While I heard stories from numerous drivers about the competition they face on the road, I was unable to collect much data on the topic. “Diving” is one form of competition. Diving refers to the (prohibited) practice of “picking up or attempting to pick up passengers by means of by-passing a Cab Line or authorized airport staging area” (City of Chicago, 2008, p. 5). The August 2010 issue of Hackney Monthly has a front-page story discouraging taxi drivers from diving, and describes the damaging effect that it has on other drivers. For taxi drivers, especially those working on a lease, every minute counts to earn money. When another driver cuts the line to take a fare from the waiting taxis, it costs those waiting
drivers money and time. When I asked drivers about “diving” they were unfamiliar with the term itself, but all were familiar with the practice. Presumably, diving could also occur on the street, as, for example, “Mehtaar” described. Mehtaar is a Tunisian man in his 20’s and a relatively new driver. When I asked him about competition on the road he gasped, “Yes, it’s very tough,” especially downtown. They compete downtown, he explained, by swooping in at the last second to steal a customer. For example, Mehtaar described a time when he was at a red light and a customer appeared on the other side of the light. He signaled the customer that he was coming, but he had to cross to the next lane to get there when the light changed. Then a cab came in the right lane and when the light changed, the other cab rushed over and stole the customer. It is possible that the other cab did not know that Mehtaar had already signaled to the customer, but given the seeming ubiquity of diving, swooping, or whatever one calls it one cannot help but associate the behavior with stealing. “Ma’awiya,” an Algerian man in his 20’s, said he once confronted a driver who dove in front of him as asked why he had done this. Ma’awiya recalled that the other driver told him, “‘Everyone does it.’”

It is a cut-throat business and despite all the technological capability for collaboration, it appears that fierce competition also exists, adding to the stresses of an already challenging job. The pattern seems to be that groups of friends and/or ethnic groups will team up to collaborate, but on the street there is more competition than collaboration.

In addition to this fare stealing, there also appears to be some perceived cross-ethnic group competition, or perhaps it is simply rookie-veteran competition. “Thamar,” a middle-aged Sudanese man and experienced driver, believes there is “something going on” wherein suddenly there are a lot of new Somali and Nigerian taxi drivers who, he thinks, do not speak English well and yet manage to obtain chauffeur licenses after a rather grueling two weeks of taxi school and
a series of exams, all of which are in English. Thamar and others who shared this same distrust may be seeing through a cross-ethnic lens, or they may be seeing it through a rookie/veteran lens, or both. Often participants were reluctant to talk in detail about socio-cultural divides and so some of this data is incomplete.

Several months into fieldwork I started to observe what I thought to be a certain amount of ethnic isolation at the restaurants. In order to find out more and see if I was correct, I began asking participants about the cultural groups with which they communicate while on the job and/or socially. These findings are discussed in greater detail at the end of this chapter, but my questions sometimes led to a bit of hesitation among some drivers, as if they were reluctant to admit that one prefers to work with and socialize with people of their same ethnicity. Sometimes the topic came up organically, as it did with Thamar, and in these cases the participant was usually bold in his opinions and assertions.

Both collaboration and competition among drivers indicate the existence of community, all be it a mixture of imagined and tight-knit communities. Put another way, this labor community is made up of both strong and weak ties and it is communication technology like cell phones, the Gandalf, and Hackney Monthly that connect the individuals in the group. Community, being a process of social interaction wherein members share information, knowledge, beliefs, and practices, exists in many forms including small close-knit groups and larger “imagined” ones, as well as a combination of these. Physical proximity is not a requirement, but communication is. Access to communication technologies that enable communication across time and space give communities flexibility in how they evolve and stay connected. Awareness of the community’s existence and of members in the group is also a requirement of community, and this is achieved through communication, be it mediated or in
person. While not all communication technology used by Chicago’s taxi drivers are as successful with regard to facilitating fellowship (e.g. top-down, official collaborative technologies), others such as cell phones and Hackney Monthly are important for more naturally building and maintaining awareness of the community and its members.

With so many drivers and non-driver industry professionals it is impossible that everyone in the industry can know one another. Hackney Monthly has established its role in weaving together an imagined community of drivers and non-driver professionals by publishing information that makes them aware of each other and raises issues relevant to the community. The Gandalf and other dispatching systems provide a more direct and daily form of communication connect drivers with each other, with the city and the passengers, as well as with dispatchers. The cell phone is an even more direct form of communication that provides personalized information from a personal source rather than an institutional one, but also facilitates communication between a driver and a garage or other supervisor when the official technology fails. Because of the mobile nature of their work, face-to-face communication and community building are not always possible and the technologies discussed in this section facilitate the communication that establishes and maintains community.

B. Im/Mobility

Mobility among Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers is a characteristic of daily life that cannot be ignored. Mobilities research, discussed earlier, lends some insight on how to think about this topic. Researchers in this field argue that the world is increasingly mobile and through a focus on communication and transportation, they explore the structure and behavior of economic and social life given these changes in time and space (Urry, 2007). Mobility can be both physical and social and is understood to represent a certain kind of power, for not everyone
has the legal right or financial capability to be mobile (Urry, 2007). Immigrant taxi drivers embody the deeply mobile nature of social life today – from the physical mobility of migration and chauffeuring passengers throughout the city to the hope of social mobility by earning enough money as a driver to move on to other careers (see more on social mobility below). Communities evolve and adapt in order to persist when their members are spread across space and time. Important reasons that they can adapt are flexible, accessible, and mobile communication technologies, like cell phones. Global mobility among the participants will be discussed in the following chapter. In this section, I explore local mobility, but more specifically local places of slowed movement given their role in contributing to the growth and maintenance of community among Chicago’s taxi drivers. Immobility and places of slowed movement are equally valued sources of research as is mobility itself within the mobilities paradigm because these contrasting concepts and spaces actually support each other.

As Urry (2007) argues, mobility is dependent on vast networks of immobility to support it. I found that places of immobility of slowed movement were also rich spaces for the development and maintenance of community. Places of slowed movement, whether directly related to the business or not, are essential to drivers for developing contacts. The restaurants where I spent a lot of time doing fieldwork provide an immobile place, close to downtown, for drivers to eat, pray, socialize, and get news. Some drivers spend an hour or more at these locations, while others simply order food to-go and get back on the road. As an outsider, these immobile places felt like another world far from Chicago with unfamiliar languages, smells, foods, and media, and seeing an American or a woman walk through the front doors is uncommon, let alone an unaccompanied American woman. These immobile places are designed for a specific mobile clientele.
“Abdul,” a Pakistani driver in his 40’s and co-owner of Indo-Pak Palace spoke about designing the restaurant with taxi drivers in mind. In fact, at the time of our meeting, he had hopes of expanding to the second floor of the building and installing pool tables to create a recreation space for customers. Abdul also said they offer free wi-fi to customers, as do many other taxi restaurants that he knows of, but since customers wanting to use the internet generally bring their own wireless cards for their laptops it winds up not being used too much.

Unfortunately, about nine months after this interview the restaurant was seemingly under new ownership. The décor and food appeared to remain the same, along with the mosque\(^5\) in the basement. The only significant difference (other than new employees, save for a busgirl) was the installation of a small convenience store at the front of the dining area selling international calling cards (which are used with cell phones to call loved ones in other countries), pain relievers, copy/print services, cigarettes, herbs and seeds (good for digestion according to the man running the counter), scented oils, and candies that I had not seen before. These items for sale are particularly targeted for taxi drivers given the physical and mobile demands of their job.

Prior to the apparent change in ownership, Indo-Pak Palace had calling cards, scented oils, and pain relievers for sale at the cashier station where customers order food.

All three of the restaurants sell international calling cards, regionally ethnic foods, have parking available or nearby, have a mosque for those wanting to pray, and all three served iftar dinners during Ramadan in 2010\(^6\). Additionally, all of the restaurants have televisions that often were tuned to Al-Jazeera (Arabic), GeoTV, or Express News (Pakistani news channels).

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\(^5\) At first I perceived these spaces as more generalized “prayer areas,” thinking that a mosque was more of a traditional building dedicated solely to worship. However, the drivers with whom I spoke about these spaces in the restaurants referred to them as “mosques.” As such, I refer to these spaces in the restaurants as mosques.

\(^6\) Ramadan is a holy month in Islam when Muslims fast each day from sunrise to sunset. When they break the fast each evening, it is known as iftar.
Occasionally CNN was on, but usually that was when I was the only or one of very few customers in the restaurant, making it seem like a courtesy to me more than a general practice. The newspapers usually available include Hackney Monthly, Pakistan News, Urdu Times, the English language Pakistan Abroad, as well as flyers about taxi companies needing drivers, Muslim organizations, and occasionally an advertisement for a local fitness club. When I asked Daniel, editor of Hackney Monthly, about the paper’s distribution he said, “We go where the cab drivers go” and listed the immobile places where they leave copies of the paper each month and these restaurants were among those places. Customers who stay to eat and did not have a friend(s) to talk with in person would usually watch television, read a newspaper, or talk on the phone. I observed many drivers, particularly at Indo-Pak Palace and Falafel Plus, meet friends at the restaurant to dine together. Many drivers spoke of this intentional meeting practice, which they organize over the cell phone while on the road, while others explained that they simply show up and at a common time (often around one of the five prayer times or during a non-rush hour period) and hope to meet friends there. Some drivers have favorite restaurants that they frequent while others choose a taxi restaurant based on their location in the city.

Regardless of how a driver winds up at a restaurant, these immobile places strategically located in the city are not only a convenient break spot for drivers, but also places of community building given the connection to ethnic food and media, as well as to colleagues and prayer. From my observation, it seemed that many of the same people went to the same restaurants each day. “Aseef,” a 39 year-old veteran driver originally from Sudan, said he used to go to Indus Valley more often, but the parking became too difficult so now he is a regular at Indo-Pak Palace. Aamir is also one of the regulars at Indo-Pak Palace. He said he goes there nearly everyday because “the people are nice” and the parking is easy. In fact, on the day he told me
that he happened to have accidentally locked his keys in his car and Saleem, the manager, had a tool on hand to help Aamir open the car door. In addition to the food, the media, the calling cards, and the mosque that make Indo-Pak Palace a space designed for taxi driver needs, its employees are also prepared to serve drivers in need of emergency assistance like locked keys and jumper cables for dead batteries.

While a number of drivers talked about meeting old and new friends at the restaurants, they can also be places for a little peace and quiet. Akbar, for example, plans breaks at taxi restaurants (we happened to meet at Indus Valley where he was relaxing in a massage chair) where he is unlikely to know anyone so that he can eat, pray, and re-energize for the next part of his shift. The restaurants, then, provide drivers with a separate space for respite during a busy, stressful shift. Although drivers wanting to avoid socializing at the restaurants are not exactly building relationships, they are participating in community by taking advantage of the services and comforts offered by these unique immobile places.

In particular, the restaurants that were part of this study played a unique role in community building and maintenance given the religious space that they provided. Each restaurant contained a mosque either in the basement or in the back. These mosques were not obvious to an outsider, except for the fact that men would disappear downstairs or in the back for fifteen minutes or so and then emerge either before or after ordering food. In Islam, a number of Muslim drivers explained to me, praying with others is preferable to praying alone when possible. As Aseef said, “You get more points [from Allah]” when one prays in groups. I was invited to see the mosque areas at two of the restaurants, but I did not spend a significant amount of time in either one because I did not want to intrude on their worship. During Ramadan, however, some amount of worship and religious ritual moved out into the dining area as well. In
particular, during *iftar* all three restaurants offered complimentary snacks, such as fresh fruits and dates, and drink, such as juice or sweet milk, for everyone in the restaurant. Usually participants would nibble on some of these snacks, pray, and then order a full meal. During the evenings of Ramadan in summer 2010 that I conducted fieldwork the restaurants were often crowded and felt festive. Although it may be preferable to take part in *iftar* in one’s home with one’s family, for many of these drivers whose families live in other countries or who must work long hours, the restaurants seemed to be a welcoming alternative to celebrate Ramadan and partake in fellowship with other taxi drivers and Muslims.

Drivers would eat often arrive with or meet a small group of friends and they would chat and eat together more leisurely than usual, often ending the meal with tea and a cigarette outside. During one evening I met “Aamin,” a veteran driver in his 50’s who is originally from Palestine but has lived in the U.S. for about 20 years. He was sitting outside Falafel Plus enjoying a cigarette after his meal. After talking outside we returned inside because there was a special television program coming on that he wanted to watch and so we continued chatting during the program’s commercial breaks. The program, he explained, was a Syrian historical drama about the French occupation of the country. I asked him about the role of restaurants like Falafel Plus in helping to build community and he believed that the restaurants are significant for immigrants’ community building just as are newspapers and television programs like the one we were watching.

Aside from the annual observance of Ramadan, the restaurants are particularly important for Muslim cab drivers on a daily basis. Radhi explained that he schedules breaks around eating and prayer times and prefers restaurants like Falafel Plus where we met and Indus Valley, were I
also ran into him during fieldwork. The restaurants, then, allow Radhi and other Muslim drivers to meet both of these needs, prayer and nourishment, in a single immobile place.

Unlike other places of slowed movement that drivers visit like the airports and city offices discussed below, the restaurants are not official places in the industry. They are not actually places of work nor are they home, and thus they can be thought of as “third places.” The notion of a third place, according to Oldenburg (1999) refers to places that are different from one’s home (first place) and one’s work (second place). They are informal gathering spaces that unite a community by allowing everyone in the group to know (or become aware of) each other, though not necessarily like each other. In many neighborhoods these places are usually local bars, cafés, barbershops, etc. and they are often where old friends meet and one can meet new friends as well (Oldenburg, 1999). For a mobile population like taxi drivers locality does not necessarily mean proximity to home, rather it means proximity to paying customers (i.e. work). The restaurants in this study are strategically located within or near busy neighborhoods and they are places where any taxi driver could feel welcome given their design to serve this population.

While the restaurants are fascinating immobile places that aid in the maintenance of a taxi driver community, other immobile places in the community where I spent time, like airports and city offices, are important to examine as well. However, these places are considered “second places” because they are directly related to work. With up to two-hour waits in the taxi staging lots at the airports, these lots are also places of slowed movement where drivers gather for prayer, socializing, news updates, and perhaps a rest. Midway’s taxi lot is approximately half as large as O’Hare’s, but like O’Hare some drivers have unofficially designated one corner of the
office where they purchase stamps\footnote{Taxi drivers are required to pay for an airport tax stamp ($4/stamp), which they must include with the time-stamped ticket they receive upon leaving the taxi lot to go to the airport terminals. This airport tax is, theoretically, designed to be paid for by customers as part of the fare – $2 is added to all fares to or from O’Hare and Midway. In other words, when a driver leaves the airport with a passenger, he collects an extra $2 on the fare and when he returns with an airport customer, he collects the other $2 from that fare and, therefore, covers the cost of the airport tax which he paid for upfront. However, the stamp tax is a source of deep anger for drivers who feel that it is another way that the city abuses drivers and takes their money. Drivers argue that even though $2 is added to airport fares to cover this tax in theory, in practice drivers sometimes go to the airport with an empty car and, therefore, wind up paying half of the stamp cost out of pocket.} and snacks at vending machines as a prayer area, complete with small collection of prayer rugs. At O’Hare, the staging lot is larger, with room for 400-425 taxis (excluding limousines). There are 19 lanes that, when full, have room for 20-25 taxis per lane. At both lots, one lane of taxis is dispatched to the terminals at a time. Dispatchers at O’Hare are located in a second-floor office at the front/exit area of the lot. The dispatcher(s) work with a series of radios, phones, and cameras. Cameras enable dispatchers to monitor activity in the lot to watch, for example, if the lot is too empty for the expected amount of service at that time. Radios and phones facilitate communication between the dispatchers at the lot and “starters”\footnote{A “starter” refers to an “Aviation, Department, or other Authorized Personnel located at specific cab stands located at major transportation and tourist centers.” (City of Chicago, 2008, p. 7). This employee monitors taxi traffic at his or her specific location.} at the terminals to monitor which terminals need cabs and when. Since O’Hare’s taxi staging area is located approximately one and a half to two miles from the airport terminals it is necessary for employees to be able to communicate between each site. While Midway’s lot is closer to the terminals, communication between both sites remains a necessity. Taxi lanes are numbered and when it is time to move, an announcement is made over loudspeakers located throughout the open-air lots regarding which lane(s) are to head out. Drivers generally keep a close watch so that they can return to their vehicles just prior to this announcement (e.g. when the lane before them has started moving). A raucous of shouting, honking horns, and sometimes
a loudspeaker announcement usually occurs if a driver is delayed in his return or has fallen asleep in his parked vehicle, delaying the cars behind him anxious to get back to work.

The extended waits that often occur at these lots give drivers a chance to stretch their legs, pray, grab a snack, purchase stamps, socialize, read, browse the internet and/or watch a movie (if he carries a laptop or smartphone), play games, nap, etc. While drivers at Midway use a small corner in the stamp office (at least during the winter months that I conducted fieldwork there), at O’Hare there are two small buildings and a trailer in addition to the dispatch and stamp office. Drivers tend to gather in one of those buildings for use as an unofficial mosque and in the other they tend to gather for socializing. “Ghedi,” a Somali man in his 30’s, talked about the unofficial relationship building at O’Hare where Somalis often congregate while their cars are parked in the long queue. He said, “It’s like channel 5 news” because of the amount of information that they exchange there. People discuss current events back home, events in the U.S., and they discuss work, gossip, etc.

Drivers at O’Hare also socialize in a small, greasy spoon type of grill restaurant (without seating) located next to the stamp/dispacth office, especially if it is cold outside (Midway only has vending machines). If the weather permits, drivers mingle outside, often near the grill or one of the other buildings at the front/exit area of the lot. In the spring/summer months I often observed Middle Eastern drivers playing an ethnic board game in this part of the lot utilizing concrete traffic dividers or other concrete curbing in the area as tables. On several occasions I also observed a group of two or three men power walking up and down the three fire lanes dividing the 19 lanes, presumably as a form of exercise, while other groups simply strolled through the fire lanes. In addition to dispatching, stamp and food sales in the main office building at O’Hare, there is a bulletin board on an outside wall that usually contains taxi-related
announcements, such as a flyer from the UTCC, companies or medallion owners in need of drivers, or accountants advertising their tax-preparation services. There are also non-industry related announcements such as funerals or, for example, a Nigerian church’s activities. Midway also contains a bulletin board and it is located inside the stamp office near the restrooms and vending machines.

One hears a multitude of languages in these lots along with periodic loudspeaker announcements, jets flying above, and the occasional honking car horn. Both lots are bustling spaces of slowed movement where drivers await their turn to be mobile once again, though O’Hare is significantly more lively than Midway. This temporary forced immobility brings about an opportunity for community-building given the chance to socialize and pray with colleagues in person. Immigrant drivers are also able to connect with their home cultures and communities when they call home, watch movies, read/discuss news from home while in the queue at the airport lots.

Other spaces of immobility frequented by drivers include company garages and city offices that serve driver needs. However, unlike restaurants and airport staging lots, they are not necessarily meant for extended visits. City offices are places where drivers need to get paperwork done, for example pay a traffic/parking ticket or renew a license, and garages are where drivers pay their lease or, perhaps, have their car serviced. City offices are particularly brief (and, likely, stressful) pauses in the workday and so some networking may occur, but observation from my visits to a few of these locations suggests that it is uncommon. At the Broad Shoulders Taxi garage that I visited, socializing and lounging is possible if desired. The BST garage contains a “play area,” as “John,” the garage manager, called it, with six waiting room-style chairs attached to a couple of end tables; four desktop computers with internet access;
vending machines dispensing soda, chips, candy, coffee, and ice cream; six $0.25 turn style candy machines; one arcade game; a pool table; and a flat screen television on mute mounted to a wall. During one of my visits a man with a food truck pulled in to the garage and several men ordered food. In addition to social and recreational opportunities, there is also a car wash at the garage and a few homeless men offering to hand wash cars for a fee. While I spent less time at this site than the restaurants and airports, it is clear from the presence of the lounge area that the garage offers the opportunity for drivers to take care of business (e.g. pay their leases, service and/or wash their vehicle) as well as socialize and lounge. Moreover, John spoke about the improvements he intends to make, including designating a prayer room for drivers of any faith.

Like waiting in the airport queue, having one’s car serviced may take a long period of time, therefore offering relatively comfortable lounge and prayer areas gives drivers the opportunity to build social and professional communities.

Lastly, some drivers spoke about meeting new friends, colleagues, and even roommates at places of worship, especially mosques. It was not always clear whether they meant traditional mosques, perhaps located in their home neighborhoods, or mosques in restaurants and other locations throughout the city. Nevertheless, these places of worship give immigrant drivers of the same faith a comfortable, familiar kind of space in which to meet and make new connections. Zayd recalled finding a place to live by responding to a roommate advertisement tacked up at a local mosque. Knowing my research interest in new media, he then considered this rather traditional form of communication that connected him with his roommates. Despite the variety of new media technologies available, he reflected that sometimes people “still have to come back to old communication ways.” Indeed, Zayd brought up an important point. Communication and community-building, in particular, occur through variety of media and one must not discount old
technologies or methods. Taxi drivers work in a technology-dependent environment and while much community and relationship building occurs via technology like cell phones, I also found that a significant amount of it transpires through traditional methods such as newspapers, the occasional bulletin board announcement, and face-to-face communication at immobile places discussed above.

C. Isolation

Thus far, the discussion about community has focused on the taxi driver community itself more so than its relationship with the city in which it exists. Moreover, I have not yet discussed ethnic group dynamics within the community. These two topics will be explored in this next section. In many ways taxi drivers in Chicago are isolated from the rest of the population despite being a visual staple of city activity. Drivers are, in a sense, hidden in plain sight. Other than comments about taxi drivers being on their cell phones or erratic driving, the general public, I would argue, knows very little about the job. Some folks may have a general understanding that many drivers lease their cabs, but the industry infrastructure is more or less not understood nor are the other professional challenges drivers face. Chicago’s taxi drivers work an average of 13-hour shifts for approximately $4.38 per hour take-home (Bruno & Schneidman, 2009a), drivers who lease are often over-charged by their companies (Bruno & Hewitt, 2010a), they face perceived aggressive ticketing by the city along with possible racial profiling by law enforcement (Bruno & Hewitt, 2010b), as well as “unacceptable levels of violence and harassment” (Bruno & Schneidman, 2009b, p. 9). Moreover, while drivers may be told in training that they are the “ambassadors of the city,” one driver in a focus group likened his experience on the streets to being more like the “dogs of the city” or the “scum of the city” (Bruno, 2010). Drivers’ relationship with the city, then, is tense.
1. Social Isolation

In addition to a certain sense of oppression, the job itself is lonely. Indeed, as Luedke (2010) has found, “the more efficiently drivers work, the lonelier the job becomes” (p. 8). In other words, the more fares a driver can get in a certain timeframe, the more money he can earn, but this constant mobility for job efficiency comes at the expense developing social relationships. The cell phone, as discussed above, can alleviate some of this loneliness by enabling communication with co-workers or friends/family. Omar, for example, was hesitant at first to tell me about his cell phone usage, but eventually decided to “tell the truth” and explained that he uses the phone quite a lot for companionship discussing things like politics and (at the time in 2010) the World Cup.

For immigrant drivers whose families live in other countries there is an added dimension of isolation given a lack of familial companionship at home. Aseef said there was “no reason to stay home” without his family there which is part of why he works long hours. Luckily, Aseef has developed friendships, in part, by meeting others during prayer (he is a religious Muslim who seems to schedule his day around the five daily prayers) and, in fact, later in the interview talked about missing his friends in Chicago when he visits Sudan. Ma’awiya, on the other hand, said, “You can’t make friends in this job” because drivers sit in a car alone all day. I asked if restaurants like Falafel Plus (where he and I met) help with making new friends and he said yes, but they are friends limited to work.

The job of driving a taxi, then, is inherently social and yet isolating. Drivers are in constant motion looking for people to drive and such a customer service-oriented job requires

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9 Sensing his hesitation, I reiterated to Omar during the interview that he does not have to answer my questions and was prepared to move on to another topic. He decided to share the information about his cell phone usage anyway despite my assurance that it was not necessary.
some amount of socializing. Some of the drivers I met take pride in their customer service abilities and speak positively of their customers. Shahzad is proud of his customer service skills and ability to communicate well with passengers. Although he does not enjoy the job and only does it because he can support his family, he does think it important to do a job well. When driving a taxi, doing his job well involves excellent customer service and communication with passengers. Given Shahzad’s previous career in hotel and restaurant management, it is understandable that he would value customer service. When discussing customers, Aseef said, “I think about the people and I get a good heart about what they’re doing and I want to help them.” For example, he feels he is doing a good deed when he can help someone who is stuck out in the rain or snow and get him/her to their destination safely. Moreover, some experienced drivers spoke about feeling connected, or plugged in to the city. Aseef said, “I feel as though I own the city.” Similarly, Akbar expressed a sense pride in knowing the city well and enjoys when, for instance, his children call him for advice on where to park and/or eat when they drive into the city. “Sammi,” a 30 year-old Ethiopian fellow, described the job as being somewhat “exciting” because of the chance to earn a lot of money and because it “spices up life.” Nick talked about “People getting engaged, people getting divorced” and other such big life moments that can happen in the back of a cab. He enjoys being part of these customers’ stories, or at least quietly listening in from the front of the vehicle. “Cab drivers,” he said, “have good ears.”

Concurrent to these positive feelings about the job, many drivers expressed a sense of isolation and even shame in having to do this work. Radhi “feels outside the system” as a cab driver and he worries about being an outsider when he has other jobs (he hopes to become a doctor). He drives people who are “part of the system and know how to do office jobs and talk to a boss,” but as a taxi driver he feels like an outsider. Aakif sees the job of driving a taxi as a low
form of work, but it is a step up from cleaning, which he described as “women’s work.” Despite Sammi’s positive feelings about the job, he expressed some shame when describing his friends working in Europe who (he believes) think he is a failure for leaving school to drive a taxi. “Sal,” a 31 year-old Pakistani man, said he feels pressure from friends to have a more “professional” job, or at least to pretend he does not drive a taxi. He said, “I have to be professional. All of my friends are. It’s kind of a stigma situation [driving a taxi].” His friends in Pakistan have encouraged him not to tell people there what he does for a living, but Sal says he does not care and so he tells them knowing that they are judging him. Similarly, Lisimba views the job as one of the lowest forms of employment. He used to be an accountant for a farm in Kenya and when he came to the U.S. he had not expected to be a taxi driver. In fact, his family in Kenya were surprised that he had taken such a job. Despite his disdain for driving a taxi, the money he earns allows him to support his family in Kenya. His credentials as an accountant do not transfer to the U.S., making it difficult to obtain employment in the field of accounting.

Between the nature of the work, the general public’s lack of awareness about the job’s challenges and structure, the city’s harassment, and personal shame about doing the job, a certain amount of social isolation is unsurprising. Some drivers do their best to find things that they enjoy about the job like customer service and helping passengers, but these positives do not seem to overcome a general social isolation.

2. Spatial Isolation

While this sense of isolation and shame in driving a taxi can stem from personal and/or cultural backgrounds as well as the mobile nature of the job, I would argue that some of it stems from spatial features of the taxi driver environment as well. With many of the immobile locations being more or less hidden from public awareness or on the outer fringes of city activity, it is
conceivable that such social and physical disconnection from the city could lead or contribute to feelings of isolation among the drivers themselves.

While interviewing Abder in O’Hare’s taxi lot, he looked around at the sea of taxis surrounded by a chain link fence with green nylon screens attached and barbed wiring on top and said that it makes him feel that they are “like sheep” or in a “pig sty.” In fact, I was struck by the fencing when I first drove past the lot before I had clearance to enter. I had driven to both airport lots in order to locate them and see what they looked like while awaiting official permission to visit. It took a bit of research to actually locate them and, had I not been specifically looking for the taxi lots, I might have never noticed them because of this fencing. It is difficult to see inside O’Hare’s lot from the access road making me wonder why the drivers are kept hidden from view. The barbed wire on top of the fencing is a menacing addition contributing to a sense of apprehension about getting in or leaving the lot and it is unclear what purpose it serves. Abder elaborated that inside the lot it is dirty, “not livable,” and he does not “like the climate of the area.” He went on to describe improvements he would make to O’Hare’s taxi lot if given the opportunity – he would include a small gym for exercise, showers, cleaner bathrooms, a larger prayer area, and better food.

In addition to the lots, some of the restaurants that drivers frequent have hidden or unwelcoming qualities for non-taxi drivers. As a female entering these establishments alone, I only visited restaurants where I felt relatively comfortable entering. What helped me feel a little more at ease was the fact that I could see inside from the streets, the streets the restaurants are on are relatively safe and populated, and sometimes there was signage meant to draw in customers. For example, Indo-Pak Palace has large windows allowing me to see inside and Indus Valley also has large windows as well as (at the time I first entered) signs advertising menu specials for
students. Falafel Plus also has bright signs and I happened to be welcomed in by the manager when I first visited. There were a number of other taxi driver restaurants nearby that I saw but did not feel comfortable visiting alone. One Somali restaurant is located behind a building on the street, meaning one has to walk down an alley to get to the restaurant. Others have covered windows preventing passers-by from seeing inside and they are located along a somewhat deserted street. In fact, just a few days after walking past these restaurants located along this deserted strip I read about a taxi driver being shot in the head in one of the restaurant parking lots at about 7 p.m. Certainly not all of these locations are dangerous or unwelcoming, but I took precautions nonetheless.

Despite these restaurants being located close to downtown and in or bordering trendy neighborhoods, they remain somehow hidden. Indo-Pak and Falafel Plus are on the edge of a trendy, gentrifying neighborhood around the corner from a shopping center, and about half a mile from the nearest “el” (i.e. subway or metro) stop. People must know to walk or drive around the shopping center in order to find the restaurants. With few women in sight and groups of male taxi drivers often gathered in front smoking and drinking tea, shy women such as myself are likely to feel hesitant about entering alone should they locate the restaurant in the first place. Indus Valley, on the other hand, is located in an established trendy neighborhood, one block from an “el” stop. It is the least hidden restaurant that I located and it was also the location where I observed more non-drivers getting food. Proximity to public transit in an urban setting is important for drawing business since many people do not have cars. Throughout most of my field research I did not have a vehicle, making access to restaurants along deserted strips, along busy roads without a sidewalk, and in locations far from public transit a challenge. Even getting
to the airport taxi lots without a car is near impossible. Such qualities contribute to the hiddenness of these locations for the average, non-taxi driver urban dweller.

3. Ethnic Isolation

In addition to spatial and social isolation, there appears to be some ethnic isolation among the drivers themselves. In observing behavior at the restaurants, I rarely saw much mixing of ethnic groups while eating. They all share the mosques in each restaurant and so perhaps they do pray together, though not necessarily. At Ramadan, it seemed as though groups of similar ethnic groups ate together, though the festive and sharing spirit of the holy month appeared to lend itself to more mixing of groups.

I confirmed this observation through interviews. Sometimes drivers disagreed with my observation, but then at another point in the interview they would discuss their relationship with co-workers and inadvertently confirm my observation. As mentioned earlier, it seemed to be a sensitive topic with some participants. My guess is that they know that in the U.S. diversity is valued (at least in theory) and so to admit a preference for socializing in one’s same ethnic group contrasts with this value in the country where they live and, they may have assumed, with the values of the American with whom they were speaking. Generally, however, as I learned more about the people with whom drivers communicate, I would eventually learn that they prefer to work and socialize with people of their same ethnic group. Language was usually cited as the main reason for this preference, but lack of trust of other groups or harboring stereotypes from one’s home country also contributed.

Near the end of our interview Babu asked, “Do you have any big questions that you are afraid to ask?” I mentioned my observation about this tendency for ethnic groups to stick together rather than mix with other groups and he agreed, mentioning that he tends to talk to and
socialize with other Indians. He said “No doubt,” that drivers stick to their own ethnic groups. He cited language as an important reason for these divisions as well as age. His boss, the owner of the medallion that he is driving, is from another country and apparently they get along well. They are on good working terms, but I did not get the impression that they socialize. Zayd, who found roommates from an advertisement at a local mosque, lives with fellow Pakistanis and they are also the ones he most often calls for work advice. I asked Nick about this observation and he said that he does not like to let cultural differences disrupt his work or friendships, saying, “In America, you learn diversity,” suggesting a possible sense of obligation to accept diversity.

When I asked who he tends to talk to on the job he responded, “Whoever friend you got,” but he later said he’ll prioritize people from his own ethnic background. When socializing on the phone to combat on-the-job boredom and fatigue he talks to other drivers, especially those that speak the same language as him. It is understandable that speaking in one’s own language is more relaxing than speaking in a non-native language.

Zak has a group of about 10 Somalis that he talks to regularly while working. When he first came to Chicago he had only one friend but started meeting others at a Somali restaurant on the far north side. He feels more comfortable, especially as a newcomer to the U.S., making friends with other Somalis because of their shared language and culture. Zak has since assisted other newcomers he met at the restaurant. People will strike up a conversation at the restaurant and exchange phone numbers. Because of a certain distrust of outsiders, they do not seem to exchange numbers so easily with people from other cultures, he explained. Zak has also become somewhat friendly with a Tanzanian driver who he runs into occasionally when paying his lease at the company garage. The Tanzanian man speaks Swahili, which Zak knows and, despite being
from different countries, they are from the same ethnic group. In this case, political borders do not necessarily matter as much as ethnicity.

Similarly, Sammi said most of his friends are Ethiopian and he rarely speaks on the phone, especially for work, with anyone who is not Ethiopian. He believes, “You will never see two people from two different countries” working together. He believes language and accents is a major hurdle because understanding each others’ differing levels of English and the different accents are a challenge. He went on to say, “We are rivals here” and described an incident he had that morning with a West African driver. Sammi felt that the other driver had cut him off and so he yelled at him. Sammi was so enraged that he called the guy a “monkey.” The other driver, of course, became enraged and called Sammi a “terrorist” in the middle of downtown Chicago at rush hour by a major train station. Sammi believed that the West African man thought he was Somali because the stereotype about Somalis is that they are all terrorists. He went on to discuss racism amongst the drivers, particularly among West and East Africans. Unfortunately, it seems that in this case ethnic divisions carried across the oceans and impacted drivers working together in Chicago. Despite all the technology that drivers have to work together and build a community and despite having colleagues from all over the world, it seems that in some cases stereotypes and ethnic tensions do not necessarily disappear when living in a new country.

Unlike many other drivers, “Mishenka,” a 24 year-old man from Kyrgyzstan, does socialize with other nationalities, particularly Americans. He is a stylish young man who sounded to me like he is from California rather than Kyrgyzstan and spoke about befriending American Peace Corps volunteers from a young age back home. Mishenka, then, came to the U.S. already having American friends. He presents a confident, out-going persona and one would think socializing comes easily to him. However, on the day we did an interview, as he spoke
about an ex-girlfriend in another American city, his family in Kyrgyzstan, some complications with immigration, and dreams of attending school that will take time to set in motion, he struck me as being a bit lonely and sad.

While there are drawbacks to ethnic isolation such as harboring negative stereotypes as Sammi described, there are benefits in terms of building a support network and community when facing hurdles of which Mishenka spoke. Ghedi spoke about the tight Somali community of which he is a part. He said that nearly anywhere he goes he can “call someone, who knows someone, who knows someone” who will help him if needed. If someone needs a place to stay, food, etc., this community is there to help. They do use cell phones to stay in touch, but being a short interview we were unable to discuss the details of how they communicate. Ghedi’s Somali friends helped him get started in the taxi industry and helped him find a place to live with Somali roommates. Aseef also described a small, but tight-knit Sudanese community in Chicago. He spoke about financial assistance that they give to each other. Apparently they will all donate money to an emergency fund that they use for members who are in sudden need of assistance (e.g. a last minute flight to Sudan for a death in the family). Luckily, Aseef has not needed to utilize this service, but he donates money to it regularly. It was not clear to me who collects and tracks the money, but it is certainly evidence of a Sudanese-specific support network that is likely a comfort to its members.

A drawback of ethnic isolation, in addition to maintaining negative stereotypes, could be an inability to assimilate to the host country, assuming assimilation is desired. The discovery that despite praying with drivers from around the world, their personal networks remain fairly insular suggests that technologies’ claims to transcend borders are unfulfilled promises. Social and cultural norms ultimately influence technology use in this case. The concern in the case of taxi
drivers in American cities is that their job already makes them relatively isolated from the rest of the population, despite being constantly in contact with it. Assimilation may be a challenge if they are not well informed about the host culture and if the host culture is hostile towards them, as people often are to cab drivers in the U.S. Moreover, working with people from an ethnic group that is disliked in their home country can be a challenge in the U.S. if they are isolated and unable to overcome these perceptions. But, perhaps a more interesting question is whether or not assimilation is a goal in coming to work in this country. If a person is living a transnational life, living and working in two or more countries at once, is assimilation even a goal? This brings up interesting social, cultural, and possibly political tensions that globalization and mobility of people produce, which are partly explored in the next chapters.

D. Summary

Although community among taxi drivers exists, this underlying isolation highlights the community’s complexity. Not all members of this labor group like each other nor do they necessarily integrate well with the larger urban society within which they work and live. But, these aspects of isolation do not prevent the formation of community. For these drivers, community manifests itself in their use of communication technologies to collaborate and socialize as well as in the immobile places that they inhabit during work hours. The communication technologies used further illustrate the group’s complexity in the relational affordances that each one brings. Unfortunately, the preference for one’s own ethnic group combined with the usage of cell phones may be resulting in the growth of stronger ties within the community but hindering the growth of weak ties.

The newspaper, Hackney Monthly, establishes an imagined community of colleagues who do not all know each other but share the same kind of work and allows them to become aware of
each other. It is a platform for sharing beliefs, values, knowledge, and the practices unique to this group and, therefore, helps to thread weak ties connecting the smaller groups and cliques within the larger labor community. The Gandalf and CB radio in the taxis help to build weak ties in their ability to share fare information, but the sharing of values, beliefs and other kinds of cultural information is less successful. Nevertheless, these two technologies are significant for communication and collaboration between drivers and their supervisors. The cell phone is particularly powerful for building both strong and weak ties, depending on how the driver uses the device – whether to speak with only close friends and family or to also speak with a variety of people to gain job related information. In addition to sharing information, knowledge, and practices about the job, drivers gossip and share news over the phone, keeping each other company during long shifts, thereby also sharing beliefs and values. The cell phone also helps to temporarily empower drivers, who are relatively powerless in the industry hierarchy, with valuable and personalized work information that they cannot necessarily collect from other sources.

For a mobile community like taxi drivers, the flexible communication that these technologies allow are important for preserving community, but a series of immobile places were also found to be significant to its members. City offices, airports, and garages are “second” places, or work places, where drivers attend to job-related tasks such as license renewal, lease payments, and/or ticketing. While city offices do not invite much communion or fellowship from drivers other than a chance to commiserate about poor treatment of drivers by the city, the garage and airports that I visited did provide some lounge space for members of the community to congregate if desired. The restaurants that I included as field sites were “third places” separate from home and work that play a significant role in the driver community. The third places
offered conveniently located spaces for drivers to congregate for a meal, for prayer, to socialize in person or mediated, relax, and/or catch up on news. The process of community in this population is complex, as I have shown throughout this chapter, combining and overlapping small groups with a larger labor group and using a combination of communication technologies and immobile places to establish and maintain its existence. In the end, what binds them is a shared form of work. In the next chapter I move into a discussion about globalization and its impact on this particular labor community.
V. THEMATIC FINDINGS - GLOBALIZATION

Globalization plays a role in community among the drivers as a labor group as well as their personal, familial ties. As discussed earlier, globalization is characterized by the interconnection and movement of people, capital, commodities, images, and ideologies across the globe (Inda & Rosaldo, 2008). The benefits of globalization include mobility, rapid exchange of goods, money, ideas and information. But, the drawbacks include unequal distribution of wealth and access to information potentially resulting in a disconnection from the global economy. Globalization, as it is experienced today, emerged in the 1970s concurrent with the development of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism refers to a system of governance and economics wherein private economic enterprise is preferred over state intervention (Harvey, 2005). “Flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption” is preferred in a neoliberal system (Harvey, 1989, p. 147). Neoliberal economic practices characterize globalization, but globalization is about more than economics. Globalization relates to social, cultural, political, and technological experiences as well as economic ones.

People’s relationship with time and space under globalization has shifted so that they are decreasingly obstacles to the movement of people, information, and capital that they had been in the past. Neoliberal economic practices have resulted in the increase in global investment and its influence on local communities worldwide, which Sassen crucially links to a rise in international migration (Robinson, 2009). Much of the migration that does occur is transnational wherein immigrants maintain various interconnecting ties in multiple countries at once. A globalized economy and citizenry means that the role of the nation-state with regard to the power to govern its own citizenry and regulate business also becomes flexible. The role of the state is in many
ways reduced to creating a friendly environment for private enterprise to operate (Sklair, 2008), minimizing regulations, and shedding responsibility for the welfare of its citizens.

Communities under these conditions adapt and must persist free from the constraints of physical proximity in order to incorporate dispersed members. Countries with large numbers of émigrés incorporate these migrants into the imagined community of nation by seeking them out as political, economic, and social resources (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995). As a result, immigrants may become transnational as they are interconnected with daily activities in both countries. Concerns from a home country may become part of one’s present in the host country, despite being physically absent from that place.

Facilitating these changes have been flexible communication technologies like, cell phones and the internet, that make rapid communication across vast distances possible. In this chapter I examine a few themes under the umbrella concept of globalization, exploring both economic and social aspects. First, I explore the ways in which Chicago’s taxi industry exemplifies the flexible labor practices characteristic of globalization and how this impacts drivers who represent the bottom of the industry hierarchy. Then, I examine notions of power and resistance as it relates to Chicago’s taxi drivers and the role that technology plays, and could play, in resistance strategies. Finally, I explore transnational practices among the immigrant drivers and the roles that various communication technologies that inhabit their working worlds play in transmigrant behavior.

A. Taxi Industry

The taxi industry in Chicago is a micro example of neoliberal economic patterns common under globalization. Drivers are not employees of a cab company; they are freelance or subcontracted laborers. Such “flexible” production of labor is characteristic of globalization and
a neoliberal economy (Harvey, 1989). As discussed earlier, this change in economic structure of the taxi industry in many cities toward decentralization began in the 1970s (Gilbert & Samuels, 1982; Mathew, 2005) around the same time that globalization arose. Prior to this shift, drivers in Chicago would earn minimum wage plus commission and had representation with a union. After the change to a lease system drivers were left vulnerable to economic swings and lacked representation to protect themselves (Luedke, 2010). Coincidentally, as the job of driving a taxi became less stable U.S.-born white and African American drivers who had largely populated the industry began leaving and immigrants with limited employment options began driving cabs instead (Luedke, 2010).

In a global city like Chicago, where there is a centralization of international service firms, there is a need for a vast infrastructure of local, immobile places and workers to support the mobile, global activities of these organizations and their international employees and clients. Low-wage earners like immigrant taxi drivers represent part of this local infrastructure that provide services to high-wage earners. As Sassen (2007) has argued, vulnerable populations such as immigrants hold many of the low-wage jobs in global cities, which can make them invisible and their contributions devalued. Indeed, Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers’ contributions to the global economy are overlooked which makes devaluing them and their work more likely.

Taxi drivers are the face of the taxi industry in Chicago and yet they are at the bottom of the industry hierarchy. Drivers either lease a taxi for a specific timeframes (typically 12- or 24-hours which are paid on either a daily or weekly basis) or they own their medallion. Most drivers I met lease their vehicle because the cost of purchasing a medallion is high – the mean price in 2011 was just over $213,240 and the mode was $165,000 (City of Chicago, 2011). The City of Chicago defines a taxicab lease as “a written contract between the licensed owner of a City of
Chicago taxicab medallion (‘lessor’) and a City of Chicago licensed public chauffeur (‘lessee’) authorizing the use of the medallion and, if applicable, a taxicab vehicle, by that chauffeur for a specific period of time” (City of Chicago, 2008, p. 28). Lease drivers pay the lessor up front and then hope to earn enough while driving to cover the cost of the lease fee, fuel, and earn some take home pay. As Aamin, a veteran driver who owns his medallion, said, “I don’t know how people leasing do it.” It is not an easy way to earn a living given such economic instability. In addition to the base fare, there are a number of allowable charges that can be included in a driver’s lease such as insurance and worker’s compensation. Unfortunately, in Bruno and Hewitt’s (2010a) study of Chicago taxicab leases, 80 percent of drivers reported one or more violations in their leases illustrating their vulnerability at the bottom of the system.

Some individual drivers do own their medallions and they may either operate fully alone or they may affiliate. Taxicab affiliations are defined as:

- an association of public passenger vehicle license holders organized and incorporated for the purpose of providing its members with a Chicago business address, telephone number registered to the affiliation, color scheme where applicable, a trade name or emblem where applicable, a two-way radio dispatch system, insurance and the designation of an authorized registered agent (Municipal Code of Chicago, 1990, code 9-112-010a). Affiliating comes with a fee (albeit lower than a lease fee) as well as the benefits of dispatching services (if provided) and color scheme. Assuming a medallion is paid for, then the cost of driving a taxi is lower thus presenting the potential for more income to the driver.

In addition to individual medallion owner/drivers there are medallion owners and medallion corporations who own multiple medallions. These medallion owners may also own cab corporations so that they can transfer responsibility of the medallion to the cab corporation, or from the cab corporation onto a medallion management company (Bruno & Hewitt, 2010a).

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10 For more detail on leases and violations please see Bruno and Hewitt’s (2010a) Taxi Lease Report.
Interestingly, it is possible for one medallion owner to also own a cab company and a medallion management company (Bruno & Hewitt, 2010a). The industry structure is complicated, making the process of unraveling it a challenge. Attempts to get clarification from non-driver professionals during interviews was often difficult. Obtaining details about who owns what, particularly with regard to Broad Shoulders Taxi, their dispatching service, and other players in the Broad Shoulders family was confusing, though I did not sense that participants were intentionally trying to confuse. Everything seemed to lead back to one individual and yet was structured so as to appear as separate entities. Bruno and Hewitt’s (2010a) research outlining the industry structure explains why – one person can own multiple medallions, a cab company, and a medallion management company. As in the case of Broad Shoulders, this single owner appears to control a number of medallions, a few cab companies, and dispatching company that serves drivers in these affiliations.

Before a person can become a taxi driver, he or she must meet a series of requirements, one of which is the successful completion of the Public Chauffeur Training Course (or “Training Course”). This Training Course is a two-week long intensive program offered every two weeks, beginning on a Saturday, at one of the local city community colleges. A person can receive a chauffeur license without this program if he or she meets certain requirements (e.g. has had a license from Illinois or another state for the last ten years that has not been suspended or revoked and is currently a student in a higher education institute), but in such cases the person must successfully complete the Training Course within one year (City of Chicago, 2008). I met with the director of this program to learn more about it. He explained that the students begin each Saturday with a four-hour bus tour of downtown Chicago and the north side neighborhoods. During the weekdays instructors cover professional development topics such as customer
service, working with dispatchers, cultural diversity, and other kinds of professional communication. Students also learn about the city’s rules and regulations, details about disability access, and city geography, which the director described as the “core of the program.” Students also take a second bus tour of the outer neighborhoods – e.g. south side, west side – and on the final day they take a multiple choice exam. If a student does not pass s/he must re-take the entire two-week course and pay the course fees again.

Before taking the course, students must pass an English language exam or provide documentation of having taken an English course in order to prove their language comprehension. According to the college website, for the six-credit Training Course tuition ranges from about $530 to $1380 depending on a student’s residency status. The fees for city required documents (e.g. drug test, physical exam, motor vehicle report, etc.), the director estimated, cost about $400 plus the Training Course tuition just to obtain a public chauffeur license. It is, then, an investment to get started in this line of work.

The community college also offers supplementary courses that may or may not be required for current and hopeful drivers. Such courses include English language, defensive driving, and safety behind the wheel. The director ensures that materials are updated approximately every six months to reflect changes in the city (e.g. a hotel closure, the city’s professional soccer team no longer competes at Soldier Field, and/or a name change such as with the Sears Tower being renamed the Willis Tower). He also regularly works with the city to ensure that the content his instructors are teaching, such as industry regulations, is accurate because their Training Course is meant to prepare students to take the city’s exam for public chauffeurs, which all applicants must pass.
Setting the rules and regulations that everyone in the taxicab business must follow is the City of Chicago, specifically the office of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP). The BACP, among other responsibilities, “oversees the licensing of Chicago’s public chauffeurs and public vehicles including taxicabs…[as well as] the purchasing of taxicab medallions, vehicle inspections and rates of fare” (City of Chicago, 2012). This office also has the authority to fine drivers and other parties, such as taxi companies, who do not comply with city regulations. For example, in January 2012, the city instituted new regulations that limit driver work days to 12 hours or less and they are working to better track driving records in an effort to keep reckless drivers off the road (Dizikes & Mahr, 2012). They are also encouraging taxi companies to purchase more fuel-efficient vehicles by increasing the 12-hour lease on them to $74 per day, which the city also hopes will draw drivers interested in the fuel-savings from these new vehicles (Dizikes & Mahr, 2012). According to the Chicago Tribune, as a result of these new regulations, the city is also investigating technologies that will allow them to better track who is on the road and when in order to enforce the 12-hour work shift limit (Dizikes & Mahr, 2012). Police officers may ticket drivers for traffic violations, the Department of Aviation regulates taxicabs at the airport, and the court system manages traffic tickets that many drivers regularly face. Most of the drivers that I met expressed tension, if not downright hostility, toward these entities because it is believed that they exploit taxi drivers.

1. Flexibility

Despite concerns about power exerted over drivers in unfair ways and the unstable nature of the market, many drivers enjoy what they perceive as a sense of freedom that the job brings. Abder imagines that an office job would be too immobile and restricting, making his extended biennial visits to Algeria a challenge. He said of driving a taxi, “after a while, you feel used to it,
you feel like free. You cannot go to a company and work like, have supervisor and manager [say] do this, do this, do this, [and get] only one vacation a year.” “Nasir,” a middle-aged Pakistani fellow, worked for the City of Chicago as a medical administrator in a prison for about 15 years before being laid off during the 2008 economic crash and becoming a taxi driver. He likes driving a cab because of the independence the job gives him. He can be “his own boss” and does not have to “take orders” from anyone – a freedom that is hard to let go once a person has tasted it, he says. As a city employee he only had a limited amount of vacation days, but driving a cab full time gives him more freedom for vacations.

In addition to not having to “take orders,” drivers also enjoy setting their own hours and they adopt strategies for their shifts in order to make the most money. These strategies are discussed in the previous chapter. It is important to plan one’s shift because as Jonah explained, “Time is money.” This relentless time-consciousness is common among drivers – whether it is the time of day (e.g. rush hour, lunch hour), time at a parking meter, wait time at an airport or in traffic. When not using time productively they are missing opportunities to earn money. Nick explained, “If you don’t put the time on the road, you don’t make the money.” As such, the job freedom and flexibility they enjoy is not entirely pure given this opposing enchainment to time.

Flexibility in the taxi industry exists not only within the structure of employment (sub-contractors), but also as evidenced by job mobility. None of the drivers I met had plans to make a career of being a cab driver. Omar, for example, is a young software engineering student. His main purpose for being in Chicago is to attend school, not drive a cab. To him, driving a taxi is “a job, not a career” and he spoke of plans to return to Burkina Faso to open his own technology consulting firm. Similarly, Radhi only drives a cab during the summers, attending college during the school year. Even the veteran drivers discussed previous employment that they had, using the
cab business as a backup plan. “Shawn” (a Pakistani man in his 50’s), for example, has been driving a cab in Chicago on and off for nine years. Prior to our meeting he had worked for a major U.S. airline’s ground operation crew but was laid off. Though he expected to be hired back soon, driving a taxi in the intervening time allowed him to continue earning money. Similarly, Aram has been driving a taxi in Chicago on and off for 11 years, but took about five years off to run a Middle Eastern restaurant in a wealthy north side neighborhood. Sadly, he described himself as “an economic casualty” because the restaurant failed around the time of the 2008 crash and he lost everything. He returned to driving a cab in order to support his family.

Unfortunately, however, the need to put in long hours to earn enough money may prevent some drivers, especially rookie drivers, from pursuing other interests. “Mehtaar,” a young man originally from Tunisia, would like to get a graduate degree in computer science, but finds that the hours he must put in to driving and the cost of higher education in the U.S. is preventing him from attending school right away.

Job mobility exists not only among the drivers, but also in some of the related industries. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, ownership/management at both Indo-Pak Palace and Falafel Plus appeared to change during my 18-month field research season. Saleem and his brothers had only been running Indo-Pak for a few years before appearing to sell it. More surprisingly was Falafel Plus whose friendly manager (or owner, I struggled to get clarification) disappeared about six months after selling his cab medallion to take the new restaurant job. Similarly, at the dispatching office, “Miss Malene,” a senior dispatcher, spoke of the high turnover rate of the other dispatchers in the office. As an experienced dispatcher, she usually trains the new hires, but “sometimes it gets disappointing,” she said. “You spend all this time training people, then they’re out the door.” It was unclear why new dispatchers leave quickly –
whether by choice or due to poor job performance. Miss Malene suspected that it is a choice, describing the new hires as young people who she believed to have few financial responsibilities. Nevertheless, she enjoys training people, as illustrated by her enthusiasm for explaining her job to me, but it is understandable that it is disheartening to see colleagues leave so quickly.

The taxi business is a flexible industry, a characteristic that has both advantages and disadvantages. The flexibility is an advantage for those pursuing an education or other business ventures allowing them to come in and out of the job, but for taxi-related businesses like restaurants and dispatching, stable employment is not a guarantee or necessarily an aspiration. It is an advantage for those who enjoy the perceived freedom from having a boss watching over them, but the disadvantage is insecure income.

As is common with globalization, local places and people are affected by and connected to global forces (Giddens, 1990). For Chicago’s taxi drivers, external global forces such as the economy, gas prices, or events like 9/11 impact their business. The recessed economy means fewer tourists, fewer conferences and conventions, and local residents opting for cheaper transportation or none at all, and therefore less business for drivers. Because taxi drivers pay for their own fuel, gas prices have a direct impact on their take home earnings. When Jonah and I met in April of 2011 he was spending about $70/day on gas. When combined with his $525/week lease payment, the costs add up quickly. “I need to put in more hours before I catch up,” he explained. Additionally, a number of people reflected on the negative impact the 9/11 had on the taxi business in Chicago. Daniel, editor of Hackney Monthly, reflected:

People were getting out of the industry for a variety of reasons, but related to 9/11. And so it really damaged the industry. So, a lot of the people who were left in the industry, I mean, there was a lack of business on the streets…the planes stopped flying at the pace they had been flying before. People aren’t coming into Ohare and Midway, well those people who aren’t coming here on a plane aren’t getting in a cab…So it really hurt the business quite a bit. And, with the medallion prices dropping, drivers who owned their
own cabs, a lot of these guys felt stuck. Some people dumped their medallion, they just went to the bank, you know, when you owe more than it’s worth, a lot of people were just saying, ‘here take it, I don’t want it anymore.’ And they left, they went to do something else. But, some people toughed it out.

Nick reflected, “September 11th changed it big time. Big time. It’s not the same anymore…more money, more time.” According to Nick, the industry still has not recovered. Global forces and events wind up having tangible effects at the local level and that is the experience of globalization on the ground. In other words, Chicago’s taxi drivers along with just about anyone else in this global city live with a continuous absent presence of global activity.

Despite setbacks and financial hardships involved with the job, the taxi business persists. The director of the taxi training school reflected that registration for the two-week course is down somewhat, he suspects, because of the tuition costs. He finds that often times friends and family are helping a hopeful taxi driver to pay for the course. Nevertheless, in his time there he has found that “this particular business hums along.” In other words, the taxi business always seems to move forward despite economic challenges. Perhaps it is because driving a taxi is often the fall back job when other ventures fail or it is a temporary job to take while pursuing other interests.

The industry in which they work reflects, on a small scale, the kind of flexible labor that is common under globalization. Drivers take on much of the economic risk and feel the effects of global activities, like 9/11, the 2008 economic crash, and rising fuel prices, in very real and tangible ways. Yet, their contributions to the global economy largely go ignored. The risks involved with the job as it transitioned to flexible labor drove many Americans away and wound up becoming a job option for already vulnerable populations like immigrants (Luedke, 2010). Despite the risks and unfair treatment, some drivers rather enjoy the job’s flexibility. The flexible economic structure of the industry may make drivers more vulnerable to abuse, but the flexible
communication technologies that drivers use give them a chance to potentially regain some lost power, at least temporarily.

B. Power and Resistance

In a system of employment that places drivers at the bottom of the hierarchy, vulnerable to taxi companies’ lease and fee charges, harassment from city workers such as police officers (Bruno & Hewitt, 2010a; Bruno & Hewitt, 2010b), as well as to the effects of global events like 9/11, drivers appear to be powerless figures. Power is an underlying theme in the context of globalization – e.g. who benefits from it and who suffers; what roles do nation states play in a system that seemingly functions without them? On the question of state power, it is the perspective in this study that the role of the state is adapting to circumstances in which territorial boundaries are flexible, citizens are mobile across the globe, and information, ideas, money, and goods flow rapidly through global networks. Power in such a “network society” rests with those who set up a network’s goals and with those that can link different networks (Castells, 2009). Facilitating this power and networking are communication technologies such as cell phones and internet given their role in enabling access to information.

These technologies, however, enable both power and resistance. That is, although entities higher in the taxi industry hierarchy like the BACP and taxi companies have more power, the drivers in this study have shown ways that they resist these forces in order to empower themselves. Specifically, in Chicago’s taxi industry, the city generally has power in that it has the ability to regulate how drivers can communicate and access information as well as when, where, and for how long they may drive, how much they can charge for a fare, etc. The official communication devices offer drivers little control over the communication that they can engage in, though the devices remain useful sources of information for drivers. Many driver participants
exhibited resistant behaviors in order to empower themselves with information and opportunity to earn more money, specifically by using cell phones – a personal and chosen form of communication technology. In this section I discuss in more detail the power/resistance dynamics that emerged during fieldwork, with a particular focus on communication technologies used for resistance.

Drivers often feel at odds with the city and the police in a variety of ways – e.g. ticketing, airport tax, licensing, etc. As Omar, a 27 year-old driver from Burkina Faso and software engineering student, said, “We are the City of Chicago’s ATMs,” echoing many drivers who feel that the city takes advantage of them financially through a perceived excessive amount fines and taxes. Whether I asked drivers about ticketing or not, they usually wanted to talk about it and expressed a deep frustration about this tense relationship. Even John, the manager at the Broad Shoulders Taxi garage, expressed displeasure at how the drivers are “abused” at times and recalled a couple instances that some drivers told him about when police officers participated in unfair and excessive ticketing of his drivers. A study of Chicago’s taxi drivers by Bruno and Hewitt (2010b) found that nearly 81 percent of drivers surveyed “had some sort of encounter with the law (i.e., a parking ticket, a ticket from the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, an experience being stopped by a law enforcement official, or a traffic ticket, usually the result of a traffic stop) within the year period prior to responding to the survey” (pp. 11-12). Moreover, the survey also uncovered a possible pattern of racial profiling by law enforcement, particularly of drivers from sub-Saharan Africa (Bruno & Hewitt, 2010b). It appears as though city employees working within the taxi industry may exert unjust power over drivers making them feel like targets, as Omar expressed.
Despite a sense of oppression that many drivers feel, they must follow the rules set out by the city in order to keep their licenses. There is little cohesion and organization among the entire cab driver community, making fighting for updated regulations and policies (e.g. a fare increase) in drivers’ favor a challenge. As I argued in the previous chapter, there are many groups of strong ties among the drivers and while weak ties exist, they are not necessarily utilized to their full potential for the drivers to benefit in the way Granovetter (1973) describes. There is at least one organization, United Taxidrivers Community Council (UTCC), working to unionize drivers and advocate for their rights, but progress in these matters is often slow. In terms of unionizing or otherwise having a singular, powerful voice to protect drivers, there is not a strong sense of community. Rather, there are pockets like the UTCC attempting to have a larger positive impact, but success has been limited. Community, then, refers to both the imposed labor community that the city and the companies oversee and within that there are the smaller, more personal and organically formed communities (often ethnic-based) that seem to support one another, but not those outside the smaller group.

Part of the struggle to unionize, Radhi speculated, has to do with the job mobility, i.e. drivers are often in and out of the job and few plan to make a career of it. As a result, current drivers tend to want to simply earn enough money and then move on to the next job, and therefore lack an interest in the long-term industry structure. As the editor of the Hackney Monthly explained, there is a lack of “loyalty” to the industry the way there is in other kinds of work, which creates a problem for getting people to fight for their own rights.

With drivers more or less on their own, they appear to form unofficial collaborative communities of relatively strong ties, as described in the previous chapter, to assist each other on and off the road with a key communication medium for said groups being the cell phone.
Communication technologies that are acceptable for use by taxi drivers, such as the Gandalf and CB radio, have been approved by the City of Chicago and are useful to drivers for obtaining work-related information. Other technologies, like the cell phone\textsuperscript{11}, are prohibited and drivers potentially risk their job by using a cell phone while driving. Yet, many drivers still use it and they do so to empower themselves with access to personalized, job-related information. On the road cell phone usage, however, comes with both risks and benefits.

1. Blessings and Burdens

In her 2006 study of cell phone usage among rural Jamaicans, Heather Horst wrote of the “blessings” and “burdens” that the technology brings its users. She wrote of the freedom and flexibility of communication (i.e. blessings) that participants enjoyed with a cell phone, but concerns like increased surveillance and financial costs are significant burdens that the technology brings as well (Horst, 2006). The taxi drivers I met in Chicago face a similar dilemma regarding cell phone usage. On the one hand, the device provides the blessings of access to information and to colleagues, which is perceived by some participants to improve a driver’s job efficiency and earnings. On the other hand, use of the device while driving comes with the burden of violating professional policies and thereby risking one’s job security\textsuperscript{12}. Moreover, as the city would likely argue based on the point of the rule as well as a couple of the

\textsuperscript{11} It is not entirely clear whether GPS devices that some drivers own and use in their taxis are prohibited. However, it seems likely that they are prohibited based on the language in the Rules and Regulations: “Using a cellular telephone or other electronic device, whether or not hands-free, while operating a taxicab shall be deemed a violation of section (d) above” (City of Chicago, 2008, p. 23). Section (d) refers to public safety and the requirement that drivers operate taxicab vehicles safely.

\textsuperscript{12} Unlike participants in Horst’s (2006) study, financial costs of using a cell phone did not arise a major concern among the taxi driver participants. Certainly cell phone usage costs money, but the taxi drivers’ main financial concerns had to do with industry costs such as leases, fuel, stamp tax, and ticketing.
taxi drivers I met, a driver using a cell phone also bears the burden of risking public safety by engaging in distracted driving behavior.

For most of the drivers that I interviewed, especially less experienced ones, the risk of violating city law and the burden of taking that risk do not outweigh the blessings of access to an information network that the cell phone provides. While the Gandalf supplies important information for job efficiency and earnings, the information is not as personalized and immediate in the way it is from cell phones. The Gandalf and the radio are communication technologies that are imposed on drivers from an authority and their flexibility with regard to communication is limited. Communication through these technologies is more or less top-down, reflecting the source from which they are provided to drivers. Cell phones, however, provide personalized information and these devices also reflect the sources from which they come – personal sources. They appear to be mostly used to maintain relatively strong, often ethnic-based ties among drivers. This reflects to some extent Palackal, et al.’s (2011) finding that cell phone users in Kerala, India strengthened their close networks of family and friends through the use of cell phones, but links with people outside these groups shrunk. Nevertheless, using both city-approved tools and cell phones plugs drivers into Chicago’s rhythms of business, tourism, and leisure. Chicago’s taxi drivers may be resisting city policy by using their cell phones, but the resistance does not seem to amount to much other than access to more information for increasing one’s income (though, earning more money is no small accomplishment). Larger industry problems like unfair ticketing, harassment, and over-charging on leases do not appear to be addressed with this form of resistance as it stands. Perhaps utilizing cell phones to better link weak ties among the driver community, in addition to the roles that Hackney Monthly and restaurants/mosques play in this regard, rather than simply preserving strong ties can help drivers
to empower themselves even more and achieve better working conditions. These concerns about power, technology, and ties will be explored more in Chapter VI’s examination of the present study’s theoretical implications.

2. Technology Begets Technology

In considering this cell phone question during fieldwork, there appeared to be some mixed messages with regard the rule prohibiting cell phone use. Certainly, distracted driving is a major public safety concern and the city’s rule prohibiting cell phone usage is understandable when put in that context. However, there are technologies that are approved for public chauffeurs like taxi drivers, and these devices are potentially distracting themselves. Having a small computer screen to read for updates and fare addresses as the Gandalf requires has the potential to distract a driver just as a cell phone can by pulling his eyes off the road. I asked the editor at the Hackney Monthly why he thinks these devices are perceived to be safer than cell phones. He replied, “I think part of it is that it’s stationary. So, it’s actually mounted. I think drivers will get into this rhythm of just kind of seeing it…it’s kind of in your face.” The cell phone, he considered, has the potential to move around one’s lap, fall under the seat, etc. and while a driver fusses with the small, portable device could get distracted and hit someone or something. MDT’s like the Gandalf appear to have distraction potential, but by being mounted to the dashboard they may present less of a risk than a cell phone.

In discussing the dynamics between using these two kinds of technology just about every driver that I spoke with about cell phones, even those that said they rarely use the device at work, talked about what they do when the MDT or credit card machines in the vehicles fail: they use the cell phone. To be fair, in these instances one can assume the driver has pulled over to park when using the cell phone. Nevertheless, a driver is still “operating” (City of Chicago, 2008) a
taxicab in these cases and could, potentially, be cited for a violation. When these approved
devices fail, a taxi driver must call the dispatch service or taxi company to get assistance with
fixing the device and/or running a credit card over the phone. It seems as though in Chicago’s
taxi industry technology begets technology in that as technology is incorporated into the cab as
part of the job, other technology becomes required, particularly when the former technologies
fail. Few drivers spoke about tickets or fines related to cell phone usage even though the city
appears to aggressively ticket and fine drivers for other reasons. Given the value that drivers find
in using the cell phone combined with the fact that they have to use them when the official
devices fail, it would seem that the city looks the other way to a large degree on this policy
matter.

3. Striking a Balance

Perhaps the opposing perspectives on cell phone usage stems from how one thinks about
what it means to be on the phone. Often times cell phone usage is considered a form of “absent
presence” (Gergen, 2002) where one may be physically present in a place, but by being on the
phone one’s mind and attention are elsewhere. Increasingly, however, cell phones (particularly,
smartphones) invite users to engage with their physical surroundings just as much as they enable
users to escape them. Map and GPS functions allow users to navigate their physical world with
confidence and social networking via mobile devices invite users to “check-in” to various
physical locations.

Along the same lines, participants in this study who discussed their cell phone usage
spoke about using the device to engage with their physical surroundings. They are not using
applications, per se (except GPS/mapping features on a smartphone on occasion), rather they
make the basic voice function of the phone work to their advantage to navigate the city to avoid
delays and locate fares. Certainly, some drivers also use the phone for socializing much like anyone else would at work when in need of a mental break or companionship. But, primarily, drivers spoke about the phone serving as an additional professional tool. Rather than “absent presence,” taxi drivers exhibit spatial presence by making technology extend their eyes and ears on the road. Perhaps shifting the thinking on what it means to be on a cell phone to account for such spatially engaged behavior combined with the spread of newer features like voice command can also shift fears about talking on a cell phone while driving. If, like MDTs, a taxi driver’s cell phone were mounted to the dashboard and operated by voice command one wonders if they could become permissible devices for professional communication and thereby strike a balance between the city’s need to protect public safety and taxi drivers’ need to collaborate.

A shift in thinking about absent presence with regard to cell phones to account for spatially present usage combined with simple accessories like mounting the device and voice commands (which are both already available to consumers) can alleviate some concerns about its usage among Chicago’s taxi drivers. Unlike regular drivers, taxi drivers are using the device to improve their working conditions and earnings as well as customer service. But, larger problems in the industry persist and, from what I observed, current communication technology usage does not do enough to help drivers link their various strong tie networks into powerful weak tie networks that can empower this vulnerable population into a successful resistance against exploitation within the industry.

C. Transmigrants

Drivers’ working lives, especially the immigrant drivers with whom I spoke, coexist with their personal lives. Just as they build professional communities and attempt to empower themselves in a system that renders them somewhat powerless, a number of participant drivers
also manage personal communities with loved ones in other countries and use creative, mobile strategies to maintain community in a transnational context. This study’s focus was on immigrant taxi drivers with an underlying expectation that many of them would transmigrants. Trasmigrants are immigrants who maintain social, cultural, and political involvement, often on a daily basis, in their home and host countries (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994; Fouron & Schiller, 2002). Given access to technology and the ease with which people can now communicate across borders, I naively thought that the majority of the study participants would live a life more like a transmigrant than an immigrant. While many participants could be considered transmigrants, quite a number of drivers would be considered more like an immigrant in a traditional sense. However, even though not all immigrants are transmigrant, all immigrants have the potential to be transnational based on their social connections to others (Jones-Correa, 2002).

As a general pattern, though not in every case, those who have been in the U.S. longer tended to be immigrants whereas those in the country for approximately 15 or less years often displayed more transmigrant behaviors. Perhaps access to technology has been a catalyst for this shift. Certainly, there are social reasons for such a shift: those who have been in the U.S. longer tended to have more members of their family and friends living in Chicago, in the U.S., or in another host country. As more and more of their loved ones leave the home country, there appear to be fewer and fewer reasons to maintain a connection with the home country. For example, Shahzad, the middle-aged Pakistani man discussed above, lives with his wife and children in Chicago. His parents have both passed away and with few social connections remaining there to pull him back combined with his expressed disgust for the nation’s political situation, he rarely maintains contact with anyone there. He mentioned, however, that his young daughter often communicates over instant message (IM) with her cousins there.
At least one driver I met, Sammi, would like to return to Ethiopia, but is unable because it is unsafe for him. Sammi has returned a couple times in the six years he has lived in the U.S., but the tribe that he is from that was once in power is no longer in power. As a result of political tensions among the many tribes in Ethiopia, particularly between his tribe and the one that was in power at the time we met, he believes it is unsafe for him to return for fear of being identified with his tribe and subsequently attacked. Sammi is working towards U.S. citizenship and insists that he will not return to Ethiopia until he has become a U.S. citizen, believing that having a U.S. passport will protect him against political violence there. He hopes to return to live during retirement. Instead of returning physically, Sammi uses technology to connect with Ethiopian culture as I will discuss more below. This example is unfortunate in that here is an immigrant who wants to be more of a transmigrant and physically visit loved ones in his home country regularly, but he is unable to out of fears for his safety. In this case, technology proves to be Sammi’s best alternative until he feels safe to return.

Other drivers, however, are able to live very much transnationally. “Petra,” a middle-aged Jordanian fellow, mentioned at the end of our brief interview that he is only in Chicago three months of the year: March, April, and May. He comes to earn some money and believes these are the best months for driving a taxi because many conventions come to town. He has hopes of moving his wife and children to the U.S. in the future, but for now he lives transnationally. Abder is only able to visit Algeria about once every two years, but when he does return he stays for at least two full months. It is important to him that his children, who live with him in Chicago, know Algeria. He plans to return one day, saying, “I don’t want to die here [in the U.S.]” and so maintaining connections in Algeria is important to him. Nasir also lives transnationally, leaving his wife, children and grandchildren in Pakistan. He visits every year for
about a month, thus the job’s flexibility is ideal for him. Unlike Petra, Nasir does not plan to
move his family to the U.S. He seems content with this transnational relationship, finding it odd
when I asked if living apart was difficult. “When I’m in Chicago,” he said, “it’s like I was never
there and when I am in Pakistan it’s like I was never here.” He views Pakistan as his “mother
country” and the U.S. as his “foster parent.” He is happy and at home in both countries and is
comfortable living transnationally.

A handful of other drivers that I met actually run a business in their home countries while
driving a taxi in Chicago most of the year. Akbar, for example, owns property in Pakistan with
his wife and they use a rental management company to rent it out for additional income. They
return at least once a year to keep an eye on their property. Nick drives a taxi in Chicago for nine
months and then spends the other three months in Africa. He has a side business selling human
hair that he acquires in the U.S. at a low rate and sells to clients in Africa for a profit.

Jonah also described a particularly interesting transnational position that he has created.
We talked about why he came to the U.S. and he said with a laugh, “to make money.” He
elaborated that, “Most Africans here come here, make money, and invest at home,” and he is no
exception. He runs a successful mechanic shop in Ghana. Jonah’s father helps him manage it
while he is driving a taxi in Chicago. Jonah buys used automobile parts and/or totaled vehicles in
the U.S. and ships the parts to his shop in Ghana where his employees refurbish and sell them. In
Ghana, he said, the parts are perceived as “new.” He explained, “I buy the accident car, fix it,
and sell it.” He finds the cars at auctions, particularly online auctions, and it takes two weeks to a
month to ship them or the parts to Ghana. Jonah will bring his laptop with him while driving a
taxi so that when he has an hour or two of spare time, e.g. at O’Hare where we met, he can work
on his other business. He said he only brings his laptop on the road when he has work to do. He
uses a plug-in wireless device to access the internet, but he said sometimes he can get a signal in the O'Hare lot, particularly in the far right lane. Jonah visits Ghana every year for a month or two which he enjoys because he gets to “live like a king” and he is deeply respected among the locals and his employees, which is a contrast to how he is treated as a cab driver in Chicago.

The taxi industry is, in many ways, an ideal job for transmigrants. Its flexible nature gives drivers freedom to pursue other interests, such as going to school (Luedke, 2010). Similarly, this flexibility frees up transmigrants to move between Chicago and other locations or countries for extended periods of time. This flexibility seems built into the industry, or at least at Broad Shoulders Taxi (BST). The BST garage manager, John, explained that because they have so many transmigrant drivers they have a policy in place to accommodate them. At the time I spoke with John their policy was that drivers on a 24-hr lease can get the same car they usually drive after being away for one month. After three months away, drivers can get their 24-hr lease schedule back, though not necessarily with the same vehicle. John mentioned some possible adjustments to this policy that are under discussion with the company owners, but at the time we met this was the policy the company followed. On a smaller scale, Aseef, who works for a man who owns a small fleet of about 10 medallions, described the flexibility he has when he travels to Sudan. Aseef said he can recommend a replacement driver while he is gone and his supervisor will have a job waiting for him when he returns to Chicago. Such policies illustrate the flexible nature of the job, the mobility of the drivers, and the need for taxi companies to build in policies to accommodate a transmigrant lifestyle.

However, changes may be afoot in Chicago’s taxi industry with regard to becoming a taxi driver. According to the director of the taxi school, there is a discussion about modifying the rules for becoming a taxi driver so that those who have not been driving in the U.S. for at least
three years prior to applying for a public chauffeur license may not become a taxi driver. Currently, the Rules and Regulations state that any new applicants who have not held a U.S. driver’s license for at least three years prior to the application must complete a “Driver Training Course before being issued such license” (City of Chicago, 2008, p. 9). If this rule were changed so that a new applicant would not have the option of taking an additional course, then “it would kill our industry,” the director pointed out. He estimated off the top of his head that at least 90 percent or more of their students are immigrants, and, in fact, are recent arrivals.

The director has noticed country of origin patterns with the students coming to his program. Recently, he has noticed more students from Tajikistan and Somalia, speculating that unrest in the regions may be pushing people to migrate. He believed they also tend to have a steady stream of students originally from Nigeria, India, and Pakistan. Most of these students have been in the U.S. for less than three years suggesting that, in fact, a change in application requirements would have an impact on the program he directs as well as the taxi industry itself.

For some, easing the transition to become a driver involves transmigrant behavior and a dependence on an already established community in Chicago with which to connect. During a preliminary focus group conducted with Robert Bruno, a few drivers discussed rumors they had heard about drivers who had completed their training sending their study materials back to their country of origin to friends/family members who plan to move to Chicago and become a taxi driver. Later, “Alek,” a 25 year-old driver from Russia, discussed this same practice noting that there is a lot of information to learn in a short time, especially if English is not one’s first language. Moreover, Luedke (2010) noted this same practice in her ethnography of Chicago’s taxi drivers. This practice enables hopeful drivers to study ahead of time making the two-week course and subsequent tests a little easier having had more study time than others. It is a
fascinating example of transmigrant behavior combined with community. In order to take part, migrants living in Chicago must be in communication with people in their home country enough to know who needs these materials. Those planning to migrate depend on a community of other migrants in order to ease their transition to Chicago by helping, in this case, with employment prospects shortly after arrival. Moreover, before moving to Chicago, those in the country of origin receiving these materials develop a consciousness of the city and their prospective job. In order to maintain these transnational connections and communities drivers use various communication technologies. In the chapter’s final section I examine the role of technology among the immigrant and transnational communities that I encountered among the driver participants.

D. Role of Technology

The importance of technology in navigating a global existence and the flexible employment and relationships that it entails must not be overlooked. Daily experiences of globalization include an altered relationship with time and space – they can feel compressed to the point that time and space are not the barriers they once were to the flow to ideas, goods, people, and information. Ideas and information can move almost instantaneously with the use of communication technologies, and people and goods can travel across spaces in decreasing amounts of time with the combination of transportation and technology. And while this kind of movement is restricted to those with access to mobility, even immobile populations feel the effects of these globalized flows. However, when mobile populations must maintain relationships with immobile ones, these time/space barriers take conscious effort to overcome. I have discussed this previously with regard to taxi drivers’ use of cell phones at work. I will next discuss the cell phone in relation to globalization as well as other technologies that inhabit taxi
drivers’ working worlds and reflect on how these sources of communication affect experiences of time and space.

1. Cell Phone

The cell phone is, of course, a crucial technology for drivers’ working lives. It helps them collaborate with each other for more personalized information than the regulated communication technologies allow. However, during fieldwork it also became clear that these devices facilitate transnational relationships and communities. For those with family and friends in another country, the cell phone provides flexibility with calling schedules. Time differences do require some amount of scheduling phone calls, but it is possible to reach contacts more easily with the phone and the drivers need not necessarily be at home to take/make a call. Aamir’s parents, for example, live in Pakistan where there is an 11-12 hour time difference with Chicago. He said they do not keep a strict calling schedule, but generally he will call them around 8 a.m. while he is in the long queue at O’Hare. At that time of day it is about 8 p.m. where his parents live and so the time is convenient for social calls for both parties. Aamir recalls that when he first came to the U.S. cell phones were not that popular yet and they were rather clunky. Moreover, few people in Pakistan had cell phones. Over the last several years he has noticed the technology exploding in both countries and now, “everyone has a cell phone,” he said. He believes that the cell phone has made it easier for him to keep in touch with his friends and family in Pakistan. Aamir’s personal experience and observation aligns with research on mobile phone adoption in the global south. In fact, the developing world has more mobile phones than the developed world and these devices have “quietly provided people at the bottom of the income pyramid access to electronically mediated communication; often for the first time” (Ling & Horst, 2011, p. 364).

Omar, also uses his cell phone to reach friends and family in his home country, Burkina
Faso. Unlike Aamir, a family man, Omar is a student in his 20’s and does not send remittances to his family. He said he talks to his parents a couple times a month, which he considered to be infrequent, and assures them that this infrequent communication means that all is well in Chicago. Omar said that his need to study and work limits his ability to talk to his parents more often. He does, however, talk to his friends almost daily by phone. Like Aamir, the time difference (about 7 hours) dictates to some extent when he talks to people in Burkina Faso, but the cell phones, which he and his contact abroad all have, do provide spatial flexibility.

Most of the drivers I spoke with about calling home are communicating daily with friends and family abroad, and since they all bring cell phones with them to work regular communication is easy. Having the ability to maintain affordable, daily communication with loved ones despite great distances in time and space is a phenomenon of globalization and it makes these distances more manageable to some degree. Close relationships can be maintained, despite physical separation (c.f. Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2001; Senyürekli & Detzner, 2009). For example, “Michael,” a man in his 30’s born in Afghanistan but who has spent most of his life in the U.S., managed his new marriage over a cell phone for almost two and a half years while awaiting visa paperwork for his wife to move to the U.S.\(^\text{13}\)

Regular communication, however, is rarely free. Generally, the drivers I met spoke of themselves as the ones making the calls to their loved ones because the cost for them to call the U.S. is too great. Interestingly, however, one driver at least has developed a creative way around this in cases of an emergency. Nick spoke about a system he has worked out with this loved ones in Africa wherein they will call him in an emergency, let the phone ring once, and then hang up.

\(^{13}\) I tried to learn more about their communication practices, but unfortunately during the interview Michael became concerned that I work for the government and so I ended it early due to his discomfort.
Nick will see the missed call on his phone and know he needs to call them back. This way, they can reach him without incurring the high cost of making an international phone call. This practice of calling/hanging up is known as “beeping” (also “missed calling” and other names) and is often used throughout the developing world, especially in Africa (Donner, 2007). Radhi spoke about talking to his family in Sudan daily, but he talks to them for free. He was able to set up his family with an Illinois-based area code so that it is as if they are making local calls to each other. There was not enough time during the interview to get more details about this technology work around, but I suspect the family in Sudan is using a computer with an internet-based calling application like Skype to call his cell phone. Aseef also uses the phone to talk to his wife and other family in Sudan and nearby countries where they live, but because his wife works at a telecommunications company that provides her with free phone services she is able to call him regularly as well.

Although I did not actively track who has what type of phone (smartphone, Blackberry, etc.), on occasion I was able to see the kinds phones drivers carry and collect information on this topic. Many of the drivers I met and/or observed who carried their phones by hand or on their bodies where I could see that they were often using standard cell phone devices, often connected to a hands-free device (see Appendix D for a photograph). Smartphones and other such internet enabled phones are useful to be sure, but since most of the drivers use the devices for voice calls and their job requires visual focus it may not necessarily be worth the added cost of a smartphone. Aamir, for example, owns a Blackberry, but he said he rarely uses its internet functions; he primarily uses the phone for voice calls. Aram also carries a Blackberry. He purchased it in Syria because it has Arabic lettering on it, which he finds easier to use on occasions when he needs to text.
For those that have them, a smartphone’s added functions like internet browsing and music storage enable transmigrants users to not only maintain relationships across borders, it also enables them to maintain a connection with their home culture. Sammi has a touch screen smartphone that he uses for online socializing as well as browsing. Specifically, it seems that being able to check global soccer scores brings him great joy given the way he lit up when talking about this practice. He also uses his phone to check Facebook and participate in online social networking with friends around the world. Additionally, he likes to look at photographs saved on his phone and listen to music. He particularly enjoys rock bands like U2 and R&B groups, finding Ethiopian music to be dull except for holidays. Similarly, Saleem pulled out his smartphone to show me a video clip of a famous tabla drummer since we had been talking about the instrument and I was not familiar with it. In both cases, the smartphone device allowed users to connect with a particular aspect of their culture (as well as Western culture) despite the great distance between Chicago and their home countries.

The cell phone can alleviate the stresses of spatial distance by providing affordable access to one’s culture and transnational community of loved ones. However, when communicating between a mobile person (e.g. a Chicago taxi driver) and an immobile person (e.g. the driver’s parents in Africa), time and space are obstacles that one cannot ignore. Drivers I met and their loved ones have adopted strategies to work around these obstacles, such as making scheduled calls, that seems somewhat counter to the easy access, all the time vision of cell phone communication that sometimes exists. In fact, scheduled calls combined with the costs of phone cards and negotiating if and how loved ones abroad contact the driver (e.g. via cell, landline, internet, “beeping”) are all important details that dictate cell phone usage for immigrant, and especially transnational, community members.
2. Phone Cards

A crucial reason why cell phones are affordable for participants to make international calls and maintain communication across borders is because of phone cards (or calling cards). These cards are sold at places of immobility within taxi drivers’ working worlds, particularly at restaurants. The cards I saw often advertise rates for particular regions (e.g. Africa or the Middle East), though others have a more generalized international focus. Restaurants display the cards that they offer somewhere near the cash register, and in the case of Indo-Pak Palace’s new ownership phone cards were sold at the mini convenience store within the restaurant (see Appendix B for photographs). Each of the three restaurants where I conducted fieldwork sold these cards, as did the grill located within the taxi lot at O’Hare.

A number of drivers talked about the importance of phone cards for allowing them to maintain regular communication with loved ones abroad. Alek, for example, has family and a fiancé in Russia and he talks with them once a week via cell phone and calling card. However, he also calls “whenever I want to hear their voices,” i.e. when he misses them, and the low cost of the cell phone/calling card combination makes this possible. Zak buys two $10 phone cards each month, which allows him to call his family in Somalia twice a month. Similarly, at the time we met, Jonah had used a $10 phone card earlier that morning to call his family in Ghana. It was not always clear how many minutes $10 will get them (and this may vary depending on where they are calling). Aram also uses phone cards when he calls his family in Syria. Interestingly, he said he has found that he gets more minutes if he calls them (from his cell phone) on a landline rather than on their cell phones. Thus, the convenience of cell phone usage may, in this case, only extend to Aram and not his family, which may further dictate the timing of his calls due to the need to call a landline instead of a mobile. While some drivers spoke about purchasing their
phone cards at any immobile place that they frequent, Nick has specific places where he goes for his calling cards. He said he prefers to purchase them in Indian/Pakistani restaurants along Devon Avenue\textsuperscript{14} where he can buy a $5 card for $4 and get 28 minutes out of it.

Shahzad was the only driver I met that spoke about not using the cards, preferring to use his regular phone plan. He finds that the extensive amount of dialing required when using a phone card, the worry over minutes, and the poor quality connection make using them too cumbersome. However, Shahzad does not have many connections in Pakistan anymore after becoming well established in the U.S. many years ago, which may mean that he does not need/want to call as regularly as other drivers. Aamin has also lost touch with many loved ones in Palestine over the 20 years that he has lived in the U.S. He recalls writing letters home in the past and stressing over the cost of his AT&T phone bill with the international calls. He appreciates calling cards because they are “just a couple of bucks,” though he may not be as regular a user as drivers with stronger ties abroad.

3. Computers/Internet

In addition to phone calls, some of the drivers also discussed the use of computers and online applications in order to maintain communication with loved ones abroad as well as to connect with one’s home culture. As with Radhi, some of the drivers spoke about using the computer to make calls and usually Skype was the application used. Online calls are useful due to the low cost; as Alek expressed, “Of course, I like Skype. It’s cheaper.” Ma’awiya said that he has set up his family with a U.S.-based Skype account for their computer in Algeria. They dial his cell phone number into Skype and it calls his phone for free. He said they also sometimes use

\textsuperscript{14} Devon Avenue is the main street in the Indian/Pakistani neighborhood in the far north of the city. The street has a dense collection of Indian/Pakistani restaurants and other businesses serving the neighborhood.
the video chat feature on Skype, but since he is not home enough to spend time sitting at a computer, the cell phone is easier for him.

Lisimba is a heavy phone user, but also discussed using social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace as well instant messenger on the computer to keep in touch with friends and family in Kenya. He also likes to read newspapers from home online so that the can keep up with current events there and he applies to jobs online, but given the recession he has not had much luck. Lisimba said he goes to an internet café about once a week to socialize online, read online newspapers, and apply for jobs.

One afternoon at Indo-Pak Palace I found Aamir working on a laptop. He told me he was checking the stock market because he is involved with international trading on an online investing site, though he said he is not having much luck. As we talked he told me about his other computer and internet use. He uses Skype to talk with loved ones in Pakistan, but because of his job they do not talk this way very often. Generally he talks to them on his cell phone via a calling card. He does not use his computer while driving, of course, but he will bring it out while waiting in O’Hare’s long queue so that he can watch a DVD or an online video or read Pakistani newspapers online. He has a portable wireless device that plugs into his laptop enabling him to access the internet from any location. This portable internet access is particularly useful since he does not spend a lot of time at home or in any one location, for that matter. Aamir also stores digital photographs on his laptop, for he proudly showed me a number of pictures of his wife and child as we spoke.

Aseef also owns a laptop, but unlike Aamir, he does not carry it with him to work. Generally, he uses the computer to read online Sudanese newspapers, but since he is not home that much he does not get to use the computer all that often. Zak does not have a computer or
internet at home at all, though at the time we met he was saving up to buy a laptop. He goes to a
“cybercafé” near his home once a week to check his email and read the news (usually British
Broadcasting Corporation) in order to keep up with events at home at a rate of $1 per hour.

In some cases, computer and internet access not only facilitate transnational
communication, but it can also facilitate job opportunities (e.g. Lisimba’s job hunting) and
community building within the U.S. among migrant groups. For example, Sammi met his wife
online. Sammi had a challenging transition to the U.S. with a difficult time in school before
dropping out and moving to a Chicago suburb, Peoria, where he continued to feel lonely. He
said, the “computer is my only friend in Peoria.” Sammi started searching female Ethiopian
names within the area and found a woman on a dating site; he said his (now) wife had signed up
for it and then forgotten about it. Sammi got her email address from the site and contacted her.
They developed an email, then phone, then face-to-face relationship that eventually led to
marriage. Their story is highly unusual in Ethiopia – the internet is not that popular there and
there are cultural rules around marriage that they did not follow. He said, “they didn’t have an
option in our case,” meaning the elders of his wife’s family were not asked for permission
regarding their marriage as would be the custom. Sammi said they have not told anyone back
home that they met online because it would be frowned upon to have sought out a relationship
online rather than through traditional methods. Nevertheless, online searching like Sammi did
can help people locate others in their ethnic group if one does not already have a community
and/or lives in a remote area without access to places like ethnic restaurants where one might
meet others from their country of origin.

For those that do not have their own computers, immobile places like the Broad
Shoulders Taxi garage are convenient places to use a computer with internet access for free.
Nick, for example, spoke about using the BST computers to read local newspapers from home as well as to learn about things like the latest music from home. “If you miss the culture,” he said, “you look online” to reconnect as he does. For communicating with loved ones, however, sometimes the phone is easier not only because of the nature of taxi drivers’ job, but also because people living abroad may have limited access to computers and internet restricting their ability to respond to emails or socialize on sites like Facebook. Zak and Aram, for example, said most people in Somalia and Syria (respectively) cannot afford to have a computer and internet in their own homes so they must go to an internet café. Similarly, Alek likes to Skype with his fiancé and family in Russia, but since they cannot afford internet at home they have to go to an internet café for a scheduled call. Aram pointed out that it is “not fair to compare” internet access in the U.S. and in Syria because it is too different with regard to access. For him, phone conversations are the preferred method of communication due to access restrictions for loved ones abroad.

Despite the advantages of computers and internet for transnational communication, a few drivers expressed fear of online communication and the internet in general. As has happened in the past with other technologies and has occurred since the internet reached the general population, new technologies are met with a mixture of awe and trepidation about the changes they may bring to society (Carey, 1989). Aamin, for example, was concerned that new technologies like computers will impact how people think. He recalled learning multiplication by hand, but since people do these calculations on computers now he worries that they will lose a certain amount of mathematical understanding by not thinking through calculations themselves. Radhi is generally uncomfortable on the computer and uses it once in a while to check his email. However, he thinks that the internet is slower than he is sometimes (I was not able to ask what kind of connection he uses) and that “it is not very smart.” He recalled a friend suggesting to him
that perhaps the internet is slow because the U.S. government is tracking everything he does online, which may also be contributing to his fear of the technology, though he did not strike me as suspicious or fearful of the U.S. or Americans as other drivers I met. Mostly, Radhi worries that with too much time spent online, “people will stop talking” to each other in person. He said he favors face-to-face communication more than the phone and the internet, yet given his transmigrant status he must engage with these technologies if he wants to remain in contact with loved ones abroad. Moreover, he also spoke about setting up his family to make free calls to him, which I suspect involves a computer and internet.

While computers and internet are not necessarily an important part of regular communication practices across borders for taxi drivers (either due to the nature of their job or access in home country or both), they remain part of the communication environment. Restrictions of space, time, and access are more pronounced with regard to these technologies than with mobile devices.

4. Television

In all three of the restaurants and at the BST garage there were televisions for drivers to watch. Generally the station the television was set to reflected the customers’ tastes. At Indo-Pak Palace, which was operated by Pakistanis, the television was usually set to Express News or GeoTV, both Pakistani news stations via satellite. At Falafel Plus, operated by an Egyptian fellow, the station most commonly on was Al-Jazeera in Arabic, though sometimes they switched to ethnic drama programming. At Indus Valley (not sure who operated the restaurant) often Geo TV or Express News were on the front television and Al-Jazeera in Arabic was on the rear television. Though, on several afternoons that I visited the cashier, a woman from Barbados, tuned in to American daytime talk shows like the Tyra Banks Show. At BST, I only saw CNN on
the television, though I did not spend as much time in that area as I did at the restaurants. If there were very few or no customers at the restaurants an employee would sometimes switch the channel to CNN, presumably for my benefit.

Although I could not understand the languages spoken on these satellite television stations I could often pick up a general idea of the topic based on visuals or I would ask someone nearby what was happening on the show. The news programming, of course, would be about local as well as international events, which help keep audience members up to date on current events. During the Cricket World Cup, games were shown at least at Falafel Plus that I noticed and men in the restaurant watched closely. Drivers also closely watched the FIFA World Cup, but they tended to watch it on American channels. In fact, the most crowded I ever saw the restaurants was during FIFA World Cup matches. Men would cheer loudly, debate referees’ calls, and debate who would win each game. One passionate fellow at Indus Valley was sure Ghana would win in their rather nail biting match against Uruguay. When Ghana lost he splayed his body across the floor in disappointment. Meanwhile, the Latin American kitchen staff could be heard cheering in the back of the restaurant. During Ramadan at Falafel Plus a group of men were very interested to watch a drama series, which they told me was a Syrian historical drama about the French occupation of the country. Unfortunately, I could not get a clear answer as to whether or not it was a special program related to Ramadan.

Advertisements on these satellite stations were particularly interesting. Sometimes they were in English, in Urdu, in Arabic or another language based on the presumed audience. On the Pakistani stations I noticed ads in English for immigration offices and assistance, ads for Muslim centers and events to raise money, and banquet halls where people can have events. Such ads mirror the kinds of ads I noticed in the Pakistani newspapers. During the Cricket World Cup at
Falafel Plus I observed advertisements for MetLife, AllState, and dating websites that seemed to be geared towards Indian- or Pakistani-American audiences. There were also advertisements for temporary health insurance for people traveling to the U.S., which speaks to the transnational status of many families and/or tourism patterns. Such ads and services indicate that there are enough people who travel to the U.S. to warrant the need for temporary health insurance. The dating websites focused on different regional ethnic groups with messages saying that their site is “for Punjabi’s like us” or “for Bengalis like us.” These ads seem to encourage people of the same ethnic background to date each other rather than other ethnic groups or nationalities. Such ethnic-focused ads are telling in that it speaks to the earlier observation of ethnocentrism among the drivers and may suggest that ethnocentrism is encouraged from the media.

Despite the availability of satellite television and programming geared toward particular nationalities and/or ethnic groups, many drivers spoke about lacking the time to watch much television, as they often do with computers and internet as well. Ma’awiya said that he does not have the time to watch television because he works so much, but his friends around the world have different jobs and so “they have time to read and watch television.” As a result, he believes, they know more about the U.S. than he does. Radhi does not watch much television either and so he does not usually pay for cable. However, he noted that he signed up for cable during the 2008 U.S. presidential election “to make sure Obama got in.” Having access to television in places of immobility within their working worlds like the restaurants gives drivers an opportunity to access news from their home country or at least from sources nearby, when they otherwise may not have had access. Moreover, as Radhi and Ma’awiya suggest, access to television can also help them learn about American culture and current events while living in Chicago.
5. Audio Devices

Other communication technologies that make up drivers’ working worlds are audio devices like digital music players and car radios. Digital music players, like iPods, enable drivers to carry particular bits of their culture with them wherever they go. Aseef, for example, carries an iPod on which he has stored Middle Eastern music as well as pictures of his family in Sudan. Although I tried to learn more about the music he has and when he listens to it, he was more interested in showing me digital photographs of his young son, wife, and extended family, which he expertly scrolled through. He said he does not often look at these pictures, though when he has a new batch he finds that he looks at them more often at first and then slowly stops until he has another new batch to look through.

I did not meet many drivers who carry iPods with them to work, though all drivers have a radio in the vehicles they drive. Favorite radio stations are news related like National Public Radio (NPR) and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which occasionally is played on the local NPR station. As Aseef pointed out, “NPR is very important for cab drivers” because it provides them with good news and entertainment programming during their long hours in the car. Similarly, Radhi observed that, “Drivers get information from two places – cell phone and NPR.” The car radio, like the cell phone, provides drivers with access to information as well as entertainment, though the information provided, other than traffic updates, is not necessarily always work related.

6. Newspapers

In addition to the newer technologies, newspapers are also important communication tools for immigrants. In discussing communication technology use among immigrants, Aamin said that newspapers are important for immigrants and that “every community has one.” In the
immobile places where I conducted fieldwork I often picked up newspapers and magazines that were freely available. Most often, I found these publications at the restaurants – ethnic newspapers as well as copies of the *Hackney Monthly* and occasionally monthly magazines from a religious organization. At the two Pakistani restaurants that I visited regularly there were weekly deliveries of a Pakistani newspapers, like *Urdu Times*. In it there is an English language insert titled, *Pakistan Abroad*. The stories in *Pakistan Abroad* covered current events in Pakistan, how they relate to the U.S., and stories about local, Chicago community events with colorful pictures and lists of distinguished guests in attendance. Some of the ads in the *Urdu Times* were in English as well as some of the classifieds. I found classified ads for jobs, matrimoniais, and apartments in New York City, Philadelphia, Canada, as well as unidentified locations. Yet, the *Urdu Times* appears to be a locally published paper. Other than print publications, many drivers spoke about reading newspapers from their home countries online. Online access to newspaper from a home country is indicative of the importance of technology under globalization because they help transnational, globalized, and, in terms of nationalities, imagined communities stay connected.

The technologies described here that inhabit immigrant drivers’ working worlds play a role in their management of time and space, particularly with regard to their personal communities which are often globally dispersed. Ethnic newspapers like *Urdu Times* allow its audience to remain connected with an imagined national community and its insert, *Pakistan Abroad*, facilitates the maintenance of weak ties among the local Pakistani community through its stories about Pakistani combined with local Pakistani-American news, events, and activities. Other mass produced communication media like television, radio, and online newspapers and other culturally-specific websites function in a similar way – the information shared and
disseminated assists with the weaving of weak ties among dispersed populations, allowing them
to connect with a home culture and sense of imagined community. Personalized devices like cell
phones, laptops, and iPods gives users access to both mass-produced community-related
information as well as personalized information and community within strong tie networks of
friends and family. Although Chicago’s immigrant drivers cannot travel to see loved ones on a
whim, they can call, email, video chat, etc. easily and affordably. However, easy access to
communication technology for Chicago’s drivers does not necessarily mean the loved ones they
are trying to reach abroad are easy to access. Time differences and access to technology,
combined with restrictions of the drivers’ professions dictate communication practices within
these strong tie transnational communities.

E. Summary

Globalization involves economic as well as social effects at both global and local levels.
In this section I have explored the local experiences of globalization from economic and social as
well as personal and professional perspectives for Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers. At the
professional level the taxi industry, with its flexible labor structure, is illustrative on a small scale
of the flexible labor practices common in neoliberalism and globalization. Drivers are rendered
somewhat powerless by being placed at the bottom of the hierarchy and incurring much of the
day-to-day costs, like fuel. These day-to-day costs are affected by global forces that drivers
experience locally.

Although many drivers enjoy the flexibility of the job because of the freedom it appears
to give them with respect to vacations and daily scheduling, this kind of employment structure
also makes them vulnerable to exploitation and devaluation of their contributions by higher
authorities. In response, drivers seek out ways to empower themselves and resist ill treatment by
working around some of the industry’s rules and regulations. One way they do this is through the use of cell phones to access personal communities of colleagues and gather information to improve their earnings and customer service. However, these ties are relatively strong and ethnocentric, limiting the opportunity to link weak ties, and perhaps empower the larger labor community even more and eradicate some of the industry problems like over charging on leases, overzealous ticketing, and harassment. Moreover, re-thinking the implications of cell phone use with regard to absent presence to account for the fact that drivers are most often using the phone to engage with their physical surroundings may also lift some of the burden of risking cell phone usage while driving. Specifically, minor modifications to in-car cell phone use like device mounting and voice command could strike a balance between city regulations and drivers’ need to communicate with one another.

Since this study’s focus was on immigrants, their management of global communities was also of interest because globalization has personal effects on individual lives. As such, I found that drivers also manage personal, social communities and some of these are transnational communities. I encountered a mixture of immigrants and transnationals, but even those immigrants had access to transnational people and/or media in their work and personal lives. For those negotiating regular communication with loved ones abroad time and space were factors that had to be overcome. Indeed, technologies like cell phones and the internet make time/space obstacles less intrusive and thus maintaining transnational communities more manageable. However, for mobile workers like taxi drivers trying to communicate with relatively immobile loved ones abroad, timing and placement of calls became factors that needed more attention and negotiation.
Power and time/space are broad concepts that underlie many discussions of globalization. Examining these dynamics locally, on a small scale, as I have done here in looking at immigrant taxi drivers in Chicago lends insight into how globalization affects people and what it means for society. In the next and final chapter I discuss theoretical implications of the findings examined here and in Chapter IV.
VI. CONCLUSION

In this study I have explored what community means to a globally mobile group and how communication technology plays a part in community for them. These questions are important because society is increasingly interconnected and interdependent at the global level with families as well as citizenries dispersed around the world. While urbanization prompted questions about communities among Chicago School scholars in the early 1900s and the growth of the internet prompted new questions about the topic nearly a century later, globalization with the mobility and migration it brings also raises questions about community. Community is an important topic for social research because it represents how people live their lives, and examining communities and how they adapt to social changes can tell us how broad forces like globalization impact people at the daily level. It has been the perspective of this study that community refers to interaction, shared knowledge, information, beliefs, and practices, and it is a concept that must not be linked to proximity as it had been in the past. Freeing community from notions of physical proximity allows researchers to see transnational communities and other mobile communities of families, friends, co-workers, and/or citizens that is reality of day-to-day life for many people in the world today. What keeps communities together, however, is communication (Dewey, 1927), especially when they are physically dispersed. When face-to-face communication is no longer a possibility, it is communication technologies that make community building and maintenance possible under transnational and other mobile circumstances. As such, it was my goal to investigate community among a particular immigrant group and focus on the technologies they use to maintain it.
A. Summary

Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers are a unique population for research because as immigrants they represent the migratory aspects of globalization and as taxi drivers in a global city they represent low-wage service jobs that are often undervalued in a global economy. Moreover, the taxi industry in Chicago illustrates, on a small scale, the kind of neoliberal economic practices of flexible employment that are common under globalization. Additionally, communication technologies are an important part of taxi drivers’ work. For these reasons, Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers were a fitting population to explore questions of community in a global economy, and they are a population that is rarely studied in social research.

Two major themes emerged during fieldwork, which I have labeled community and globalization. I found that a labor community exists for my participants, but it is not as robust as it could be. Using the notion of strong and weak ties as set out by Granovetter (1973) to understand a participant’s individual connections helped me to understand the community dynamics as a whole. Community manifested itself for the drivers in two ways – collaboration among drivers (via communication technology) and behaviors at immobile places like restaurants. Drivers collaborate with colleagues using both official communication technologies and unofficial ones. Using official collaborative technologies (particularly the Gandalf) drivers get information from dispatchers about where to find fares. It is a top-down form of communication that is authorized by the city and managed through taxi companies. These devices do not exactly promote fellowship among the drivers, but they do facilitate the sharing of information and build some amount of weak ties among this mobile labor community. Using unofficial collaborative technologies, specifically cell phones, drivers build and maintain personalized communities of colleagues that help each other on the road. Cell phones facilitate
relatively strong ties among drivers who already know each other and, often, they are from the same ethnic group. The benefits of cell phone collaboration include personalized and timely information about fares, traffic, and directions, which help drivers improve their customer service and, ideally, increase their incomes. In addition to sharing information, these devices also help build community by facilitating the sharing of professional beliefs and practices as well as companionship for this mobile group. Moreover, the newspaper *Hackney Monthly* promotes a labor community among Chicago’s drivers by weaving invisible (weak) ties among its members who cannot all know each other. The paper makes drivers aware of each other and raises issues relevant to the community of drivers and non-driver professionals and thus helps to establish an imagined community within the taxi industry.

Community within the taxi industry is also supported by a number of immobile places that serve drivers. Airport taxi staging lots and taxi company garages are work-related places where drivers must slow down for a period of time to await their turn to go to the terminals or have their vehicles serviced, respectively. In these places drivers will socialize, pray, eat, and/or take care of professional business in a face-to-face manner. Although face-to-face communication is not a necessity for community, it is helpful for making community members aware of each other, building friendships and professional relationships. In addition to these work places, there are also “third places” (Oldenburg, 1999) within the taxi driver community where members take breaks to eat, socialize, and pray. These third places are the restaurants that cater to taxi drivers where I spent time during fieldwork. All three of the restaurants in this study contain a mosque making them particularly attractive to Muslim drivers wanting to adhere to their practice of five prayers a day. Each of the three restaurants had regular customers that came in everyday and groups of friends would meet at these places to take breaks together.
Although this labor community operates within and relies on Chicago as a large urban center, it is relatively isolated from the city outside of the services it provides. Drivers experience harassment and aggressive ticketing from city employees and the immobile places the drivers inhabit are relatively hidden from the rest of city activity. Although drivers, especially experienced ones, may feel that they know the city well, they are in many ways socially isolated given the ill treatment from some city representatives as well as the lack of general public awareness of their work and contributions to the economy. Moreover, their spatial separation contributes to this isolation, for the restaurants are located on side streets that can easily go unnoticed and airport lots are hidden from general view. In addition to professional isolation, I also found some amount of ethnic isolation in that participants tended to prefer to work and socialize with other drivers who are from their same ethnic group. This preference for one’s ethnic group is largely due to language barriers, but also appears to be a certain amount of ethnocentrism. This labor community, then, exists by way of a combination of strong and weak ties, which are linked through communication technology and immobile places that support face-to-face communication. The value of communication for the community and the technologies they use ought not be underestimated. Newer technologies that make up the official and unofficial devices and traditional technology like the newspaper are crucial for keeping these mobile professionals connected and consciously working toward community together.

Globalization was another theme that I explored in order to understand how it impacts this mobile labor community on an economic level as well as how it impacts this group of immigrants on a personal and social level. As a labor group, the taxi industry structure reflects the flexible labor practices that are common under globalization and neoliberalism. Although drivers are the face of the industry to the general public, structurally they are at the bottom of the
hierarchy without much power to fight for their own rights and are vulnerable to daily costs, such as fuel, that are influenced by global activities. And while many drivers enjoy the flexibility the job gives them with regard to daily scheduling and vacation time, many also adopt strategies to empower themselves within an employment structure that seems to devalue and sometimes exploit them. An important strategy many drivers adopt is to use the cell phone to empower themselves with greater access to job-related information that they believe improves their earnings and customer service. Interestingly, from what drivers told me it seems that the people they talk with on the phone reflects a certain amount of ethnocentrism and, to speak in terms of ties, their contacts are made up of relatively strong ties. I argue that many drivers miss the opportunity to develop more weak ties with others who they may meet at immobile places or through other activities. Developing a strong network of cross-ethnic weak ties among the taxi driver community could further empower drivers to influence industry structure and policy in their favor. Use of the cell phone certainly helps them on a small scale and with the daily battle to earn enough money, but perhaps the device (along with other forms of communication) could aid with building these stronger weak ties.

In addition to employment structure as it relates to globalization, I also examined how this group of immigrants manage their personal communities of loved ones around the world. Despite shifts in people’s relationship with time and space under globalization, making them less imposing obstacles to the flow of people, goods, ideas, and information, they remain factors that participants had to negotiate. Even when using flexible communication technologies like cell phones and the internet, the simple fact of time differences had to be managed. Moreover, the nature of taxi drivers’ work, requiring them to be always mobile, made use of certain technologies, like television or internet that need visual focus, challenging to the point that they
are less utilized than audio devices like cell phones. Understanding which communication devices are most utilized among this population is valuable when considering the ways that drivers might be able to empower themselves, build weak ties, and possibly improve working conditions. In addition, recognizing the everyday challenges of communicating within a transnational community is valuable for understanding the on-the-ground experience of globalization for these dispersed communities. Globalization may compress time and space leading to faster communication and transportation and link people so that events around the world have concrete, local effects, but when it comes to transnational community communication, these concepts remain as tangible barriers that must be consciously negotiated and managed.

B. Theoretical Implications

Throughout the discussion of findings a few important theoretical questions were raised which I explore further in this section. Among the community literature, the notion that community is a process and it evolves as people take part in it, as developed by Fernback (2007), was influential. Even though Fernback (2007) was writing about online interactions, the notion still holds in the context of transnational, mobile communities. Indeed, the findings on community here further support the process argument. For the drivers, the practice of community manifested itself in the ways that they interacted with each other as colleagues, specifically through collaboration. Communication technologies like cell phones were a crucial means through which community was enacted because this population is mobile, meaning that face-to-face interaction is not always possible. With an online community as with a dispersed, mobile and/or global community, motivation and/or commitment become the driving forces keeping the group together (Fernback, 2007). Drivers are motivated to maintain this professional community
because being part of it and the information, knowledge, belief, and practice sharing that membership entails can improve individuals’ earnings and daily work experiences. While a significant amount of scholarship reconsidering the concept has been inspired as a result of people’s adoption of the internet, the applications of these arguments need not be limited to the online realm. Mobile individuals like professional drivers and/or immigrants must also maintain relationships in a kind of virtual environment of voice calls that brings those who are absent into a virtual presence with one another.

Moreover, giving the concept of community the kind of flexibility that a process allows frees researchers to see the practice of community in new contexts like virtual and mobile/transnational environments. Understanding community in this way is reflective of globalization and the migration, mobility, and flexibility that it entails. Communities may seem to some extent fleeting because they are changeable, evolving and because people may be moving in and out of them regularly (such as the transnational drivers in this study). But, such a perspective is rooted in traditional notions of community. Society has changed with globalization and that means communities have adapted as well. Community is a very human way of relating to one another that people have always and, will likely always, engage in, but in order to endure communities must adapt to changing circumstances like globalization. Ignoring the effects of broad changes like globalization result in a limited understanding of community. The present study illustrates the value of a more flexible, process-oriented vision of community for being able to identify the existence of community (particularly in a mobile context) where others may have overlooked it.

Another concept that this research addresses is “absent presence” (Gergen, 2002). Being on the phone has, traditionally, meant that one is to some extent elsewhere in their mind through
a voice connection to another person. When using a cell phone and the mobility that it provides, “absent presence” can be a problem for activities like driving or even walking because the user’s mind is not entirely in his/her present space. But with the growth of smartphones that permit users to engage with their physical surroundings through applications like maps, the question of absent presence gets more complicated. For the most part, drivers use their phones’ voice features, rather than an application, to navigate their spatial present. Cell phones usage, particularly voice calls, may bring into one’s presence a person who is absent, but it is the content of their communication that ought to be researched in greater detail before making claims about whether the present cell phone user is fully present in body and mind. As I found in this study, the content of these calls between colleagues allows users to better engage with their physical surroundings, particularly when talking about directions, rather than necessarily distracting them from physical surroundings. A practical implication given the finding that drivers often collaborate over the phone and the question over absent presence leading to distracted driving may be as simple as mounting the phone and using voice commands. A theoretical implication here is that researchers interested in cell phone use and absent presence must also take into account the content of the communication to fully understand the nature of the absent presence.

This altered relationship with time and space that underlie discussions of absent presence and that new media like cell phones and internet facilitate is also an area that came into question in the findings. Although it is common to view time and space as compressed under globalization (Harvey, 1990), on-the-ground research with individuals illustrated that while time and space are compressed, they are factors that people still must negotiate within their professional and transnational communities. Drivers have to consciously negotiate time and space to maintain
transnational connections as well as manage their professional work. They expressed a sense of being enchained to time with regard to their work. Globalization, then, has limits and contradictions. Although it has significantly impacted how people experience time and space, it too is bound by them. Moreover, compressing time and space may make them easier to manage in some cases, in the case of immigrant taxi drivers this compression combined with the flexible (i.e. unstable) employment made time and space more tangible and demanding of drivers to always be mobile.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is that individual ties among the drivers tend to be ethnocentric and relatively strong while weak ties among different groups of friends and ethnic groups are minimal. When asked who they talk to on the cell phone while working, drivers often described people of their own ethnic background. And while they are using cell phones as an alternative communication tool in order to empower themselves, it seems that they could be doing more. This finding mirrors Palackal, et al.’s (2011) finding in their longitudinal study of cell phone users in Kerala, India. Over time, their participants exhibited a decrease in social linkages over all and, more specifically, a localizing and strengthening of “core networks” of family and friends with a corresponding shrinking in the growth of ties to outsiders. In other words, individuals’ already strong tie networks remained strong via cell phone usage, but links to weak ties decreased (Palackal, et al., 2011). They refer to this trend as, “‘bounded solidarity,’” building on Ling’s (2008) thesis that density of communication within a strong tie network leads to a deepening of those relationships but a decrease in the growth of new communication ties. Put simply in the context of mobile communication, “mobile technology tends towards closure rather than opening of networks” (Palackal, et al., 2011, p. 394). Bounded solidarity is a disturbing trend because, as the authors point out, “The increasing interdependence – and
associated problems – that characterizes the modern era requires solutions based on interpersonal understandings and relationships that go beyond the narrow confines of restricted circles to incorporate more, not fewer, core connections” (Palackal, et al, 2011, p. 407). That is, in a globalized society it is important that individuals understand how to relate to, communicate, and/or work with people from a variety of backgrounds. As research shows (United Nations, 2004), migration is increasing, meaning that communities are becoming more diverse. Moreover, one’s work is increasingly global, either requiring global travel or influenced by global activities, and being able to navigate these situations will ease these interactions.

In the context of Chicago’s immigrant taxi driver, I want to be cautious in my discussion of findings with regard to bounded solidarity. I had limited time and access with my participants and so was unable to get a great level of detail regarding their ties within the professional community. Nevertheless, the consistently ethnocentric nature of drivers’ ties led me to believe that although these ties may not necessarily be “core” ties like family and close friends (though some are), they are relatively strong ties under the umbrella of co-workers. More significant is that ties outside of participant’s ethnic groups were relatively minimal. The problems that Bruno and Hewitt’s (2010a, 2010b) research revealed, such as exploitation and harassment of drivers by city employees and taxi companies, could be alleviated if drivers better linked weak ties across all ethnicities to speak as a unified labor force. Granted, job mobility and lack of loyalty to the job contribute to this difficulty in organizing, but it is possible that a greater linkage of weak ties within the larger community could help to address some of the injustices drivers face. Cell phones would be an important medium for achieving greater solidarity since nearly every driver carries one and it is a personal communication device rather than an official one.
This bounded solidarity finding is important for social research and society because it reflects a possible pattern in human behavior towards a preference for insularity despite globalization’s push toward mobility, migration, and diversity of communities. This possible insular pattern of sticking to one’s own ethnic group is problematic in what is an increasingly globalized world with communities becoming more diverse and dispersed. The bounded solidarity that I found shows, importantly, both how the smaller, ethnic-based communities stick together but also how community does not exist, or at least struggles to endure, possibly to the detriment of the larger taxi community. By ignoring or rejecting weak ties across ethnic groups drivers are allowing the imposed labor community, which the city and taxi companies control, dictate their work environment and they lack a unified voice to fight against poor treatment. The identification of smaller, more organically formed communities is an important finding, but the realization that they are relatively insular has implications for this group as well as for society in general. The bounded solidarity finding has been identified in India (Palackal, et al, 2011) and in Chicago with completely different groups of people, suggesting a possible pattern of human behavior. The fact that communities might be reacting to the migration, mobility, and diversity of globalization by turning inward via technology like cell phones goes against expectations. If this pattern continues to appear in future research it can have important implications for both theory and policy with regard to community and society as globalization continues to shape our world.

The cell phone itself does not inherently push users to build strong ties and neglect weak ones, but it seems to be how some people use them. In contrast, Rashid Temuri, the driver who utilizes social media to find fares discussed in Chapter IV, uses his cell phone to develop weak ties and improve his earnings (Cheng, 2012; McLaughlin, 2011). In other words, he uses the
strength of weak ties to earn more money and develop a customer base that can potentially ensure long-term financial stability in an otherwise unstable industry, not to mention his goal of improving public perceptions of cab drivers in the city. Although this story is unique, it illustrates the potential of cell phones, particularly internet-enabled phones with access to social media applications, to develop the strength of weak ties. In Temuri’s case, those who benefit are not only himself, but also his customers who get reliable, personalized taxi service. Not all drivers are as tech savvy nor do they all have smartphones with mobile application capabilities, but they all carry a cell phone of some sort. Functions like mass text messages and/or recorded voice messages are alternative ways to reach many drivers at once and help to improve the strength of weak ties between the smaller strong tie networks within this labor community and, potentially, improve working conditions. However, technological solutions can only go so far. Social issues like lack of loyalty to the industry, job mobility, and possible reluctance to work with drivers of different ethnic background are more likely to prevent organized resistance than technology. Technology may be crucial for building and maintaining the communication ties that foster community, but one must remain cautious with how much power to give technology. For technology is only as good and as useful as people make it. The technological potential for drivers to build on weak ties exists. Future research can expand on this information, combined with the knowledge of the social limitations that exist in the community, and consider solutions that can help drivers or other populations facing similar dilemmas.

C. Limitations and Methods Reflection

As with any kind of social research, this study has limitations. Firstly, my sample of participants is small and so these findings cannot be generalized. In addition to the small sample, my access to participants was relatively limited. Non-driver industry professionals were
generally able to offer me more time for interviews, but drivers tended to have less time. While my interview structure tried to accommodate drivers’ work schedules, it meant that many of my interviews were brief and lacked the opportunity to delve deeper into their communication practices. Relatedly, I was never able to develop a strong relationship with any one participant who could become a key informant within the community. Granted, a number of non-driver industry professionals did generously help me by granting interviews as well as providing contacts and recommendations for further research, I did not pursue a key informant type of relationship with them because the study’s focus was on immigrant drivers. Among the drivers, every time I hoped that I had developed a connection with someone and attempted to follow up (via phone or email depending on the information the driver may have shared with me\(^{15}\)) for an additional interview it did not pan out. While I became a regular at O’Hare and the restaurants such that I would repeatedly see many of the same drivers, these encounters rarely led to more than one interview and a casual conversation. A longer-term research relationship with participants never evolved as I had hoped it would. Drivers’ needs to be mobile as much as possible coupled with my research need for a participant to be immobile long enough for an interview meant that obtaining an interview, let alone a longer-term research relationship was a challenge.

Perhaps part of my struggle to get into and learn about this community had to do with my outsider status, in addition to drivers’ pressure to be in constant motion. As discussed in Chapter III, being a white, American woman meant that I was largely an outsider in this community in terms of race, gender, and nationality. Some potential participants were cautious of me because I

\(^{15}\) I never request participants’ contact information. However, when discussing possible follow-up interviews several drivers offered me their phone number or email address in order to reach them for scheduling.
am American and they feared discrimination/profiling/harassment/etc. by the U.S. government. Some, particularly conservative Muslim men, were cautious of me because I am female and it is not their custom to speak to women outside of their families. Others seemed to want to control the conversation, tell me how to conduct my work, or simply seemed ashamed of their job when speaking to a female about it, all of which may have influenced what information they shared with me or how much I was able to learn from them. Despite these limitations, I did gain some amount of access and I am grateful to all participants who shared their time and stories with me.

The experience in the field was one of constant learning and demanded flexibility with and sensitivity to participants’ schedules and willingness to tell me about their lives. The challenges due to mobility never disappeared, but a creative methodological approach that reflected the flexibility demands of the field as well as of the drivers’ work itself made the research possible. In reflecting on the methods, the value of mobile methods becomes apparent when attempting to learn about a mobile population as a researcher who is relatively immobile. Although the population may be difficult to reach, mobile professionals like taxi drivers are worthy of study and their contributions valuable for social research, and so social science methods have to adapt in order to reach them. Assuming adaptable methodological strategies and incorporating the immobile systems that interact with the mobile ones under study make these populations more accessible.

Although my methods were logical and effective under the circumstances, I do wish that I thought to include the non-driver industry professionals as participants from the beginning of the research rather than halfway through my time in the field. I found that interviews with the non-driver professionals were helpful for contextualizing drivers’ responses, for better understanding the industry, and for gaining access to additional research sites like the airports. In
more general terms, for those researching a labor group, reaching out to the laborers under study as well as others in the industry and in related industries can be valuable for developing a more robust understanding of the labor group as a whole. Another regret that I have is that I was unable to develop a key informant relationship with any of the driver participants. Unfortunately all attempts to forge such a connection did not evolve and it is not effective to try to force such a relationship. Qualitative researchers must work with participants and cannot force a relationship that they do not want to have.

In addition to being able to think outside of the group under study to see the importance of reaching out to those in related areas as well as being adaptable when relating to participants, qualitative researchers need to be sensitive to and aware of practical issues like outsider status and safety. As discussed earlier, gender and religion became issues during fieldwork to the extent that my fieldwork slowed or had to stop in response to sexual harassment, inappropriate advances, or difficulty in finding drivers willing to speak to me as a female who is not a family member. Moreover, addressing my own safety in the field limited my access to certain places (e.g. restaurants) because I felt unsafe going there alone. Qualitative research like this has a lot to do with relating to people and when the researcher is uncomfortable in a situation, participants are likely to sense that and may feel they cannot trust the researcher, avoid talking to him/her, or otherwise respond in a way that is not conducive to data collection which may or may not have long term effects. As such, researchers must be aware of issues like outsider status, safety, and harassment and be prepared to react, make adjustments, and/or end fieldwork for the day. After the couple of occasions of sexual harassment that I experienced, I ended fieldwork after the encounter and wound up taking a day or two off from the field entirely to give myself time to recover and regain confidence in the work. Others may respond differently, but the point is that
researchers cannot ignore such issues and interactions nor do they need to cause an end to the research entirely.

Qualitative research depends on one’s ability to interact with others and instill enough trust in the participants so that they are willing to share their stories. Understanding that any qualitative researcher – despite issues like gender or insider/outsider status – will most likely face hurdles in relating to participants at some point or another may be of some consolation. For example, a male researcher doing this same study would not likely have been sexually harassed, but he may have experienced challenges like a certain amount of competitiveness from male participants. Responding to these challenges honestly, but also with patience and respect for the participants is an ideal approach.

D. Future Research

As a result of the findings discussed in this report, there is great room for additional research on this topic. Having developed a stronger understanding of industry structure and having found useful ways to reach drivers, future research could take a more specifically network approach and focus more on the precise details of individual ties and how they interact. Such an approach could help improve understanding of the possible pattern of bounded solidarity that I found. Moreover, including all drivers rather than just immigrant drivers would allow researchers to gather a more representative sample of the industry.

A more complicated possible extension of this project would be to focus on international communication between drivers and their loved ones abroad. If possible, being able to observe and interview people on either end of the phone calls in both the U.S. and countries of origin would provide a more complete understanding of transnational communication practices and communities. Honing in on a specific ethnic group rather than a labor group would also allow
researchers to learn the languages the groups speak which would bring some element of insider status as well as a greater dimension of understanding of the community practices.

This study and other recent works uncovered some of the inner workings of the industry structure (e.g. Bruno & Schneideman, 2009a and 2009b; Bruno & Hewitt, 2010a and 2010b), but more work could be done. Bringing a more specifically economic eye to the industry and unraveling the details of how money travels (perhaps both officially and unofficially) as well as track the relationships with related industries, like the restaurants, would highlight the daily economic workings of a single industry that is connected to and influenced by globalization.

Taking a cue from mobility studies, asking drivers to complete daily journals about their communication on and off the job would be a fascinating way to learn about their practices on a daily basis rather than upon reflection during an interview. Moreover, if at all possible, collecting transcripts from these conversation and texts as well tracking smartphone application and internet usage on drivers’ devices would provide fascinating insight and detail into the content of their communication and interactions. This methodological approach, however, could be too much of an invasion of privacy.

Another approach that could help to solve the problem of outsider status would be for a research to conduct a similar study as a cab driver him/herself. This would give him/her first-hand experience of the profession as well as some insider status when interviewing and developing relationships with other drivers. Or, rather than the researcher becoming mobile, another way to become an insider might be for him/her to work at a taxi restaurants and become part of the immobile environment that drivers inhabit.

Tracking was a topic that came up on occasion, but I did not fully explore it. Taxi drivers are tracked in the city through the Gandalf system, though this may become more intensive with
the recent policy change prohibiting drivers from exceeding a 12-hour shift, which will require better tracking in order to enforce this policy. The social and technological impacts of this practice are areas that communication scholars, particularly those concerned with privacy and/or labor, may find to be an exciting area for future research.

Religion and culture were underlying themes throughout the fieldwork. When put in the context of bounded solidarity and the tendency to stick to one’s own ethnic group the question of how people relate to one another under globalization becomes another area ripe for future research, particularly by globalization scholars. I was not able to observe drivers praying very often, but my sense is (based on patterns of behavior outside the mosques) different ethnic groups did not pray together. In other words, despite being of the same religion (though, perhaps, following different forms of Islam), it is possible that ethnic and cultural divisions hold greater weight. If true, this may support Huntington’s (1993) prediction that under globalization people will divide up according to culture rather than ideology or economics. Future research ought to explore this question further either with this same group studied here or with other mixed ethnic groups in order to better understand, on a small scale at least, whether Huntington’s (1993) prediction continues to hold weight.

Another theme that emerged during fieldwork was gender and it is an area that merits more scholarly attention. My understanding of community among immigrant taxi drivers is limited to male drivers. Granted, most drivers are men, but there is a small percentage of drivers who are female and it is worth exploring their experiences of community to test if/how it is in anyway different from the male drivers. Being a male dominated industry it would be fascinating to learn how female drivers navigate this world with their supervisors, colleagues, and passengers. Do they adopt specific strategies for interaction and collaboration that are gender
specific? What led them to this line of work, as opposed to female dominated industries, and to what extent does their gender impact their experiences of community if at all?

Along a similar line, transnational female dominated industries such as domestic labor present an opportunity for comparison of the experience of community within different kinds of gendered transnational work. Are the patterns of bounded solidarity the same among female transnational workers in a different kind of industry? What role do gender and ethnicity play in how colleagues do or do not work together? Taking gender out of the equation, future research ought to test the findings here with regard to other kinds of work, transnational or not. For example, might researchers find a pattern of bounded solidarity among a diverse group of American-born workers? If so, how might that be impacting their work?

Lastly, the question of assimilation came up during the course of this research. Assimilation is an area of research that explores how immigrants adapt to, integrate with, and possibly alter the culture in which they reside. However, in cases of transmigrants where people move to a host country to work part of the year, returning to their country of origin for the rest of the year, and/or when they move to a host country only to work or attend school and intend to return to their country of origin for the long term, the question of assimilation becomes murky.

Migration today is not simply about people uprooting their entire lives to live in another country. Migration is more fluid today as transnational research shows and as the transmigrants in this study exemplify. The question is, if transnational patterns of migration continue, then how do nations and societies adapt? Assimilation assumes a certain permanence and migrants in these cases may feel more inspired to adapt and integrate, but when transmigrants live more fluidly and lack a sense of permanence in the host country they may also lack inspiration to assimilate. Future research ought to explore whether assimilation is a notion that holds up in the face of
transnational migration and, if not, what are the impacts on society. How are nations, societies, and institutions responding to this new pattern of migration, if at all? How can they respond better?

In spite of the work done in the present study, many questions remain. In fact, more questions have arisen as a result of this work. This study took questions about community within a globalized and mobile society, and applied them to a unique and often hidden-in-plain-sight group that is part of the urban environment. Taxis and their drivers are classic symbols of the urban milieu, especially in a bustling global city like Chicago, and yet little research has been done to understand their working world. The present study sought to bring to light their experiences and, in the process, contribute to theoretical understandings of community and globalization in social research.
CITED LITERATURE


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February 27, 2012 from
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDES

Short Interview Guide (Taxi Drivers): series of questions I will select from; one question or all of them may be discussed in the short interviews, depending on the participant.

General Information:
Name______________________
Age_______________________
Gender____________________
Country of Origin____________________
When did you arrive in the U.S.?________
When did you arrive in Chicago?________
How long have you been driving a cab?________
Do you lease or own your cab?____________
If you lease, what is your lease schedule?________

Why did you become a cab driver?
What do you like and dislike about the job?
Do you talk to other drivers while working? If so, who do you talk to and what do you talk about?
What do you do on work breaks? Where do you go? Why those places?
How do you stay in touch with people from home?
How do you stay informed about events at home?
What do you carry with you to work each day? Why these items?
Who was the last person you talked to on your cell phone? What did you talk about?
When do you use the cell phone at work and when do you use the Gandalf (if it is in the vehicle)? What are the benefits of each device?

Long Interview Guide (Taxi Drivers)
series of questions to ask in a semi-structured interview

General Information:
Name______________________
Age_______________________
Gender____________________
Country of Origin____________________
When did you arrive in the U.S.?________
When did you arrive in Chicago?________
How long have you been driving a cab?________
Do you lease or own your cab?____________
If you lease, what is your lease schedule?________
APPENDIX A (continued)

Work:
What kinds of things do you do to stay in touch with other drivers?
Describe what you do when you take a break from work.
Do you remember your first day driving a taxi in Chicago? What was it like?
How is that experience from your first day different from your experiences driving today?
Please show me around your cab.
What nationalities/ethnicities are the other drivers that you hang out with?
Why do you come to this restaurant/cafe? Are there other restaurants/cafe where you stop for breaks? What do you like about these restaurants/cafes?
When do you use the cell phone at work and when do you use the Gandalf (if it is in the vehicle)? What are the benefits of each device?
What do you carry with you to work each day? Why these items?
What is the process of becoming a cab driver?
Once you pass the exams, what else do you need to learn (e.g. best times to drive, neighborhoods to go to, restaurants to frequent for breaks?)
Can you think of a time when you got taxi-related information on the cell phone while working that helped you do your job?
Do drivers compete with each other? If so, how?

Relationships:
When you are working do you ever help out friends and do they ever help you? How do you help each other? What kinds of things do you do? How do you stay in touch with each other?
You were born in a different country from where you currently live. Do you still have friends and family in your country of origin? How do you stay in touch with them? Do you get to visit?
What kinds of passengers do you usually pick up?
When you are not working, who do you spend time with? What kinds of things do you do?

Technology:
It seems like the cell phone is an important part of your job. Who do you typically talk to on your cell phone? What kinds of things do you talk about?
There is a lot of technology involved in your job. Besides the cell phone, what other technologies do you work with inside your car? What are they used for?
When did you first got a cell phone? How did it change your day-to-day life?
Are you interested in keeping up with current events in your country of origin? If so, how do you stay informed?
Tell me about the last five cell phone calls/texts you made: Who were they? Why did you call/text them? Who are there people you call on a regular basis, and why?
APPENDIX A (continued)

Interview Guide for Non-Driver Professionals (Hackney Monthly editor)
series of questions to ask in a semi-structured interview

What prompted you to start Hackney Monthly?
How has the publication evolved over the years (e.g. publishing methods, media used, readership)?
What do you see as Hackney Monthly’s role and main contribution to the industry?
What are your distribution methods? How do you get the paper to its audience? What are the strategies and reasoning behind these choices?
How do you reach out to/contact drivers and other industry professionals for stories?
Aside from this publication, are you involved in the taxi industry in any way (e.g. driving a taxi yourself)?
How do you envision the future of the publication? What plans do you have to continue its success?
What do readers appreciate most about the paper?

Interview Guide for Non-Driver Professionals (Broad Shoulders Taxi Manager)
series of questions to ask in a semi-structured interview

How long have you been a manager at this garage? Have you had other positions with the company before?
What is the process of leasing a cab to a driver? Do drivers come in daily, weekly?
What is your average day like on the job?
How has the job changed over time?
How does this garage communicate with drivers while they are on the road? For what reasons? With what technology?
Do all cabs have Mobile Knowledge technology in them? What are the pros and cons of using this technology? In what ways does having the ability to communicate with your network of drivers help or hurt in this job?
Would you give me a brief history of BST in Chicago?
Would you give me a tour of the facility?

Interview Guide for Non-Driver Professionals (Training Course Director)
series of questions to ask in a semi-structured interview

Please describe the program – goals, procedures, timeline, etc.
What do you teach drivers about job-related technology?
What and how do you teach drivers about communication with dispatchers, with companies, with customers?
How has the program evolved/changed over the years?
How long has the program existed?
How do instructors teach drivers about the city geography?
Do the instructors recommend neighborhoods for good business? If so, what advice do they give?
May I observe one of the classes?

Interview Guide for Non-Driver Professionals (Broad Shoulders Taxi Dispatching Manager)
series of questions to ask in a semi-structured interview

How many cab companies dispatch from this office?
How long have you been a dispatcher and manager?
Which Mobile Knowledge products do you use and why?
What are the pros and cons of using these products for communication?
Aside from connecting customers and drivers, what are the other reasons your dispatchers communicate with drivers? How do they help drivers in their work?
How has the work of dispatching changed over the years?
How long has dispatching been centralized like this (rather than from in individual company’s garage)? What are the advantages/disadvantages of centralization?
Sometimes drivers talk to each other to locate fares instead of going through dispatch. How do this impact your job?
May I observe the dispatchers working?

Interview Guide for Non-Driver Professionals (Dispatchers)
series of questions to ask in a semi-structured interview

How long have you been a taxi dispatcher?
Please describe your average shift at work.
Please describe the process of taking a call from a customer and then alerting your drivers.
Are drivers required to use the Gandalf system?
What do you think are the pros and cons of using the Gandalf?
Aside from connecting customers, what are the other reasons you communicate with drivers?
How do you help them?
APPENDIX B

TAXI RESTAURANT PHOTOGRAPHS

Indo-Pak Palace

Dining area
APPENDIX B (continued)

Indo-Pak Palace

Food counter
APPENDIX B (continued)

Indo-Pak Palace

International calling cards, scented oils, and pain relieves sold at the food counter
APPENDIX B (continued)

Falafel Plus

Dining area
APPENDIX B (continued)

Falafel Plus

Food counter
Taxis lined up in front of Indo-Pak Palace and Falafel Plus
APPENDIX B (continued)

Indus Valley

Exterior of the restaurant
APPENDIX C

OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY PHOTOGRAPHS

Gandalf

Main interface with credit card swipe on left side
Gandalf connected to radio and meter
APPENDIX D

UNOFFICIAL COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY PHOTOGRAPH

Driver with a cell phone hands free device wrapped around both ears for clearer communication
APPENDIX E

O’HARE TAXI STAGING LOT PHOTOGRAPHS

View of lot from a fire lane
Fencing, barbed wire, loudspeakers surrounding the lot
View from inside a parked taxi near the front of a line
APPENDIX E (continued)

Bulletin board near the grill and stamp office
APPENDIX F

BROAD SHOULDERS TAXI GARAGE LOUNGE PHOTOGRAPH

Lounge area in the garage
VITA

NAME: Margaret Carr Griffith Williams

EDUCATION: Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago, Communication, 2012 (expected)
Dissertation: Taxis, technology, and transmigrants: Communication practices of Chicago’s taxi drivers.
Chair: Steve Jones, Ph.D.

M.A., Temple University, Broadcasting, Telecommunications, and Mass Media, 2007
Chair: Zizi Papacharissi, Ph.D.

B.A., Trinity College, Religion, 2002
Distinction on Senior Thesis: One Festival, Two Cultures: The Holi/Phagwa Festival in India and in Trinidad.

TEACHING: University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Instructor
Interpersonal Communication, 2010
Fundamentals of Human Communication, 2008

Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Teaching Assistant
Media in Everyday Life, 2006
Mass Communication Theory, 2006
Introduction to Media Technology, 2006

Berlitz Language School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Instructor
English Language Instructor, 2004 – 2005

Platinum Team KKT, Budapest, Hungary
Co-founder
Co-founded a Hungarian teaching business with four other native English speakers, 2003.
Employed five certified teachers, including myself, who taught at language schools and high schools throughout Budapest.
Taught all age groups from three year-olds to fifty year-olds.
Instructor
English Language Instructor, 2003 – 2004
Trinity College, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Teaching Assistant
Hindu history & culture in Trinidad, 2002

Teaching interests
New media, mass media, history of technology, globalization, popular culture, and English as a Second Language.


the 9th annual meeting of the Association of Internet Researchers, Copenhagen, Denmark.


**RESEARCH:**

**University of Illinois at Chicago,** Chicago, Illinois

*Doctoral Dissertation*


Study explores the role that communication technology plays in the development of personal and professional communities among Chicago’s immigrant taxi drivers.

**Temple University,** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*Master’s Thesis*


Conducted a textual analysis of ten personal video blogs using Goffman’s (1959) work on presentation of self.

**Temple University,** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

*Research Assistant*


Gathered topical and controversial articles to be included in an updated edition of the instructional book.


Assisted in organization and production of a nation-wide teleconference for Prof. Jarice Hanson (Fall 2005 – Spring 2006).

**Trinity College,** Hartford, Connecticut

*Undergraduate Thesis*
Griffith, M. (2002). One Festival, Two Cultures: The Holi/Phagwa Festival in India and in Trinidad. Investigated the ways that the springtime Holi, or Phagwa, festival is celebrated differently in India and in Trinidad due to the diaspora, concluding that the emergence of the song form, Pichakaaree, is the major difference. Cultural uses of Indo-Trinidadian music, specifically, Pichakaaree were explored.

EXPERIENCE:

**University Outreach and Public Service**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois

*Editor (February 2011 – December 2011)*

- Worked with administrators, authors, and other parties across all three of University of Illinois’ campuses.
- Composed Project updates for Senator Durbin’s office.
- Co-developed and co-executed editorial procedures to compile an e-textbook on the topic of sustainability.
- Communicated with authors about formatting, deadlines, and reviews.

**New Media & Society**, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

*Editorial Assistant (June, 2008 – August 2011)*

- Managed daily needs of a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal published by Sage that contains 100-150 manuscripts under review at any time.
- Assigned relevant reviewers to manuscripts based on reviewer research interests and manuscript topics.
- Communicated with authors of manuscript progress.
- Communicated with editors about each manuscript’s progress.
- Emailed editorial decisions to authors.
- Used Open Journal Systems to correspond with authors and reviewers.

**Disability Resource Center**, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

*Reader (July 2010 – January 2011)*

- Assisted a visually impaired Ph.D. candidate with research for her dissertation and other academic pursuits.
- Aided with copyediting of dissertation chapters and/or conference paper submissions.
- Facilitated online library research.
- Took dictation on research, funding and other academic-related emails.
• Assisted with online research on post-doctoral positions.

**Pew Internet and American Life Project**, Washington, D.C.
**Intern** (June – August, 2007)
• Research assistant to the project’s director, Lee Rainie.
• Compiled research on the growth of the internet.
• Attended weekly Project meetings.
• Contributed to development of upcoming projects.

**Kell and Associates**, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
**Intern** (September, 2006 – January, 2007)
• Researched role of blogging, podcasting and video blogging in businesses and non-profit organizations in order to provide media training and coaching.
• Contributed to Kell and Associates’ blog, PRWebfire.
• Composed how-to guides on podcasting and video blogging.

**Temple University**, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
**Assistant Editor** (May – August, 2005 and May – August, 2006)
• Edited content for the Undergraduate Bulletin and the Course Descriptions catalogue in the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies.
• Worked with administrators and faculty to update information on all undergraduate courses and programs in the University.

**Camera Planet**, New York City, New York
**Intern** (January – May, 2003)
• Post-production Assistant: “Strictly Personal” – New York based reality show.
• Pre-production/casting Assistant: “A Night With” – VH1 reality show.
• Read and critiqued scripts for production.
• Assisted in preparation of two journalists for Jordan and Iraq to document the War in Iraq for HD Net.
• Filmed March 22, 2003 Peace Rally in New York City using a Sony PD150.

**Trinity College**, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
**Documentarian** (January – May, 2002)
• Developed, filmed (with a Canon XL1), and edited (using Final Cut Pro) a documentary titled, “Pichakaaree: The Voice of a People” (2002).
• Pichakaaree is a song form in Trinidad characterized by social commentary. Film explores the cultural uses of this music in Trinidad and within the Hindu community specifically.
• Documentary was a supplement to senior thesis on the Hindu festival, Phagwa.
• Documentary aired on Trinidadian national television in celebration of Indian Arrival Day: Gayelle Channel, Tuesday May 31, 2006, 12:45 p.m.

SERVICE: Reviewer, First Monday, 2009 – present.
Colloquium Committee, Department of Communication, University of Illinois, 2008
Assistant to Co-Chair, Presidential Inauguration Committee, Temple University, 2007

AFFILIATIONS: National Communication Association, 2009
Association of Internet Researchers, 2009-2011
International Communication Association, 2005

FUNDING: $20,000, Dean’s Scholar Award, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011-2012
Research Assistantship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008-present
Teaching Assistantship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2007-2008
Graduate Assistantship, Temple University, 2005-2006
$25,000, Emily and Jerome Farnsworth ’60 Prize in Education Scholarship, Trinity College, 2001-2002

AWARDS, HONORS CERTIFICATIONS:
Web/Print Design Certificate, Truman College, 2012
Top Student Paper, AEJMC Visual Communication Division, 2007
Teacher of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) Certification, Budapest, Hungary, September 2003
Distinction on Senior Thesis, Trinity College, May 2002
Faculty Honors, Trinity College, Fall 2001 and Spring 2002

SKILLS: Microsoft Office