Public Space and Protest: An Ethnographic Analysis of Alpha and Beta Camps at Occupy Portland

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The Occupy Wall Street movement began suddenly as a socio-political movement and quickly spread to other cities across the United States and globally. The Occupy Portland camps at Chapman and Lownsdale Square parks in Portland, Oregon, like other occupations, grew rapidly through bottom-up processes and provided a unique and fleeting opportunity to observe this socio-spatial situation in the heart of a metropolitan region. My goals were to discover what sort of organizational behaviors took place there, how they organized the space from an urban planning perspective, and add to the surveys and polls conducted in other occupations regarding demographic information and personal beliefs held by the occupiers and supporters.

Methods: Direct observations were made at the camps including participant observation as a volunteer at the designated Information Tent over a period of three weeks between October 22 and November 12, 2011. Major events, rallies and marches were attended. A convenience survey was conducted throughout the camp and while at the Information Tent. A total of 43 surveys were completed by occupiers and non-occupiers of the camps. Questions were asked regarding political and religious affiliation, length of time spent at the camps, and reasons for being involved in the movement. Informal interviews were also conducted as warranted.

Results: The occupiers and non-occupiers were extremely diverse in many categories and beliefs. A virtually anarchistic camp created some problems for the occupiers but also revealed a virtual microcosm of society at large. Comparisons with other surveys conducted at Occupy Wall Street in New York City revealed that most subjects were male, under 35, employed, but had an average annual income less than $25,000. My survey in particular also revealed that a large majority (88.6%) were housed, and the majority (54.5%) of occupiers in particular rented apartments. The most common political affiliation reported was in fact no affiliation, followed by Independent and Democrat. Further, most reported having no religious affiliation followed by a general “religious” or “spiritual” belief, and Atheistic.

Conclusion: The organization of the space as a bottom-up system was comparatively rigid and refined over time. Public and private areas were established and neighborhoods were named and occupied by self-proclaimed tribes in some cases. Top-down planning efforts were resisted by the members of the established neighborhoods. Stress created difficult situations for the movement as a whole and handling internal issues became a large amount of time spent by the occupiers overall. An unofficial social hierarchy was also established including leaders, major players, supporters, floaters, and freeloaders. Despite temporary conflict and stress, the occupiers involved in the movement still created a vibrant, unique community centered around common grievances and shared experiences, and represented society as a whole.

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INTRODUCTION

At Occupy Portland, part of a worldwide occupation of public space in solidarity with the socio-political movement Occupy Wall Street, 500-600 people occupied Chapman and Lownsdale Square Parks in Portland, Oregon from October 6 to November 12, 2011. The origins and grievances of this movement are numerous and diverse, stemming from the 2008 bank bailouts and financial crisis and including (but not limited to) education reform, student debt reform, universal health care, corporate greed, domestic jobs, a halt on home foreclosures, overseas military spending, and corporations’ influence on politics. Over time the movement has also, somewhat unexpectedly, drawn attention to the restricted use and access to public space for assembly by city governments, anti-camping bans and curfew laws, as well as militarization of the police force and police brutality in the United States.

Previous social movements in the United States have mostly been protest movements focusing on rallies and marches as opposed to continuous camping. Camping protests that have occurred recently, including those in Portland, have typically also been much smaller in size. The Occupy Portland camp was in a constant state of flux but was still considered to be one of the largest camps in the country. As such, this movement could arguably be called the most significant socio-political movement since the Vietnam War protests and the largest camping protest since the Bonus Army’s demands for compensation outside of Washington D.C. in 1932. This situation provides an opportunity to not only witness the evolution of a so-called “leaderless” movement (quite different from previous ones) as well as how a temporary settlement in an urban environment is established and managed in the United States – a country and culture where these types of settlements are infrequent, illegal (and not tolerated), short-lived, and small. While not precisely like the temporary settlements found in other countries, this could still be significant for socio-spatial organizational reasons and to further understand how systems and services evolve without a top-down leadership or planning process.

During the time of Occupy Portland’s camps, standing with hundreds of occupations worldwide, the volunteers put on dozens of marches and rallies, produced informational videos and documents, and performed community services in the form of serving 1500 free meals per day and providing a safe, comfortable place to live for many of the city’s homeless population. As a volunteer-run and donation-reliant urban village, many stations were established for the basic needs of occupiers and whoever else may need them. This included tents for the kitchen, medical, peace and safety, sanitation, kid’s camp, and community needs (which provided free clothing and personal supplies). Other tents were provided for services and secondary groups, including information, media, Latino/a outreach, Veterans, wellness, mental health, art, library/workshops, engineering, KBOO (the local community radio station), Food Not Bombs, general outreach, legal, a non-denominational spiritual center, and even a café aptly named Rumorz (see Image 1).

The relationship between Occupy Portland and the city of Portland, including its commissioners and Mayor Sam Adams, was unlike most occupations in the United States. While Occupy Wall Street’s main camp in Zuccotti Park, New York City, was not raided immediately by officials like many other cities, it still faced numerous threats of eviction, severe restrictions regarding structures and generators, and experienced the use of force
by the NYPD early on in the occupation (including pepper spray). There, the privatization of public space, while controversial in regards to regulation, did ultimately prevent the city from taking actions against the camp. In Portland, the original camp was considered illegal but was ultimately allowed to remain, tents and tarps were permitted, and food could be cooked on site with open flame. Later, restrictions were incrementally enacted upon the camps regarding fire codes. Subsequent actions were put in place to raise the tarps and safely operate smaller wattage generators before the ultimate eviction notice on November 10th, 2011. During this entire time, communication was open and constant between Occupy Portland liaison teams and the Mayor, Police Chief, Fire Marshall, and Portland Parks and Recreation. The notice was also given two days prior to the deadline, November 12.

Ultimately, like many other occupations, health and safety issues were cited as being too much of a concern for Mayor Adams and he decided to enforce park curfew laws, leaving the occupiers with a statement of understanding and suggestion for the movement to evolve (Adams 2011). Many occupiers not willing to risk arrest or not involved in the movement decided to leave before the eviction, and most major committees moved their supplies elsewhere in preparation. At the time of eviction, 7,000 people occupied the site until early the next morning in support of the movement. While no police action took place that night, the next day on November 13 Portland Police in riot gear moved in on a sparsely populated park, made several arrests while evicting the remaining occupiers, and erected a fence around the space.

While conducting an ethnography of this unique space over the last three weeks of the occupation, my research goals were to explore:

1. How many people occupied the site, who they were, and why they chose to occupy or be involved in the Occupy Wall Street/Occupy Portland movement.
2. The spatial layout of the camp, how occupiers interacted with the space, how the space was changed, and how it was established.
3. Social structures within the two camps, how individuals interacted with each other, general behavior, and how these systems were established.

METHODS

Participant Observation

Between October 22 and November 12, 2011, I spent as much time as possible at Chapman and Lownsdale square parks conducting a sudden and unsystematic ethnography of the Occupy Portland camp. On average, I was on site five days per week and spent four to twelve hours there per day. In order to learn more about the organization of the camp and the people behind the movement, I was given the opportunity to volunteer at the Information Tent located in the Alpha camp (see Image 1). This responsibility included accepting and sorting donations, disseminating information to interested visitors, assisting with the needs of occupiers, distributing supplies, updating information stands and calendars, distributing surveys, organizing the tent itself, and assisting with maintenance. Other activities outside of the Information Tent I took part in included attending General
Assemblies (the governance process of the movement), going to marches and rallies, cleaning the parks, visiting other major tents, and generally socializing with occupiers.

While I did not stay overnight at the site, I did take part in all activities typical of an occupier while at the site. Hot meals were prepared mostly on site three times per day by people with food handler’s cards and served at specific times (for most of the occupation). Snacks in the form of apples and granola bars were available all day. Despite offsite storage, most meals were vegetarian due to spoilage concerns and consisted of rice, beans, greens, vegetables, and spices (frequently curry). Meals were served on mostly plastic dinnerware and people were encouraged to assist in washing dishes in the large dishwashing buckets filled with hot water and soap. Public restrooms were originally located at either end of the two parks separated by gender (Image 1). However, the state of these restrooms before the occupation was verging on disrepair and frequently had maintenance or security issues. In the men’s restroom, doors were removed from the stalls for example and replaced by occupiers with haphazard hanging curtains for privacy. A “buddy system” was encouraged for females. Local unions sporadically provided two to eight portable toilets located near the women’s restroom, though they frequently became full and at times leaked due to the heavy volume of users. Restaurants and civic buildings in the area provided another alternative, especially after the city closed the public restrooms and forced the removal of the portable toilets late in the occupation. The accessibility of these toilets, however, varied depending on the day of the week, time of day, and whether access was only provided to customers. All of this was of course an incredibly important body of information for any occupier or visitor and was quickly explained to any newcomer to the camp.

Surveys

When not navigating the intricacies of basic human needs while at Occupy Portland, I also spent some of my time conversing casually with occupiers at both camps while helping them with tasks or simply playing a game of chess at the chess station. I made it a point to visit every major service tent and become familiar with the individuals organizing those committees. When it was acceptable, I distributed the short survey to these people in particular (see Appendix A). Most of the surveys, however, were distributed while at the Information Booth where I received responses from occupiers as well as non-occupiers visiting or volunteering at the camp. Participants were made aware of my research project before completing the survey and a brief explanation of my intentions and the project was given to them as well. All surveys were anonymous. Most people agreed to do the survey with only a few declining when asked. The research and my intentions were met with gratitude and accepted almost immediately, which allowed me to distribute surveys while also attending to the Information Tent.

A total of 43 surveys were completed during the first five days. Questions asked in the survey focused on basic demographic information, whether they had a personal connection to any of the other occupiers, and how long they stayed at the camp daily. Two open-ended questions were asked regarding their decision to be involved in the Occupy Wall Street/Occupy Portland movement and how they have been personally involved at the Portland camps. These results were compared to other academic surveys and polls taken at Occupy Wall Street. Eventually, it became increasingly clear to me that the parameters listed in the survey were frequently altered by the participants or included non-standard
responses, and that observations and conversations were more significant to this research project due to the unique circumstances.

RESULTS

The situation presented by this dense encampment located in the heart of downtown Portland was challenging, unique, diverse, and informative. A constant flux of 500-600 people occupied the space at any given time, not including the numerous visitors and volunteers that frequented the space every day as well. Space was extremely constricted very early on, though new occupiers ready to add their numbers to the movement arrived almost every day. The Information Tent had a steady queue of curious visitors, occupiers checking in on daily events or borrowing supplies, supporters dropping off donations, foot-messengers delivering information, and even informal tour groups or classes interviewing occupiers and gathering more information about the movement. Most of the time having two people present at the Information table was not enough to handle the flow of people until late at night.

On an average day you could expect to see the following. Up to five people may be looking for a place to put their tent, often coming from other cities or states. Ten or more loads of donations varying in size and content would be dropped off ranging from clothing, bedding, tents and tarps, batteries, food, medical and personal supplies, to wooden pallets and straw and even a large flat-screen TV and new (still in its packaging) 10,000 watt generator. Monetary donations were frequently in the form of folded twenty-dollar bills from quiet but grateful visitors, unceremoniously tucked into an empty antibiotic wipe container locked to the table. The most common sentiments from visitors were “thank you for doing what I am unable to do [camping]” and “I’ve been waiting for the young people to do this for years [decades/since the 1960s/etc.]”.

The camp’s organization was, in truth, very similar to technical definitions of anarchy. While self-professed anarchists did take part in the movement in different degrees, sometimes negatively, the lack of official leadership created a system where communication was often strained and most were preoccupied more with their immediate needs or problems in the camp than the governance system of General Assemblies designed to present and enact proposals brought up by committees. If something needed to be done, such as sweeping, emptying out a rain-filled tarp, or raising a tent, the impetus was on the individual and help was either offered or requested by those taking the initiative. Some signs proclaimed, “What have you done for the occupation today?” and “Imagine if everyone spent 20 minutes cleaning, what a beautiful camp we’d have”. While technically a consensus model as a whole, much of the emphasis was placed on the individual due to the “leaderless” concept of the movement.

However, there was also an informal hierarchy of recognizable individuals who decisively became involved in numerous committees and functions of the camp and had more of an impact on the daily activity of the camp than others. These leaders and major players were then looked to in times of need, or conversely were scorned when it seemed as though they were overstepping their boundaries. Many in this group also customized their appearance or created nicknames for themselves which assisted in recognizing them, whether intentionally done for this purpose or not. One woman specifically removed her
identifying item of clothing (a very colorful hat) in an effort to not be signaled out and
called upon for advice or direction while in camp. She explained, “I’m just another person”.

There were also an indeterminate number of individuals not involved in the
movement or daily maintenance of the camps who eventually may have outnumbered the
major players and supporters. This group’s activities, typically illegal, potentially
dangerous or at the very least not productive, became problematic to the structure and
safety of the camp over time and a major point of concern leading up to the eviction notice.
This informal social hierarchy of leaders, major players, supporters, floaters, and
freeloaders, created a very interesting structure, not unlike society at large (Image 2).

The amount of recognizable individuals that made up the first three categories
numbered anywhere from 150-200 individuals. It is unknown, however, how many of the
inactive individuals possibly labeled as “freeloaders” or “floaters” were in fact supportive of
the movement or their grievances but simply did not publically participate or become
visible in any major way (Image 3). Given that the population of the camp numbered from
500-600 people, this could mean that the people known to be involved in the movement
may have gone from 100% in the early stages of the occupation down to one-third of the
total towards the end due to an influx of the other categories.

Public and Private Space

Personal tents were randomly situated in most places wherever space would allow
and major service tents were located at the nodes of each park and along the already
exiting paved pathways (Image 1). This division of space created, within these parks in two
city blocks, private and public space for the occupiers and non-occupiers. Because
occupiers still basically lived publically, they adopted strict norms of behavior and
guidelines for visitors against the intrusion of tents in an effort to create more private
space. In some cases this meant walling off the entire space surrounding a tent or group of
tents with tarps or simply hanging signs that say “This tent is someone’s home”. Too many
structures became an issue for the fire marshal, a lack of visibility created problems with
safety, but too much transparency led to stories of harassment or voyeurs while in tents. As
a part of their leader-like privilege as well as out of necessity, many members of
committees strategically placed their personal tents directly behind or near the service tent
they attended. This allowed them to keep an eye on their personal property, access it more
freely, and provide nighttime security to the service tent as well.

Each of the two camps also had differences in the way the space was set up prior to
the encampment. At Beta camp, no tarps or rope was allowed to be attached to the
veterans’ monument in the central circle out of respect and at the request of the resident
veterans at the camp. Due to this, the circular pathway in the center of this camp remained
open-air space without a central intersection. The services in the camp including the art
tent, medical, health and wellness, the library and workshop, and Food-Not-Bombs, were
significantly less populated and active. The nearby kid’s camp also encouraged a more
respectful attitude or less-boisterous behavior. Because of this, Beta camp was
stereotypically the “residential” camp where one could get sleep at night, to an extent.
Unfortunately, the secluded nature of the area also encouraged criminal elements towards
the far ends of the camp, including a bicycle chop-shop, which was eventually disbanded by
the Peacekeepers.
Alpha camp, on the other hand, was the hub of activity because of its physical layout and service tents. Naturally, the kitchen was a comparatively large space and constantly full of activity. On average 1500 meals were prepared daily, which meant cleaning, cooking, and dishwashing was constantly needed in-between. The kitchen would, thankfully, often deliver several plates of food to the major tents such as Information, but most would have to travel to Alpha camp for meals. In the center of this camp was also a Benson Bubbler, as they are known in Portland, which provided a constant supply of cold water. Directly across from the kitchen was the free coffee and tea of Rumor Café. Notoriously rowdy in an effort to keep spirits up (or perhaps because of the caffeine), the attendants there would frequently yell back and forth to Peace and Safety until late in the night. They even started a “Shirtless Tuesday” coffee service, probably because they simply could and needed something to occupy themselves. All of this combined with A-Camp’s spontaneous throaty shouts of reaffirmation at all hours of the day when one member of this tribe would yell “A-Camp!” and receive a response from down the street of “A-Camp!” (just in case you thought they had gone away). Add to this activity the Information Tent nearby with its steady stream of visitors, and Alpha Camp was the “downtown district” of Occupy Portland.

Other private areas became established neighborhoods with named alleys and courtyards. As individuals spent time with those who happened to set up personal tents near them, they came to be known as a tribe due to the automatic segregation of the space based on the parks’ layout. Neighbors would then rearrange the space to create common areas under tarps complete with tables, chairs, hay barrels, and pillows. It was only after becoming established at the camp that I was able to gain access to these areas due to their private nature. For example, the “Time-Travellers” occupied the space behind the Library in Beta Camp. Their name came from their tendency to sit around the candlelight of the circular communal area at night telling stories of their pasts or futures. In Alpha Camp, the “Aquarium”, also known as “Ganja Island” neighborhood, positioned itself behind the kitchen on an alley named Shake-down Street next to a smaller neighborhood called “Land of the Romans”. The middle-aged woman “in charge” of this neighborhood would request to be called “mom” and even had a guest tent for visiting family or strangers. The Relaxation Tent was it’s own tribe, which decided to construct a more permanent structure of plywood and window frames entered by hanging burlap sacks with “Re” and “lax” painted in bold black letters. This more permanent area became a point of concern for the city and their regulations regarding “structures” and was raided the day before eviction due to what appeared to be a stockpile of concrete blocks the police suspected of being weapons. Despite these issues, the Relax Tent was never removed by occupants or police until after eviction, and remains a tribe today. And of course, everyone knew about A-Camp.

Daily Life and Organization
Most occupiers went to sleep exceedingly late and woke up fairly late in the morning. Early on, faced with the thrill of the movement and creating an illegal encampment, most would gather around individual community spaces drinking or smoking marijuana while socializing. Peacekeeping personnel would patrol the streets at night in shifts with small walkie-talkies for communication while handling occasional intrusions by intoxicated individuals roaming downtown. Once the day reached lunch hour, however, the camp was a buzz of non-stop activity. In the course of a single day service tents could be relocated, tarps erected, personal tents taken down and filled in, and engineering problems
brought up and resolved. Signs could be made and hung whenever and wherever by their creators which changed the landscape daily. Ideas, proposals, and plans were put in place and rallies or small marches happened almost every day around the numerous committee meetings or entertainment events at Terry Shrunk Plaza nearby. Every Saturday there was a major march and every day the General Assembly started at 7pm, often lasting until 10pm at night due to the sheer amount of debate and information. Keeping track of activity was nearly impossible, even at the Information Tent, and was a commonly referenced issue with the camp and movement in general.

Anyone could start a committee, which meant that committees were formed for any reason, from Fashion to Entertainment, to somewhat redundant groups for Finance and Spending. The exact number of committees was always growing and never known precisely, numbering over 30 at the peak. Some committees had service tents, such as Library and Engineering, but many did not and met off camp because the need for a constant physical presence was low. The Information Tent and committee was set up after the 10,000 strong first march on October 6, when my informant, a leader, turned to the person standing next to him and suggested they set it up. A piece of plywood set on two blocks with a paper sign was all that was needed at that time. The original system of identification was different colored and patterned duct-tape applied to the person’s left arm representing one of the major committees. If needed, a permanent marker could be used to write the name of the committee on the piece of tape, or one could reference the hanging cardboard legend that explained the coded system. Medics would also frequently have a large red cross taped on their coat for better visibility. Later, a generous supporter made labeled cloth armbands that could then be tied onto one’s arm instead.

Maintenance and morale were constant issues, sometimes satisfied by the Sanitation and Entertainment committees, but more often left up to the individual occupiers themselves. The Hippie, a bandana-clad man who played guitar, would often make his way through camp playing as he walked, and was much appreciated for it. Other spontaneous groups would simply begin a beat or play around with an odd instrument that soon sparked an impromptu music circle. One night in particular the intersection of Alpha camp was filled with a Native American drum circle, and the camp was even visited by famous people and performers such as Michael Moore and Amanda Palmer. When no instruments or energy were to be found, and no interviews were being done, the KBOO community radio tent would play music over its speakers. The decision regarding the final night of the eviction was to host a potluck and then festival-like atmosphere as a sort of celebration rather than conflict. One of the most important components to that night was the large drum circle/dance party at the corner of Alpha Camp that kept occupiers and supporters alike dancing past midnight to stave off the eviction.

Conflict and Burn-outs

Living in such tight quarters with so many people, outside in the elements, and working so much on often little sleep, conflicts would occasionally arise between individuals or regarding a particular committee or tent. The common term for an individual becoming too overworked or stressed regarding the camp and movement was “burn-out”. It became such a frequent event in camps across the country that it was popularized as a term and even had guides made to educate people on how to avoid it. Many of the main leaders and major players experienced burn-out one or more times during the occupation,
often accompanied by sickness, which forced them to take a break from camp at their own home or another's. These were, however, more frequent towards the beginning of the occupation when systems were being set up and there was more work to be done. Towards the end of the occupation, Info-man, the head male at the Information Tent, exclaimed “No more burn-outs!” after recently experiencing one himself.

In some cases, one individual experiencing burn-out and leaving camp for several days would cause their tent or committee to collapse temporarily until that person returned. This happened with the workshop area next to the Library when The Kangaroo Kid, the girl typically in charge of the Library and occupation’s school of sorts, left to take care of herself and her schoolwork. In this case the workshop had been re-occupied by individuals looking for a place to sleep who found the two couches within, and who unfortunately also used the space as a toilet. This was the only case of defecation within the camp that I was aware of and was a very serious issue when it occurred.

Another example of conflict occurred when Info-man, my informant, and others, decided to attempt a restructuring of the camp. This planning process was started by individuals without General Assembly approval and based off of previous experiences with temporary settlements like Burning Man (a musical event in Nevada which erects a temporary self-sustaining city around itself every year). The plan, essentially top-down and closed-door, was sketched out on whiteboards and rearranged the residential tents into neat rows to avoid wasted space and create more visibility (see Appendix B). This also complied with the fire marshal’s concerns regarding access in the event of a fire. Four-foot “fire lanes” would be the minimum width of the paths and tarps would be raised higher up in the trees. All of the major service tents would be centered directly around the nodes with larger tents lining the streets. After a trial run with the Time-Travellers and the temporary departure of one of the “planners”, the restructuring fell flat due to its top-down approach and lack of communication. Info-man subsequently burned out and temporarily left the camp in frustration (though he did return several days later and continued his work at the Information Tent).

Towards the end of the occupation, more attention was given to what was referred to as the “pressure-cooker” situation in the camp regarding crime and illegal drug use. This was coinciding with concerns raised by the Mayor and police chief about a possible increase in crime in the area. Peace and Safety was unable to monitor all locations of the camp due to a lack of visibility and an increase in those not necessarily involved or interested in the movement. One suggestion was to restructure the camp, again, to increase visibility and therefore safety. Others argued that it was the bad behavior and not the people themselves who were to be targeted, and that the movement was meant to be inclusive. Indeed, A-Camp members had originally come to the camp as slightly more chaotic individuals looking for a place to party, but eventually became a staple of the movement and assisted in keeping the camp safe. Even street-kids who resided at Occupy Portland, including gutter-punks and The Family, had announced a truce on the camp’s grounds calling it a non-violence zone. I personally witnessed one fight between two individuals which was broken up just as quickly as it began. The illegal activity, however, was enough for the city to cite it as one of its concerns for the camp’s eviction. While it is possible that given enough time or more assistance from the Portland Police these issues could have been resolved, the clearing of the camp in some ways solved these problems for the occupiers allowing them a clean slate from which they could start anew or evolve the
movement. Truthfully, some occupiers, while rallying against closing the camps on principle, did see it as an opportunity to focus on the movement instead.

Survey Results and Solidarity

A total of 43 surveys were collected from occupiers and non-occupiers alike (Appendix A). Other surveys have also been conducted on Occupy Wall Street’s camp and website by academics and pollsters. These include Guzman’s online survey completed by visitors to occupywallst.org around October 5, 2011 (Cordero-Guzman 2011), Shoen’s poll through 198 face-to-face interviews in Zucotti Park on October 10th and 11th (Shoen 2011), and Panagopoulos’s interviews with 301 individuals at Occupy Wall Street on October 14-18 (Panagopoulos 2011). Many similarities were found between my own surveys and these surveys which also seemed to draw the conclusion that “the 99% movement comes from and looks like the 99%” (Cordero-Guzman, 11).

Most respondents were male (57.1%) as compared with female (40.5%) and Transgender (2.4%) (see Figure 1). This is similar to other surveys and polls in which males made up a majority of 67.1% (Cordero-Guzman 2011), 56% (Shoen 2011), and 61% (Panagopoulos 2011). Age, too, was predominately younger with 41.9% in the 18-25 range and 18.6% aged 26-35 (see Figure 2). Shoen found that 49% were 18-29 while Cordero-Guzman found 37.9% were 25-34. Panagopoulos only reported an overall mean of 33. Still, it seems as though most respondents are younger than 35 with less of a percentage as age increases. Almost half (46.5%) were employed to some capacity, whether full time or part time, and an additional 14.0% were students, one respondent was retired (2.3%), and two were listed as homemakers (4.7%), again, showing consistency with other surveys. When separated into occupiers only (21/43) a majority of 47.6% was employed and 42.9% unemployed as compared to 34.9% of the total sample.

However, despite most being employed or otherwise occupied, the majority had an income less than $30,000 per year, with 67.4% earning an income less than $15,000 annually (see Figure 4) and 79.0% of occupiers only earning less than $30,000 per year. This is consistent with Cordero-Guzman (the only survey to ask for income information) whereas 47.5% of their sample earns less than $24,999 per year and another 24% earn between $25,000 and $49,000 per year. Interestingly, my survey was the only one of these three to ask about housing status, with the large majority of 88.6% reporting that they either rent (54.5%) or own their home (18.2%), live with their parents or in student housing (15.9%), and only 11.4% reporting being unhoused.

Two of the other surveys reported political affiliation in terms of the major parties available today (Panagopoulos and Cordero-Guzman) while Schoen stated it as an open-ended question. Regardless, all surveys showed that most identified with either alternative parties or as Independent, with Democrats as the second highest proportion. I decided to keep the question open as well, and found similar results with 34.9% of respondents identifying with “no affiliation”, followed by Independents with 16.3%, and Democrats with 14.0%. Interestingly though, I received some very unexpected results including very uncommon political parties such as International Socialist, Anarcho-Capitalist (ANCAP), Cascadian (a reference to the region of Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver known as Cascadia), and even entirely unique answers such as “human” and “neutral”. I decided not to restrict the responses of this question in an effort to explore the range of possible responses.
I also decided to investigate the religious affiliation of respondents in order to determine if there was a connection between what has been a fairly positive response on the part of religious organizations in this movement. OccupyPortland’s camp had a non-denominational religious space where two couples were married, and a priest travelled through the camps performing communion on Sundays. Most, however, had no religious affiliation at 37.2% of responses, followed by a non-denominational “religious” or “spiritual” (25.6%), and atheist (9.3%). Of the major religious affiliations represented, none reported specifically being Catholic, Mormon, or Jewish, and only one reported being Muslim. Again, many of the other responses were atypical or fairly unexpected, ranging from maternal pantheist, Zen Buddhist, Quaker/Friends, “love” or “light”, and “pagan”.

Initially, I wanted to see if occupiers had a prior connection to other occupiers in the form of friends or family before deciding to occupy the parks, or if visitors and non-occupiers had a connection to occupiers when they came to the camp. I found that while most answered that they did not (51.2%) most occupiers, when separated from the others (21/43), responded that they did 61.9% with most specifying they were friends (92.3%). Interestingly, however, I quickly discovered that most of the occupiers when asked this question immediately said that they did have a connection because they had become very close to their fellow occupiers and thought of them like family. It was therefore less important to find that most came of their own volition, but that occupiers had deep personal relationships with the other people at the camps because of the physical and cultural situation they were all in together.

As previously mentioned, 21 of 43 respondents replied that they occupied the camp daily (48.8%) with almost half of those subjects occupying 24 hours per day (47.6%) (see Figure 5). One third (33.3%) reported staying at the camp daily between 12 and 23 hours, and the minority (9.5%) reported staying less than 12 hours per day. Most respondents that did not occupy daily were visiting for the first time (45.5%) or conversely visited 3-7 days per week (27.3%). Not represented on the survey was the significant amount of visitors from other occupations around the country as well. Because of the shared feelings of the movement as a whole, individuals travelling to other places for whatever reason would make it a point to visit that city’s occupation, to learn from it, to show their support, and share in the grander experience of the movement. While there I personally saw visitors from New York City, Philadelphia, Oakland, Richmond, Seattle, and other cities in Oregon such as Salem and Eugene. Each time someone visited and announced they were from a fellow occupation, that person was welcomed joyfully and given OccupyPortland “souvenirs” to bring back, sometimes in the form of signed posters or t-shirts at the request of the visitor. Often, that person would also speak to the General Assembly to either request advice or offer to meet with strategic teams in order to spread information and tactics.

Finally, I asked subjects two open-ended questions with enough space to respond in whatever way they wanted: “Why do you choose to be involved in the Occupy Portland/Occupy Wall Street movement?” and, “How have you personally been involved in the Occupy Portland movement?” By asking these questions I hoped to discover whether there was a unifying thread between those involved in the movement and to explore the myriad of ways people may be involved. Some notable answers to the first question included very well stated summaries of the origins of the movement:

“The federal government needs visible pressure put on it by the general public to act in more egalitarian, fair, humane ways. I believe economic policy
should reflect the needs of all citizens, recognizing food, shelter, and medicine as an inalienable right, regulating the distribution of wealth, and that greater transparency is needed in all governmental activities. (I could say more, but time...)” – Female Occupier, 18-25, recent college graduate

“Because a very small, greedy group of people control most, and have influence over all of the resources in this country (and world). This would be unacceptable in a small group of people, and it is no different on the national/global scale.” – Male Occupier, 18-25, unemployed

“To show solidarity for common sense and sanity. We all have a personal responsibility to do whatever we can to make this world a better place, and to make sure we all have a fair chance at a successful life. Basically it’s all about fairness.” – Female Non-Occupier, 46-55, unemployed

"We are living in fucking Babylon.” – Male Occupier, 26-35, self-proclaimed “autonomous asshole”

Others focused on the nature of the movement or referenced their prior involvement and experience in protests. Overall they found that this movement seemed to be different and were happy that something was happening again:

"It’s the only movement that is non-hierarchical, positive, and may succeed in affecting something. I’ve been an activist since the anti-war protests. My father lost his home to foreclosure. National government is corrupt. Corporations help this.” – Male Occupier, 18-25, student

“I marched in civil rights, women’s rights, gay rights, and animal rights since the 50s – we need to participate in work for freedom always.” – Female Non-Occupier, 65+, retired

“I finally get to do witness/partake in a movement that isn’t centered on political ideology inasmuch as tackling the practical problems inherent in the system. I have found political special interest groups to be too cliquey, and I find the inclusiveness of the Occupy Movement to be revolutionary in the realm of activism.” – Transgender Female Non-Occupier, 26-35, unemployed

“I was involved in the protests of the late 70s, 80s, and 90s- basically a lifelong freelance political activist who has been demonstrating for 35 years and I have been waiting for this to happen again. I feel that for 40 years we have needed to start a movement like this to step outside of a political system and way of living that is not working for the benefit of the people or planet in any way. Over the last 40 years the uber riche 1% have sucked the lifeblood, labor, and treasure out of America and the world and they must be stopped.”
– Female Non-Occupier, 46-55, student
Some individuals simply stated that “Change is needed” or that they were “Glad to see protest against income inequality”, that they had a “General interest in societal reform/change” or that “[we are] long overdue for change”.

When responding to the second question, many people listed their roles in the movement including their respective committees, taking part in actions and protests, making signs, and even getting arrested or simply occupying. One person self-identified as an “Idea-hamster” and another simply said “Dreams”. Others responded with overall support with comments such as “How have I not?”, “In every way I can”, or “All around support”. Non-occupiers and visitors frequently responded that they are not physically involved but that they bring donations, visit the site, spread the word on social media, educate their children, attend the General Assemblies occasionally, or are simply “Just one of the 99%”.

**DISCUSSION**

The significance of this situation is multi-layered. From an anthropological perspective, these types of comparatively small and self-organized sedentary settlements, while not necessarily centered upon a set of goals based on a movement (like Occupy Portland), would have still had a certain set of values as a part of their culture (Smith 2002). While looking at ancient cities from an archaeological lens can be informative in understanding processes of urbanism or squatter settlements today (Smith 2009), I would also argue that looking at these sorts of spontaneous, small, and mostly bottom-up types of settlements can also be illustrative of early urban environments. The ways in which social hierarchies emerge with some taking a leadership position and affecting space (forming a committee, setting up a tent), or with others assuming a “follower” role and responding when called upon (marches, rallies), may draw similarities to other small, newly formed sedentary cultures becoming more hierarchical in their organization.

It could also illustrate methods of problem solving or the development of services. As the camp evolved, certain services emerged more quickly than others, and some were developed as a direct response to urgent, suddenly apparent needs. The Medical Tent was the first structure on October 6th after the march due to the perceived need for medical care for the protestors after possible conflicts with police (as had been experienced in other occupations). The Information Tent was next initiated by one individual who wished to create a place to disseminate information to the thousands of people taking part in the protest. Engineering, on the other hand, was something that arose as electricity was set up and as tarps needed logistical planning or more height. Eventually it became sophisticated enough that in order to reconfigure a power strip, two members of the engineering committee’s electrical section needed to confirm it would be safe. Sanitation evolved over time originally placing recycling and trash bins not far from the kitchen, but later moving them further away where they could more easily be disposed of. Smaller trash bags were also attached to benches and replaced on a regular basis. All of this was done in a fluid way with little pre-planning other than preparing for risks of injury or conflict internally or with police (Peace and Safety and Medical).

The evolution of the structures also could illustrate the evolution of the built environment within current urban environments and early cities. Given no restrictions on where to place personal tents, most people simply filled in the gaps wherever they could
find a space in the interior areas of the pre-separated grassy triangles of the parks. It is only later that they self-organized into established neighborhoods, followed by more development in top-down formal plans (which were again, rejected by the tribes involved). This would have changed the organic, sporadically organized space into neat rows with straight alleyways. The tribes, or people actually living in the area, maintained that they appreciated their communal spaces and self-designed systems. Eventually, it was moving towards a compromise with the community as better (and forced) communication emerged regarding the need for visibility and surveillance to prevent crime (something that many other cities have contended with as well).

Some more broad implications regarding the movement and its actions include the use of public space. Specifically, some have analyzed privatization of public space in places like New York City, including the semi-public bonus plazas in front of large corporate buildings (Neal 2010; Németh 2009; Németh & Schmidt 2011; Smithsimon 2008; Whyte 1980). There is also increased discussion regarding safety and regulation of public space, especially since the 9/11 attacks (Németh & Hollandar 2010; Németh 2011). Some well-known academic individuals focusing on public space, such as Marcuse, have made it a point to comment on this very concern regarding the Occupy Wall Street protests in particular through things like personal blogs (Marcuse 2011).

It is interesting to note that while protesters are focusing on economic inequality, corporate influence, and in essence less power on the part of the people, they have raised concerns regarding how power of the people in public space has been reduced to being trumped by curfew or anti-camping ordinances, despite clearly taking part in assembly as part of a protest. While the privately owned Zuccotti Park in New York City where Occupy Wall Street protestors camped ultimately saved them from eviction temporarily, the owners of the space were not in favor of the protesters being there either. We’ve seen that not only do park curfews and other ordinances restrict homeless populations from performing necessary acts (like sleeping) in public (Mitchell 2003), they also restrict things like assembly as is very apparent now.

While my focus was not entirely on the intricacies of the research in regards to these implications they may have (aside from my personal opinions), I think it is equally important to view this information from an academic as well as socio-political lens. What this camp meant to the people involved was paramount to their personal histories as well as the sense of place of the parks as well. My personal memories, when viewing this park, will now center on the invisible but once-prominent tents, signs, and bustle of activity. I will remember the group of preschool children being led through the camps in an effort to educate them about their world, the near-constant indiscriminate giving and receiving of hugs, and the midnight hour of the planned eviction day when 7,000 or more people filled the parks in solidarity for the movement and defiance of the city's decision, despite the risk of arrest, dancing all the while (see Appendix B). What sort of effect this movement may have socially, politically, or academically is beginning to show and though ultimately unknown, is still certain to be important in all areas.
References Cited


Image 1: Map of major tents and known neighborhoods (adapted from occupyportland.org).

Image 2: Social hierarchy of Occupy Portland occupiers and possible percentages.

Figure 1: Gender of all respondents (occupiers and non-occupiers).
Figure 2: Age differences of all respondents (occupiers and non-occupiers).

Figure 3: Employment status of all respondents (occupiers and non-occupiers).
Figure 4: Average annual income of all respondents (occupiers and non-occupiers).

Figure 5: Occupation duration for occupiers only.
Appendix A: Random/Convenience Sample Survey Questionnaire.

Use of Public Space: Occupy Portland in Chapman Square Park

Gender: Male Female Transgender

Age: 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 65+

Occupation: __________________________ or Unemployed

Income: $ ____________

Housing status: Rent Homeowner Unhoused

Political Affiliation: _________________

Religious Affiliation: _________________

Do you have a personal connection to other Occupiers? Yes No
If Yes, are they: Friends Siblings Parents Children Other:

_____ 

Do you occupy the camp daily? Yes No
If Yes: how long do you stay at the Occupy Portland camp daily? ____________
If No: how many days per week do you stay at the Occupy Portland camp? ______

Why do you choose to be involved in the Occupy Portland/Occupy Wall Street movement?

How have you personally been involved in the Occupy Portland movement?
Appendix B: Photos from Occupy Portland’s Alpha and Beta camps at Chapman and Lownsdale Square Parks (all photos by author).

Photo 1: Early spatial structure of Occupy Portland.

Photo 2: Typical scene mid-occupation (mid-November rains setting in).
Photo 3: Part of the restructuring planning process developed by a group of occupiers.

Photo 4: Remnants of the camp and a large crowd of supporters on eviction night.