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Let's Not Do Anything Drastic: Processes of Reproducing Rural Marginalization in Education Policy Decision-Making

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LET'S NOT DO ANYTHING DRASTIC: PROCESSES OF REPRODUCING RURAL MARGINALIZATION IN EDUCATION POLICY DECISION-MAKING

THESIS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

LET'S NOT DO ANYTHING DRASTIC: PROCESSES OF REPRODUCING RURAL MARGINALIZATION IN EDUCATION POLICY DECISION-MAKING

At a school board meeting in micropolitan Athens County, parents of children attending the district's smallest elementary school, Chauncey Elementary, packed in to defend the school against consolidation. They made calls for a levy to cover the impending budget shortfall and offered to reduce their classrooms by half if other schools would also bear some of the costs. They spent their holiday season defending their school, a source of vibrancy in the small town, from being closed. In the meeting, someone advocating for alternatives to closure suggested cutting administrator positions. The board response, according to one parent-leader? "Let's not do anything drastic!".

As the U.S. urbanizes, rural autonomy over local institutions has dwindled and rural residents are marginalized by policies which govern those institutions. Recent work, some with a large public reach, has described contemporary rural politics as driven by resentment (Cramer 2016), rage (Wuthnow 2019), or something otherwise "the matter" with rural people (Frank 2005). Urbanormativity theory, with its focus on the cyclical relationship between representations of rurality and structural forces of urbanization, has the potential to shed light on how such ideologies develop and are reinforced through processes of marginalization from political and community life in rural places (Fulkerson and Thomas 2019).

In this project, I use a mixed-methods retrospective case study of school consolidation in Appalachia as a way to understand the process by which local politics come to marginalize people and places along lines of rurality and social class. I also examine how this marginalization and loss of autonomy contribute to the development of rural politics and identity. Drawing from multiple methods, I examine the structural and social processes by which school consolidation was achieved, with alternatives to closure labeled as "drastic measures". I pay particular attention to the shifting role of the state in curtailing decisions about rural schools and the ways neoliberal ideology lent itself to justifying rural marginalization. Further, I examine the impacts of these school consolidations on the rural community and its local politics. The concentration of negative outcomes in Chauncey constructed the community as a political "sacrifice zone" (Scott 2010). The processes and outcomes of this consolidation, I argue, serves as a useful case study to better understand political divisions along rural-urban lines. KEYWORDS: Rural education; school consolidation; urbanormativity

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DEDICATION

For my dad, Steven C. Miller, and for Larry “Poppa” and Dolores “Nannie” Town, who all would have graciously sweated through another graduation. I’m finally done with college!

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I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Edward Morris (Chair), Dr. Julie Zimmerman, Dr. Rosalind Harris, and Dr. Ann Kingsolver, for their expertise and persistent interest in my growth as an academic, even when ideas felt unconnected or ephemeral. Thank each of you for encouraging and supporting me through pandemic-induced changes, familial strife, and a new job. Thanks especially to Julie Zimmerman for your enthusiastic support and for taking my phone calls to talk about fieldwork without warning. In addition to my committee, I also thank Dr. Joseph Ferrare for many opportunities and for fostering a healthy relationship with defenses and Dr. Tom Janoski for developing my “talent in the area of theory”.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

At a school board meeting in Athens High School, parents of children attending the district's smallest elementary school, Chauncey Elementary, packed the room to participate in the public comment period for the decision of whether to close Chauncey Elementary School. This meeting, held in February, was one of a series that had spanned the holiday season, beginning with the December announcement that closure was being considered. A budget shortfall loomed over the district, growing into the tens of millions over five years if no actions were taken to address it. The parents of Chauncey had proposed alternatives brainstormed between Christmas and New Year's celebrations, and Chauncey teachers penned an open letter offering to reduce their classrooms by half if other schools would also bear some of the initial costs. Chauncey spent their holiday season defending their small school, a source of vibrancy in their town, from being closed at the end of the school year. At some point in the meeting, the Board President raised one of the suggestions from those advocating for alternatives to closure: could cutting back administrator positions address the budget shortfall? The superintendent responded quickly, according to one parent-leader reflecting on that meeting: "Let's not do anything drastic".

The purpose of this project is to examine the social processes by which local policy comes to benefit some members of a community while marginalizing the demands of others and the effects that marginalization has on a community over time. Using the consolidation of Chauncey and Athens City Schools in rural north central Appalachia as a case study, I explore how rurality/urbanity is reproduced as an axis of inequality and how it intersects with other forms of inequality, with particular attention to class. I examine

the processes by which the state approached rural education, contrasting the authoritarian elimination of rural schools viewed as provincial and inadequate in the 1960s with the I bring the framework of urbanormativity, or the cyclical relationship between structure and culture that reinforces urban as the norm, into conversation with generic processes theory, or the types of interactions frequently mobilized to justify and perpetuate group inequalities. In short, I examine how, in the local decision-making discourse, closing down a rural school was the "obvious" or "natural" choice, while administration cuts were labeled as "drastic measures".

Far from a new phenomenon, school consolidations have been viewed as policy solutions in rural places for over a century, and Ohio has followed national trends in reducing the number of schools in operation (Asbury et al. 2011; Bard, Gardener, and Wieland 2006; Dorn 1953). Between 1940 and 2010, the number of school districts in the state has declined despite a steady increase in the state's population (Asbury et al. 2011; Dorn 1953). In the later 20th century and early 21st century, school building consolidation became the predominant type of consolidation, with the number of schools in Ohio experiencing a relatively steep decline from 4,025 schools in 2008 to 3,193 schools in 2014 (Asbury et al. 2011). Despite this ubiquity, the evidence for school consolidation's efficacy as a policy solution in rural communities remained mixed.

School consolidations are frequently justified using the claim that they will result in greater fiscal efficiency and improved educational outcomes (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). However, the evidence is mixed that either efficiency (Cox 2010; Duncombe and Yinger 2007; Howley, Johnson, and Petrie 2011) or improved outcomes (Bard et al. 2006; Brummet 2014; Engberg et al. 2012; Jack and Sludden 2013; Siegel-

Hawley, Bridges, and Shields 2017) result from school closures and mergers. Despite this lack of support, the U.S. generally and Ohio specifically has seen multiple waves of consolidations and closures, which I outline in Chapter 4. Recent federal policies have treated closure and privatization of public schools as turn-around measures as education policy took a neoliberal turn, increasingly relying on market-based solutions and arguments rooted in economic efficiency and economies of scale (Johnson 2013; Zimmer, DeBoer, and Hirth 2009). These policies frequently operate from an assumed urban default, providing programs and structures that do not account for rural schools' unique circumstances. As such, the continued reliance on school closure in favor of privatization is unlikely to result in any further efficiency and equity gains in rural areas, and may have already exceeded the limits that rural consolidations can provide (Cox 2010; Howley et al. 2011; Killeen and Sipple 2000). Instead, further school closures may be an exercise in spatial injustice, as closures are spread unevenly across space and place, disproportionately impacting multiply marginalized communities (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019).

While evidence for efficiency and equality outcomes is inconclusive, evidence is stronger for the negative impact of closures and consolidations on rural communities, namely community economic well-being (Duncombe, Yinger, and Zhang 2016; Lyson 2002; Sipple, Francis, and Fiduccia 2019), civic engagement (Green 2013), and community capacity (Alsbury and Shaw 2005; Chance and Cummins 1998; Green 2017; Sell and Leistritz 1997), among other outcomes. Consolidations are also frequently opposed by residents in both rural and urban areas (Deeb-Sossa and Moreno 2016; DeYoung 1995; Elliott 2012; Freelon 2018; Good 2017; Green 2017; Jack and Sludden

2013; de la Torre and Gwynne 2009). Rural schools are often one of the last remaining public institutions and serve multiple roles in rural communities.

Given the state of evidence, which provides limited support for a practice known to cause rural communities harm and be undesirable by rural residents, I argue that school consolidation is a useful lens into how education policy may come to marginalize rural people and communities it should ostensibly serve. In this dissertation, I ask two research questions, using the consolidation of Chauncey's schools as a case study:

> RQ1: By what processes did state policy and the Athens County consolidation debates come to a resolution reflecting the experiences and preferences of some places and people over others?
>
> RQ2: What have the impacts of the consolidations been on Chauncey's community, economic, and political life, and the beliefs of Chauncey residents as rural people?

1.1 Outline of the Dissertation

In Chapter 3, I describe the methods I used to collect and analyze the multiple kinds of data for this project. I also describe the community of Chauncey and the sites where I engaged in participant observation in detail. I used a mix of qualitative methods, and data collection was split into two time periods: that before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and that after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the first period, I collected newspapers, meeting minutes, and other materials for document analysis, all of which revealed aspects of the public narrative about the decision to close schools and how the decisions were made. I also conducted key informant interviews with community

members holding multiple roles in the Chauncey area and its schools. I focused on key informants from the Chauncey area to capture the multiple needs and perspectives of the community, especially because there was no official narrative preserved coming from Chauncey as there was from the broader Athens area. Meeting minutes and newspaper coverage emanated out from the county seat, so key informant interviews were an important balance, rather than allowing Athens to become synonymous with "top-down" and Chauncey to become synonymous with "bottom-up" narratives.

I also engaged in participant observation in public spaces and government activities to observe how Chauncey residents of different ages and roles engaged in and talked about their community. Post-Covid, I added a survey of residents based on my fieldwork thus far, both to supplement the information I may miss from halting participant observation and in-person interviews and to capture the extent to which ideas about the consolidation uncovered in my earlier work were shared in the community. I also added social media data for further document analysis, bolstering the residents' perspectives of the consolidation in my data. Finally, I moved to online interviewing and participant observation where it was possible.

In Chapter 4, I describe the structural causes of the Chauncey consolidations and examine the changing role of the state in successive school closures. These different approaches by the state both result in rural Chauncey being marginalized and its schools marked for closure, but through different structural processes. I argue that the earlier consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local School District into Athens City School District is characterized was characterized by what Scott terms a "high modernist" state (Scott 1999). The state's decision to revoke charters and circumscribe rural responses exemplify

this approach, which emphasizes scientific and technological progress, an authoritarian approach to rural institutions, and more direct limits on rural autonomy. This process of limiting rural autonomy I refer to as a pattern of "urbanormativity by commission", as the state actively labeled Chauncey and rural schools like it as provincial, insufficient, and in need of the state's urbanizing influence.

The more recent consolidation of Chauncey Elementary school, however, was characterized by a more neoliberal approach by the state. By neoliberal, I mean the trend in late capitalism towards incorporating the structures and logic of free markets into more and more spheres of social, political, and economic life, in this case, into schools and school policy (Labaree 1997; Springer, Birch, and MacLeavy 2016). Neoliberalism is also an ideology, one that exalts individualism and individual liberty over collectivism and emphasizes utilitarian rationality as the driver of good decision making (Springer 2012). The decision to close Chauncey elementary was initiated under a context of budget austerity as Ohio positioned itself at the forefront of neoliberal education policy (Howley, Howley, and Kuemmel 2014; McGuinn 2012; de Saxe, Bucknovitz, and Mahoney-Mosedale 2020). Because they did not account for rurality, these policies and funding procedures inadvertently incentivized rural consolidation but stopped short of requiring it. This I refer to as "urbanormativity by omission", as the state's retreat from public education in favor of free market mechanisms fails to account for the unique circumstances rural schools face, instead relying on "neutral" policies which treat urban schools and places as the default.

In Chapter 5, I examine the microsocial interactions by which Chauncey residents were marginalized within the context of the debates over Chauncey Elementary's closure.

Where the authoritarian approach of the earlier consolidation left little-to-no room for local debate, the open-ended budget crisis of 2012 required the decision to close Chauncey be justified from among multiple possible solutions. While Chauncey resisters levied claims that the closure was a tragedy and an injustice that treated Chauncey as an "easy target", responses by other parents and the school administration constrained the discourse through othering and emotion management. Specifically, parents outside Chauncey responded by criticizing Chauncey resisters as overly emotional and for "bashing" other schools when they called for alternatives to closing Chauncey be considered. Further, parents and teachers from other parts of the district engaged in urbanormativity by commission at the microsocial level when they justified the closure of Chauncey because it would harm the smallest number of people.

This rationalized justification fits within the neoliberal policy-making process which centers cost-benefit analysis and the devaluation of localized, community-based institutions. The discourse could then be steered back towards issues of fiscal efficiency. Upon this emotion management response, Chauncey resisters went on the defensive, shifting away from an emotionally driven community-justice framing of the proposal towards a fact-driven critique and even regulation of their own emotional discourse to appear more legitimate on the debate stage. Despite these attempts to engage in the debate in the neoliberal, highly rationalized terms circumscribed by other parents and the administration, Chauncey was still othered by these same actors, treated as outsiders of the school district that many residents never wanted to be part of in the first place. For all their strategizing, the school board voted unanimously to close Chauncey Elementary

School, a decision that many Chauncey residents reflect on as feeling preordained and just another face of the injustice they had been facing for decades.

In Chapter 6, I examine the impacts of the consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local Schools and Chauncey Elementary School. The consolidation of Chauncey Dover was justified by arguing that a larger school would increase academic and extra-curricular opportunity for students. However, the students of Chauncey Dover report having been excluded from participation in these activities, reproducing the place- and class-based marginalization within the new school community. These patterns bore out in the Chauncey Elementary consolidation, where parents and community members reported feeling excluded from participation in the activities of the new school.

Beyond the school walls, the negative impacts of the school's budget deficits were repeatedly concentrated in Chauncey, with the community serving as a political "sacrifice zone". Originally referring to the concentration of environmental damage wrought by energy extraction such as mountain top removal mining, the concept of a "sacrifice zone" sheds light onto how these costs are spatially concentrated in places often populated by multiple-marginalized individuals and justified by appeals to the "greater good" (Fox 1999; Lerner 2012; Scott 2010). I use this concept to highlight the extent to which urbanormative and classist ideas about rural places are used to justify repeatedly concentrating the costs of austerity in places like Chauncey, sacrificing communities like it to avoid costs being felt in urban and wealthier areas.

Finally in Chapter 7, I discuss the implications of this case study for the broader literature on rural political marginalization. One major implication of my project is the interrelated nature of neoliberal policymaking and urbanormativity. Neoliberalism's focus

on market mechanisms simply do not work in rural education. Rural places, often too small to support multiple schools in free market competition, will continue to be excluded from consideration under such policies. Unfortunately, neoliberalism as an ideology provides a discursive toolkit for justifying the reproduction of rural inequalities. The utilitarian rationality of limiting costs to the fewest people and appeals to rationality in Chauncey demonstrated this. Future research may delve into other domains of policy and the potential for neoliberalism to be inherently urbanormative.

This is related to a second contribution of my study. Athens is well known for its progressive policies, but in many instances, their progressive stances did not address rural inequality. This meant not only that Chauncey was excluded, but rural inequality was reproduced, and, at times, their marginalization was incentivized. Again, progressive policy without attending to rural inequality resulted in the reproduction of rural inequality.

Finally, the exclusion of rural places from neoliberal policymaking, coupled with the tendency to treat rural places as sacrifice zones, even when enacting progressive policies, may help explain the resentment for government that authors like Kramer (2016) and Ashwood (2018b) have described. The proliferation of terms like “y’all qaeda” and “spreadnecks” to describe right-wing protesters suggests that rurality is still being synonymized with reactionary politics and intolerance (Nihlean 2021; Slepyan, Marema, and Carlson 2022). Here, I have described a 50-year pattern of exclusion and sacrifice, but clearly more research and public facing work is necessary to uncover the marginalization at the heart of such rural politics.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I begin by examining the literature on the justifications, history, and impacts of rural school consolidations. I bring this into conversation with the literature on place as an axis of inequality to motivate my study of school consolidation as a case study in rural marginalization. I begin by giving an overview of school consolidation literature to situate my case study. Next, I summarize theories of spatial inequalities generally and urbanormativity theory specifically, along with its applications to date. Shifting to examining the role of the state throughout these processes, I next describe neoliberalism and high modernism as macro-level theoretical concepts that are important for understanding the broader context of rural education and rural politics. Finally, I return to the world of interaction and review Schwalbe and colleagues' generic processes of inequality framework, which examines how patterned micro-level social interactions are mobilized to reproduce the marginalization of groups of people, attending specifically to how this theory might be applied to place-based inequality and how spatial inequality can be reproduced through consolidation.

2.1 The History of Rural Schools and Consolidation

Growing out of the rural, one-room and community schools of the 19th century in the U.S., public schools have changed significantly in size, structure, and number over the last two centuries (Ornstein 1992; Tieken 2014). Districts, which in 1930 had a median size of 300 students and numbered more than 130,000, have grown in size and declined in number (Ornstein 1992) through processes of district consolidation. The number of schools have decreased from more than 232,000 in 1930 to under 100,000 schools by 2010 (Howley et al. 2011; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). The average

school population rose from 87 students in 1930 to 440 students in 1970, with that trend continuing into the 2000s (Berry and West 2010). The most significant period of consolidation occurred in the post-World War 2 era, which featured a steep decline in the number of school districts and schools (Bauroth 2018)

In a context of such rapid consolidation, research on topics typically used to justify consolidations, such as achievement, costs, and economies of scale, have proliferated. I begin by examining this literature, then move on to review the literature on community impacts of consolidation.

2.1.1 Justifying Rural School Consolidations- Policies and Underlying Reasoning

Examining both rural and urban circumstances, school closures are frequently justified using one of three reasons: cost efficiency, academic performance, and equality (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). Proponents justifying consolidation through a cost efficiency argue that consolidations increase the number of students "while certain fixed costs, such as salaries for administrators and utilities, decrease or remain the same" (Bauroth 2018). Consolidation in the face of budget constrictions have been documented extensively in both rural and urban contexts (Deeb-Sossa and Moreno 2016; Deeds and Pattillo 2015; DeYoung 1995; Siegel-Hawley et al. 2017; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). Consolidation justified through academic performance is often described as a sort of accountability measure, with closure treated as the stick facing schools deemed to be failing or underperforming (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). While this has recently been tied closely to test scores, the justification of closure through academic performance justifications is not new, particularly to rural areas whose one-room school houses were viewed as relics of antiquity (Biddle and Azano 2016; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles

2019). The argument that closure will improve academic performance has resulted in the closure of hundreds of school since the turn of the millennium, and its prevalence as a justification is well documented (Deeds and Pattillo 2015; Johnson 2013; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019; de la Torre and Gwynne 2009). These arguments together are frequently used to bolster the third common justification: equality. School closure and consolidation are framed as a tool to bring students from public schools deemed to be of poor quality or inefficiently operated and offer them a more equitable school experience by moving them to larger and more high-quality schools. This justification has been documented extensively, especially being used by school administrators claiming that closure and consolidation will improve schooling for students marginalized racially, economically, and spatially (Green 2013; Howley et al. 2011; Tieken 2014; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). While these justifications have been recycled for over a century to justify the closure and consolidation of schools, the research is decidedly mixed on whether consolidation has the anticipated positive impacts.

Broader political and economic circumstances at the national level have shaped the consolidation discourse specifically and discourse around the purpose of schools and schooling broadly, thus impacting how consolidation is framed as a policy tool. Rural places have experienced school consolidation as a policy strategy since the nineteenth century, first as a way to standardize and control the curriculum, then later to address student achievement and international competitiveness, and more recently to address rural population decreases and the effects of economic restructuring on rural locales (Bard et al. 2006; Tieken 2014; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). There

circumstances have, at different times and across places, foregrounded different justifications for closing schools and districts.

For example, the standardization of schooling and white, urban control of education's purpose, especially control over African American schools, characterized earlier pre-War education reform efforts, using the academic performance justification to wrest local control from predominantly-Black and rural communities (Biddle and Azano 2016; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). In the mid-twentieth century, the Cold War and the Space Race provided contexts that foregrounded the necessity for improved curriculum and extra-curricular offerings to prepare students to be competitive on a global stage, and again consolidation became the policy of choice to accomplish these imperatives based on the justification of creating cost-efficient economies of scale and improving academic performance (Howley et al. 2011; Tieken 2014). This period also featured policies that explicitly sought to centralize control and increase local reliance on professional experts in schooling (Bauroth 2018). More recently, federal policies, such as No Child Left Behind in 2002, have heightened attention on school accountability for student achievement and equality, and those schools deemed to be failing were compelled to take "turn around" measures to improve (Johnson 2013; Tieken 2014). Repeated failure to "turn around" student achievement can result in closure of the school, state control, or private takeover (Johnson 2013). The Race to the Top grant program of 2009 continued this trend by incentivizing certain plans to address failure, including closing "failing schools and moving children to higher performing schools outside their neighborhoods or towns (Johnson 2013; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). Thus these justifications have featured in policy for over a century as control of schooling shifted

from communities to states and, increasingly, the federal government (Howley et al. 2011; Tieken 2014).

2.2 Rural School Consolidation and Their Impacts

Thus, policies and research over the last 80 years have treated school consolidation and closure as primary tools in addressing fiscal efficiency, student academic experience, and educational equality. As such, a body of research has arisen to evaluate the impacts of closures and consolidation on these anticipated impacts as well as unanticipated community impacts (Bard et al. 2006; Berry and West 2010; DeYoung 1995; Green 2013; Howley et al. 2011; Lyson 2002; Mills, Mcgee, and Greene 2013; Ornstein 1992; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). This research, however, been mixed on the extent to which consolidations have been consistently associated with lower costs, higher achievement, or improved equality. It is to this research that I now turn.

2.2.1 Evaluating "Best Size" and Consolidation Appropriateness

Research has variously defined the "best size" for a school or district depending on the variable being maximized (Bard et al. 2006). If per-pupil cost is central, research suggests a maximum district size of 4000-5000 students and a minimum of 750 (Bard et al. 2006). However, if the focus is instead on nurturing environments that also offer substantial curriculum and extracurricular benefits, the minimum district size is suggested to be 260 with a maximum of around 3000 (Bard et al. 2006). For schools to have the most positive effects on social and emotional wellbeing and success, studies suggest that no individual school enrollment should exceed 500, but other work recommends maximums vary by age range; 300-400 students per elementary school and 400-800 students per secondary school are recommended (Bard et al. 2006). School size does not

indicate consolidation, but given that a central justification for consolidation is the creation of economies of scale, size and educational outcomes should be positively associated at least generally. School and district consolidation, which fundamentally alter the structure and size of schools and districts, can be examined for their impacts on multiple outcomes for students, budgets, and communities.

2.2.2 Impacts of Consolidations on Student Achievement and Life Chances

Regarding academic achievement, the literature on size and achievement suggests that while the smallest schools may show lower achievement, once the smallest outlier schools in the size distribution are removed, smaller schools are more generally associated with higher academic achievement and graduation rates (Howley et al. 2011). Students from states with smaller public schools may also attain more schooling and see higher returns to their education than students from states with larger schools (Berry and West 2010), but this trend may be reversing as rural students today see less return on education than their urban counterparts (Goetz and Rupasingha 2004).

Larger schools also tend to show larger racial, gender, and income gaps in achievement (Howley et al. 2011) Further, some have shown that the effects of school size on student outcomes is stronger for lower-income students, suggesting that creating larger schools through consolidation has a compounding negative effect for multiply marginalized students (Howley 1996; Howley and Howley 2004). Best size is thus a moving target depending on the variable being examined.

A short-term negative impact on students' academic achievement following a school consolidation or closure has been well documented (Bard et al. 2006; Gordon et

al. 2018; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019), but this research has primarily focused on urban school systems. Further, the limited number of longer-term studies suggest that a rebound-effect for students from closed schools is possible (Brummet 2014; Samuels 2011). This rebound effect depends on students who are displaced being integrated into higher achieving schools, making the effect of consolidation on spatial inequality a central determining factor in how achievement is affected (Siegel-Hawley et al. 2017; Westberg 2016). For example, in Philadelphia, closures frequently occurred in neighborhoods with other low-performing schools, so students were unlikely to move into a higher performing school (Jack and Sludden 2013), a circumstance that may be associated with declines in academic performance (Engberg et al. 2012; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). Evidence on educational attainment through graduation rates also shows mixed results, with some studies suggesting that consolidation raises graduation rates (Luppescu et al. 2011), while others suggest they decrease graduation rates (Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni 2010), but again, these studies are of urban schools, with no evidence one way or the other for rural contexts.

Examining rural consolidation specifically, researchers conducted a natural pseudo-experiment situation in Arkansas to examine the effect of state-mandated district consolidation on student performance (Mills et al. 2013). Arkansas' state legislature handed down a policy decision which required all districts with fewer than 350 students attending daily to consolidate (Mills et al. 2013). They found that *district* consolidations may have a small positive effect on achievement for students whose district is being consolidated, but a more substantial negative effect for students in the receiving district (Mills et al. 2013). *School closures*, though, had stronger negative impact on

achievement, suggesting that the positives of district consolidation might be off-set by individual school closure effects (Mills et al. 2013). The impacts of consolidation on rural students' academic achievement is limited, but some research suggests that rural students who experience consolidation do have more educational opportunities in the consolidated school (Alsbury and Shaw 2005; Nitta, Holley, and Wrobel 2010; Sell and Leistritz 1997). However, as I will explore in Chapter 6, this increased access to educational opportunities should not be confused with increased participation in those activities.

2.2.3 Impacts of Consolidations on Cost and Efficiency

Cost efficiency literature on consolidation and school or district examine the relationship between size and cost per pupil, with those schools or districts with lower costs per pupil labeled as more cost efficient. Cost efficiency literature suggests that many schools are inefficiently small and examine increased size as a mechanism for reducing per pupil cost (Duncombe and Yinger 2007; Grosskopf, Hayes, and Taylor 2014; Zimmer et al. 2009). Most research on cost efficiency focuses on district size and the consolidation of districts rather than individual schools (see, e.g. (Duncombe and Yinger 2007; Grosskopf et al. 2014) which predominantly happen in rural areas (Howley et al. 2011).

While much of the literature on efficiency focuses on increasing size, some efficiency literature suggests that increasingly large schools and districts create diseconomies of scale in which further growth in size leads to higher costs per pupil (Cox 2010; Hanley 2007; Howley et al. 2011; Killeen and Sipple 2000; Zimmer et al. 2009). Using retrospective data from Indiana (rather than predictions) Zimmer and colleagues suggest that while cost efficiency may increase up to an optimal point, diseconomies of

scale can be created as districts or schools grow larger than that optimal size, with costs per pupil rising (Zimmer et al. 2009). Cox (Cox 2010) and Cooley and Floyd (Cooley and Floyd 2013) found similar results regarding increased costs examining longitudinal data in Tennessee and Texas respectively. Some research ties the issue of diseconomies of scale to increased transportation costs (Hanley 2007; Killeen and Sipple 2000). However, other research suggests that diseconomies are related to increased salary costs and a larger number of school administrative positions, (Howley et al. 2011; Zimmer et al. 2009), though evidence on this is mixed (Grosskopf et al. 2014). Diseconomies may even be tied to the unanticipated costs related to decreased parental involvement in larger and consolidated schools- as parents become less involved in larger schools, parental and community oversight of the school decreases and may lead to increased costs per pupil (Zimmer et al. 2009). Some researchers go so far as to argue that consolidations have exceeded efficiency points, causing diseconomies of scale that would be better addressed through deconsolidation (Howley et al. 2011), though this argument may be better applied to the largest of urban districts (Grosskopf et al. 2014). The smallest of rural districts (under 1,500 total students) may still offer cost efficiencies, but districts above this size may create diseconomies through consolidation (Cox 2010; Howley et al. 2011).

Methodologically speaking, the Rural School and Community Trust notes that consolidation cost effects are frequently evaluated based on cost estimates rather than retrospective empirical data after a consolidation has occurred (Rural School and Community Trust 2003). This research measuring inputs and outputs in economic terms may also tend to underestimate expenses incurred over time (Rural School and Community Trust 2003) or be notoriously difficult to measure comparatively (Grosskopf

et al. 2014; Karakaplan and Kutlu 2019). Research examining district consolidations using actual cost data over three years found that the effects were wildly variable (Arnold et al. 2005), while other studies correcting for inaccuracies in modeling found that savings from consolidations may be vastly overestimated (Karakaplan and Kutlu 2019). This suggests that costs over time are an important avenue for future research, especially using incurred costs over time rather than projections and focusing on school, not only district, consolidation.

2.2.4 Impacts of Consolidation on Equity

The third of the three common justifications for consolidation, equality, frequently stems from the previous two claims (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). The argument often goes that if consolidated schools can be more efficient and improve academic outcomes, then disadvantaged students would be particularly helped by consolidating their schools. Consolidations may also be justified by stating that the process may reduce segregation along racial or class lines, or by increasing access to curricular or extracurricular activities for more students.

In the case of closing schools, as with No Child Left Behind, urban studies suggest that the neighborhoods where schools tend to be targeted for closure do not always have a quality alternative school available nearby into which displaced students can merge (Jack and Sludden 2013) and this uneven spatial distribution of good schools means closures can cause school deserts (Alexander and Massaro 2020). Consolidations specifically may increase student absenteeism from schools (Engberg et al. 2012), and decrease participation in extracurricular activities (Alsbury and Shaw 2005), even if more extracurricular activities are made available. Further, consolidations often result in longer

transportation times and less school accessibility (Killeen and Sipple 2000; Lee and Lubienski 2017; de la Torre and Gwynne 2009). The negative impacts of consolidation on marginalized students is particularly pronounced, as decreased access is more likely to impact lower-income and students of color (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019; de la Torre and Gwynne 2009). Further, the increase in school and district size that comes with consolidation may more negatively impact students from lower-income families (Howley 1996; Howley et al. 2011). The evidence that consolidations result in desegregation is mixed, as some research suggest that school consolidations improve integration (Alsbury and Shaw 2005) other studies show no effect on integration (Siegel-Hawley et al. 2017).

These general trends in consolidation and closure suggest that the primary goals of increasing efficiency through economies of scale or positively affecting outcomes and equity of outcomes have seen only mixed results in the literature. Considering how frequently consolidations incur local pushback, these results should give consolidation proponents pause. The data on consolidation's potential exacerbating effect on spatial inequality point to the need to examine how consolidation plays out across context.

2.2.5 Community Impacts of Consolidations

2.2.5.1 Economic Impacts

The community economic effects of consolidation of schools in rural areas is frequently a major concern for stakeholders (Elliott 2012; Heinz 2005). As rural schools are frequently one of the largest employers in an area and one of the final public institutions to remain in communities experiencing depopulation (Bard et al. 2006; Elliott

2012), the economic effects of school closure have the potential to be drastic in small locales.

School consolidation has a negative impact on property values in the surrounding area (Duncombe et al. 2016), even after accounting for that school's student performance and property tax rate (Green 2013). Compounding that loss is an accompanying loss of business activity in the form of decreased retail sales and number of businesses (Green 2013:100). However, it is possible that consolidation may not have a consistent, direct negative impact on economic factors beyond income and property values (Heinz 2005). While residents in Nebraska communities fearing consolidation expressed concern that consolidation would lead to negative changes in population, income, retail sales, the number of retail businesses, migration pull factors, property taxes, and property values, but upon three-year longitudinal examination, only per capita income was negatively impacted by the consolidation (Heinz 2005).

The presence of a nearby school has positive economic and social impacts for smaller rural communities like the one examined in this case study. Examining the impact of a nearby school on small locales of fewer than 1500 residents, Lyson (Lyson 2002) found that among very small rural places (500 people or fewer) having a school is associated with higher housing values, more developed municipal infrastructure, higher rates of employment in "favorable" occupations and in "civic" occupations, leading to a more independent middle class. They also had lower levels of income inequality and fewer dollars spent per capita on welfare programs. Larger rural areas with populations from 501-1500 residents also saw positive, though not as powerful, positive effects of having a school (Lyson 2002). In their modern replication study using GIS data to

measure school proximity, Sipple, Francis and Fiduccia found that a nearby school has a "consistent, significant, and positive effect of school proximity on community economic vitality" (Sipple et al. 2019:260) including an increasingly positive impact on household incomes closer to the school, higher household incomes in neighboring villages, and higher house values in villages with schools.

2.2.5.2 Social and Civic Impacts

The community development approach to school consolidation is relatively small compared to the equity and efficiency approaches which have dominated the consolidation literature (Green 2013). While research on school achievement and financial outcomes have been mixed, this literature has consistently pointed to consolidations undermining community capacity (Alsbury and Shaw 2005; Chance and Cummins 1998; Deeb-Sossa and Moreno 2016; DeYoung 1995; Green 2013; Johnson 2013; Sipple et al. 2019; Tieken 2014). Green theorized about the roles of schools in their communities and how "consolidation affects the capacity of communities to collectively improve their quality of life" (Green 2013:99). Residents in consolidated areas report less of a connection with the school system after consolidation, and evidence has consistently shown a decrease in civic participation results from school closure (Green 2013). Comparing between pairs of communities connected by the consolidation of their schools, Sell and Leistritz found that community organization participation increased for communities that hosted the consolidated school and fell for vacated communities (Sell and Leistritz 1997). While there was no difference between the host and vacated community residents in their quality of life assessments before consolidation, after the consolidation, vacated communities reported significant lower quality of life compared to

the host communities, regardless of their population decline (Sell and Leistritz 1997). Residents report feeling a loss of community identity following the loss of a school (Green 2013). Schools serve multiple functions beyond educating youth in the areas they are located, and they are frequently one of the last remaining locally controlled social institutions when areas see consolidation of other services (Green 2013).

The effects of within-school community in the wake of consolidation are also important. In their in-depth multiple-case study of four consolidations in Arkansas, the authors found that teachers often had difficult transitions to the new consolidated situation (Nitta et al. 2010). They highlighted the importance of how students and teachers interpreted the consolidation, which affected how residents in their study fared in the process. Considering the extent to which community resistance is common in these processes (Elliott 2012), this finding about transitions merits further attention. They also found that in the cases they studied, which they noted were well set up for success, both teachers and students experienced tangible benefits from the consolidation (Nitta et al. 2010). This wasn't ubiquitous, however, and moving teachers were often dissatisfied, reporting loss of a "tight-knit family" after moving (14). Some moving students were reported by teachers from the sending-schools as having more difficult transitions even when other students or teachers did not report this (Nitta et al. 2010).

2.2.5.3 School Consolidation Resistance

Consolidations and closures are rarely without local controversy (Deeb-Sossa and Moreno 2016; DeYoung 1995; Elliott 2012; Freelon 2018; Good 2017; Green 2013, 2017; Jack and Sludden 2013; Sell and Leistritz 1997; de la Torre and Gwynne 2009). However, community actors seeking to maintain local control rarely succeed in the face

of bureaucratic demands for closures (Elliott 2012; Green 2017). Residents often resist closures, at times leveraging narratives about the history of the school in the community (Good 2017), community members' role as cultural citizens (Deeb-Sossa and Moreno 2016), or questions about the role of public employees and teachers in serving the best interests of the school (Jakubowski 2019). Other community resistance focused on questioning definitions of "failure" (Deeds and Pattillo 2015) especially compared with the potential negative impacts on community cohesion and local control (Alsbury and Shaw 2005; DeYoung 1995; Lyson 2002; Sell and Leistritz 1997).

Elliott (Elliott 2012) finds that thought on school closure is divided into two camps, which creates frustration for community members who seek to affect school bureaucratic thinking on local consolidation decisions. First, there is the body of research which focuses on school efficiency and professionalism, and which seeks to close small school to meet these goals. Second, there is the growing body of literature on school-community relationships and the importance of schools to local communities. Reformers have favored the former, while activists and community members favor the latter, and the bureaucratic structure of school governance which places certain goals at the center of policy decisions.

The evidence for cost and academic performance improvements from consolidation is thus mixed, while the evidence for negative community impacts has mounted. This makes the question of where consolidations and closures occur even more important for an examination of spatial inequality and unjust geographies (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). Some research, which focuses primarily on urban closures, has suggested that closures and consolidations are more likely to occur in areas with already-

marginalized groups, including along racial and class lines (Good 2017; Grant et al. 2014; Lee and Lubienski 2017; Lipman 2007; de la Torre and Gwynne 2009; Westberg 2016). For example, Westberg studied the spatial dynamics of urban school closure, finding that the higher the proportion of African American or low-income students in a school, the more likely that school was to close rather than stay open (Westberg 2016). Spatially, urban closure and reopening patterns move schools into more densely populated areas (Westberg 2016). However, these new schools serve lower proportions of low-income and African American students, suggesting that disadvantaged students are excluded from participation in these newer, urban schools (Alexander and Massaro 2020; Westberg 2016).

This research suggests that marginalized people and places may be disproportionately likely to experience closure and consolidation, policies which have not been reliably shown to result in either cost savings or academic improvements. As such, some scholars have argued that school closure policies ought to be thought of as a process of reproducing unjust geographies (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019) or spatial injustice (Grant et al. 2014). This line of research has focused primarily on urban closures, however, leaving the spatial distribution of rural closures open for future research. In this study, I will examine how marginalization of one rural community was leveraged to justify the consolidation of its district and schools into the nearby micropolitan district, as well as the impacts of that process for rural residents. I now turn to theoretical literatures that seek to explain how spatial inequality is created and reproduced to inform this case study in the reproduction of rural marginalization.

2.3 Theorizing Rural Inequalities

While more recent literature, especially that examining urban closure patterns, has begun incorporating critical theories of spatial injustice and inequality, much of the school consolidation research thus far has not made theoretical connections to the production and reproduction of spatial inequality. Here, I will review several theories which explore place/space as independent axes of inequality which can intersect with other types of inequality and marginalization. Throughout this project, I will highlight the ways that rurality operates as a separate axis of inequality from identity-based axes of marginalization, namely class. While the concentration of inequalities such as poverty in lace make these axes of inequality overlap, they are not interchangeable. Spatial inequality theory attends to how resources tend to be distributed across space unevenly and the impacts that uneven distribution has, but this theory does not explain how the justification of such distribution becomes culturally salient and even hegemonic. Meanwhile, other theorists consider rurality and place to be the products of representation, mere cultural signifiers, but miss the ways that urbanity is normalized through structural forces, such as treating urban schools as the default in national education policy. Urbanormativity theory attempts to bridge these two extremes by attending to both structural urbanization- the rules and resources that privilege urban institutions- and urbanormativity- the cultural milieu that justifies urbanization as synonymous with progress and rurality as antiquated.

I bring these spatial theories into conversation with more traditional lenses on the context and reproduction of inequality. While urbanormativity represents a major step forward in bridging structural and cultural forces upholding the urbanization of life,

relatively few applications have focused on how these tendencies are perpetuated at a micro level, how cultural ideas about rurality are leveraged in social interactions to reproduce rural individuals' marginality in their local communities. I use Schwalbe and colleagues' theory of generic processes of reproducing inequality to attend carefully to how ideas about rurality are used in interactions to marginalize rural ways of being and thinking. Further, I argue that the macro forces which shape thinking about policy, namely neoliberalism, also carry implicit urban biases that provide adherents with justifications for the continued marginalization of rurality without naming rurality itself. By attending to how urbanormative and neoliberal ideas about how schooling "ought" to be done are leveraged within one community school consolidation, I show how the marginalization of rural people and communities is portrayed as natural, logical, and invisible.

2.3.1 Theorizing Place-Based Inequalities

Spatial inequality is a framework for treating space as an axis of inequality and as a source of difference in the experiences of other forms of inequality (Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 2007). Sociology has been at best inconsistent and at worst absent in attempts to theorize and study space and its effect on social inequality (Lobao et al. 2007; Tickamyer 2000). Those subareas of sociology and other disciplines that have attended to space have conceived of the concept in multiple ways. Space has been conceived of variously as place, or specific and particular spaces; a relational unit that captures geographies based on some variable of interest for the purpose of comparison; or as scale, the size of the geographic unit being captured (Tickamyer 2000). Demography and human ecology are the most obvious subareas of sociology which have dealt with space,

while other specializations, such a political sociology, have obvious spatial implications but have not addressed them directly (Lobao et al. 2007).

The sociology of inequality is another such subarea that has not extensively examined the spatial dimension of its topic (Lobao et al. 2007). There are two scales at which this is refuted: the national, world-systems scale and the urban, neighborhood scale (Lobao 2004). Studies of inequality at scales between these very large and very small territories, middle-range territorial units, have not had as much attention devoted to them (Lobao 2004). Primary focus has been on the question of "who gets what and why?" (Lobao et al. 2007:3), while spatial inequality calls attention to stratification "within and between territorial units" (Lobao 2004:1), asking "who gets what where?" (Lobao 2004:3).

Spatial inequality is thus a conceptual framework which takes seriously the importance of space in social processes of inequality. The approach involves several kinds of questions, each of which think about space in a different way ontologically. Spatial inequality scholars may examine how inequalities along traditional axes differ across territories, engaging in comparative work and thinking about space in terms of relational units (Lobao 2004). They may also address how the experience of inequality differs across geographic territories, examining how poverty, for example, is not only more or less common across space, but that where one experiences poverty impacts how poverty affects one's life (Lobao et al. 2007). This places space alongside other axes of inequality and mutually constructing, and this approach lends itself quite well to intersectional approaches that focus on deconstructing the idea of a universal experience

of oppression (Choo and Ferree 2010; Crenshaw 1991). Each of these approaches examine space as a source of difference.

Alternatively, theorists can call attention to the way that space is produced rather than a given (Lobao et al. 2007). Particular places themselves can become markers for inequality, such as in the case of uneven development (Lobao 2004). Lobao gives one such example in her examination of how the Ohio River Valley became recognizable as a specific region marked by underdevelopment through political and economic structures and shifts over time (2004). Thus, spatial inequality examines how space produces and is produced by inequality across a variety of territorial scales.

Through the latter half of the twentieth century and particularly in the 1990s and early aughts, the U.S. approach and the Antipodean approaches to studying rural sociology have differed in how they approach their topic (Bell 2007). Bell articulates this difference in describing two rurals (2007). First, there is the material, "first rural" popular among American scholars (Bell 2007). Second, there is the ideational "second rural" popular among European and Antipodean scholars (Bell 2007). The first rural (the material moment) is modernist, seeking to treat rural as a spatial category into which things can be grouped. First rural is fundamentally materialist, spatial, dichotomous, and relative. The politics of first rural are a politics of defense, where rural space is defined first and those in it are rural people. Rural must be defended from urban, in such a view, but does not do much influencing of its own. It could be the case that first rural politics are a political economy of the rural, but that only shifts the active element to money, rather than urban places (Bell 2007).

The "second rural" was more popular in the Antipodean tradition and its development and import for rural studies is what I will focus on here (Bell 2007). Halfacree represents such an approach in his argument that a definition of the rural based only on materialist factors, be they spatial or socio-cultural, is inadequate and relies on spatial determinism (Halfacree 1993). Instead, he argues that space must be understood as both produced and a means of production, as structure is never outside of space (Halfacree 1993). Part of understanding the ways that space is produced is understanding how people think about space (Halfacree 1993). Rurality may have material expression, the argument goes, but it is first imaginative (Halfacree 2006). Thus, rural scholars could study both rural localities and people's lay discourses of the rural (Halfacree 1993). Some take this further, arguing that rural is *only* a category of thought (Bell 2007).

Social representations of rurality involve the shared mental representations of rural places that people hold in their minds, and linguistic repertoires are the ways that people are able to communicate about rurality with others (Halfacree 1993). Both can involves slippage between the sign (saying or thinking 'rural), the signification (what is meant by 'rural') and the referent (rural localities) (Halfacree 1993). The sign and the signified are increasingly detached from the referent (Cloke 2006). In other words, meanings and images of rurality are increasingly drawn from referents other than rural geographic spaces (Cloke 2006). This increasing divorce between the sign, signification, and referent multiply the possible meanings of rurality (Halfacree 1993). Some take issue with the claim that rural is a social representation, claiming that if people's ideas about rural vary so much, it is hard to argue that such a representation can be social (Halfacree 2006). Further, they argue that "rural" is hardly a representation if the idea people are

constructing in their minds is becoming more and more unmoored from the material referent of an actual physical place (Halfacree 2006). Instead of a social representation, these dissenters argue that rural is an interpretative repertoire, and there is even less fixity to it, like a ghost of a thing (Halfacree 2006).

Some have attended to how rural landscapes become hyper-real and commodified when they are modeled based on representations and no longer reference the referent itself (Cloke 2006:22). These scholars argue that an important characterization of rural life is the blurring of boundaries between rural and urban as categories (Cloke 2006). Rural places are being urbanized and (to a lesser degree) urban places are ruralized (Cloke 2006). Thus, even as the number of rural localities may shrink, the importance of rurality remains justified because of the many ways people think about rurality and how those thoughts also shape the production and reproduction of space (Halfacree 1993).

Cloke characterizes this approach to the ideational rural as part of the cultural turn, which he says should be pluralized, as it has not been evenly taken up by rural researchers (Cloke 2006). Four critiques have come along with the cultural turn, namely that it depersonalizes, depoliticizes, and dematerializes rural while not sufficiently deconstructing it (Cloke 2006). Cloke argues that the benefits have been to bring attention to fluidities rather than fixities of rural lives and imaginations (Cloke 2006:29). I would argue that urbanormativity, with its roots in critical as well as postmodern traditions, addresses some of these critiques.

2.3.2 Urbanormativity theory

Urbanormativity is a framework influenced by the critical and postmodern traditions which attends to not only the structural effects of rapid urbanization of the U.S. (and beyond), but also to the cultural processes by which rurality has been relegated to marginalized status (Seale and Fulkerson 2014). Originally termed in *Critical Rural Theory* (Thomas et al. 2011), the idea has inspired a number of edited collections which focus on cultural representations of rural life and rural people (i.e. *Reimagining Rural* (Fulkerson and Thomas 2016b)) and the structural and contextual changes that rural places are undergoing in an urbanizing world (i.e. *Reinventing Rural* (Thomas and Fulkerson 2016)). While these collections focus on cultural and structural dimensions of rurality and urbanization, this separateness is not inherent to the concept.

The central thrust of urbanormativity is the assertion that the creation of urban systems is at once a structural process to create networks of resource extraction from hinterlands for the benefit of cities, termed urbanization, and a cultural process of normalizing urban life and institutions while distorting those of rural places, termed urbanormativity (Seale and Fulkerson 2014). These processes play out cyclically across nested scales of space, from global shifts towards urbanization and mass culture to the place-level (Seale and Fulkerson 2014). When this process unfolds spatially, the theorists term this cyclical process "place structuration" (Seale and Fulkerson 2014:22), drawing from Anthony Giddens' concept of structuration (Giddens 1984).

Through the concept of structuration, Giddens attempts to create a less rigid theory of the role of social structure in shaping social life without also falling into the opposite extreme of attributing people with unbounded agency (Giddens 1984). Social

structures, he theorizes, are at once upheld by agentic human actors through the routinization and rationalization of social of life, while also being changed by human agency through our tendency to reflexively monitor ourselves (Giddens 1984). Structures, the rules and resources that allow for social life to be reproduced, at once enable and constrain our actions, but they are only made rigid and inflexible (indeed only made real at all) through human action (Giddens 1984). Thus, just as the character of human action cannot be fully explained as the product of rigid structure or unbounded agency, but instead is the product of the intertwining of both, so too are the character of places shaped both by the structural rules and resources present *and* the ideational representations of places through *place structuration*.

Despite discourse which argues the contrary, the existence of urban life is necessarily dependent on rural production and the funneling of rural resources to urban populations (Seale and Fulkerson 2014). While this has historically been accomplished through force, such as the feudal plunder of surrounding lands or the theft of rural lands from rural Native people in the North American continent, far easier is to create and maintain a cultural system which normalizes such relations (Seale and Fulkerson 2014). Urbanormative cultural forms normalize urbanity and distort rural places, representing them not as they are in and of themselves, but as they are for urban purposes (Seale and Fulkerson 2014).

This does not mean that rural places are always denigrated in mass culture, nor that cities are always exalted (Fulkerson and Thomas 2016a). Importantly, the normative status of city life is not synonymous with desirability (Seale and Fulkerson 2014). Most central to urbanormative representations of rural life is that they are most often

stereotypes which characterize rural places as homogenous, redeploying images of a rural life which has not recently existed, if it ever did at all (Fulkerson and Thomas 2016a). These representations of rurality for urban consumption present a version of rurality which never actually existed, creating a *rural simulacra* of a rural far simpler, wilder, or more exotic than any pastoral province to be found in the real world (Baudrillard 1994; Thomas et al. 2011). Despite never having existed, these representations of rurality and simple and anachronistic can be used to justify urbanization of rural social life and structures, as I will discuss throughout.

Urbanormativity, then, attends to the interplay of cultural and structural forces is the creation and maintenance of urban systems while also focusing on how the processes occur in space. One possible explanation for differences between rural and urban school closures could be rooted in cultural characteristics of these places as perceived by the outside world. Rural places, characterized as backwards and incapable of running their own schools, must be run by urban-based reformers with the kinds of expertise needed to create successful schooling conditions (Tieken 2014). Arguing for the role of schools in the community is characterized as a selfish (Tieken 2014) or naïve goal rooted in sentimentality, while reform goals must be "modernizing" in the face of such rural stubbornness. Rural and urban closures play out differently because, though both groups are deemed unable to run their own schools, one group refuses to change, and one group is unable to do so.

2.3.3 The State and Rural Education- From "Modernizing" to Marketizing

The cases I will present here takes place over 60 years, beginning in the early 1960s during the Cold War and War on Poverty, when the state engaged in large-scale

projects such as the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission, spanning to the early 2010s, in the wake of neoliberal reforms to social policy that emphasized privatization, such as the Race to the Top educational grant program and the rise of the charter school movement (McGuinn 2012). The role of the state in rural institutions like education has varied over this period, and as such, I will be using two major lenses through which to view the state. The first comes from James C. Scott's "Seeing Like a State" and theorizes the state as shaping rural institutions to render them more legally legible through a lens he calls "high modernism" (Scott 1999).

In "Seeing Like a State", Scott sought to explain why so many state projects to "modernize" rural institutions around the world had failed to meet their goals, from map making to forest management. In his exploration, he found that when dealing with rural areas, policies and practices that would be standardized and governmentally regulated in urban centers were instead unregulated, unstandardized, and highly localized. However, Scott argued that "the more static, standardized, and uniform a population or social space is, the more legible it is and the more amenable it is to the techniques of state officials" (Scott 1999:82). In their efforts to render these rural practices legible to the state, governmental forces would often seek to standardize these practices through a process he describes as "high modernist".

Scott articulates four key characteristics of the state's high modernist approach to addressing perceived rural provincialism. The state, by applying this ideology to rural institutions, brought rural practices, including education, into the definitions, rules, regulations, and practices that were normalized in urban settings, rendering those rural "provincial" practices modern. The four characteristics outlined were:

1. The administrative ordering of nature and society
2. A “high modernist” ideology- a “muscle-bound” version of confidence in scientific and technological progress, growth of production, satisfaction of human needs, and rational design of social order “commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws”. Even when the carriers of the ideology were capitalist enterprisers, the state is also necessary.
3. An authoritarian state willing to use its coercive power to bring its plan into action (as opposed to a laissez faire state simply stepping aside for market forces)
4. A prostrate civil society that lacks (or has been stripped of) the capacity to resist these plans

The state, Scott argued, engaged in the process of transforming localized rural practices into rationalized and measurable institutions that served the state’s interests and could be more readily regulated and legislated (Scott 1999). In the process of imposing this homogenizing, rationalizing order, the state suppresses local control and place-based specificities of institutions that allowed them to function (Knoester and Parkison 2017; Schafft 2016; Scott 1999).

In education, the twentieth century saw a large reduction in the number of school districts, an increase in the size of schools, and standardization of the curriculum, among other changes that transformed rural schools from a localized institution to one far more standardized and shaped by state intervention and measurement (Knoester and Parkison 2017). I argue that this period of standardization and consolidation of rural schools is best understood through the lens of high modernism, as the state engaged with a heavy hand to reduce rural local control over schools in favor of larger, centrally controlled

schools run by state-endorsed experts. The consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local Schools into Athens City Schools exemplifies this tendency as the state and city school administrators sought to modernize education in Southeast Ohio with a progressive vision that nonetheless accomplished these goals by reducing rural autonomy.

The more recent political environment of education policy is characterized by neoliberalism. By neoliberalism, I mean the trend in late capitalism towards incorporating the structures and logics of free ("liberated") markets into ever more spheres of social, political, and economic life (Springer et al. 2016). While neoliberalism includes policies which favor private control over public control (Labaree 1997) and decreasing the role of the state in controlling or affecting social institutions (Springer et al. 2016), I also include the ideologies that underpin neoliberalism, such as an emphasis on individualism and exaltation of individual liberty over collective decisions, competition as a driver of progress, and utilitarian rationality or cost-benefit analysis in decision-making (Springer et al. 2016). Neoliberalism is not simply a top-down set of policy imperatives, but also a type of hegemonic discourse which shapes (and is shaped by) patterned thought and modes of interacting that make certain actions and decisions appear to be 'commonsense' (Springer 2012).

Neoliberalism, like high modernism, emphasizes the rationalization of institutions like education. However, I argue for the distinct use of these concepts here based on the different role the state plays in different eras studied here. Where a high modernist approach to rural education emphasized authoritarian interventions into rural schooling, such as the revoking of rural high school charters across rural Ohio in the 1960s, the neoliberal era more often saw the state retreat from control over public schools in favor

of market solutions, such as the charter school movement underway during the decision to close Chauncey. Under both approaches, rural institutions are disadvantaged, but the processes by which this happens differed, as I will discuss in Chapter 4 and 5.

In education, neoliberalism often includes policy stances which position education not as a public good, but as a private good, emphasizing the goals of private control over education, training future workers, and preparing individuals to be sorted into and compete for positions in the capitalist hierarchy (Corbett 2007; Labaree 1997). Policies such as school choice as envisioned in the charter school movement, privatization of education as under the "turnaround" measures of No Child Left Behind or Race to the Top, the quantification of success through standardized testing, and the deregulation of teaching as in Teach for America are all examples of neoliberal education policies encouraging market logics to pervade the educational sphere (Ferrare and Setari 2018; Heilig and Jez 2014; Johnson 2013; Lareau and Goyette 2014).

There is a contradiction between the realities of rural education and neoliberal policymaking: on the one hand, neoliberalism dictates competition and market mechanisms. On the other, rural places often cannot sustain an entire market's worth of schools. As such, rural education policy under a neoliberal political context differs from urban education issues. However, neoliberalism still shapes the underlying goals envisioned for education of rural children. For example, in studying rural Canadian education in one fishing town, Corbett argues that part of the purpose of schooling is to decimate attachment to place and create highly mobile potential workers who are willing to move for the needs of capital (Corbett 2007). In this argument is the implication that curriculum breadth is desirable over specificity, or that the proper educational experience

prepares students for work anywhere but not for work *somewhere* in particular (Corbett 2007).

The yardstick for defining a desirable educational experience has become ever-more dependent on standardized testing as the outcome of interest (Corbett 2017). This centers education on a rational, choice-making, spatially unattached actor who must be offered a curriculum capable of taking them anywhere or an urban student presented with multiple options for schooling. Some scholars have argued that such standardization is emblematic of how states govern their rural regions more generally, seeking to standardize local institutions in order to make them more legible and centralize state control (Knoester and Parkison 2017; Scott 1999). Such a project of "modernization" also benefits neoliberal capitalism when the standards set revolve around labor market preparation and placeless education of future workers. It is hard to argue that students should be anything less than prepared for labor market participation, but in educating for anywhere, schools fail to educate for somewhere.

Neoliberalism in rural education drives consolidation debates when those consolidations are informed by the belief that the market will solve rural education's problems. Recent rural consolidations are frequently justified using language of cost efficiency and breadth of offerings first as rural areas experience depopulation (Howley et al. 2011). They have frequently resulted from state-mandates and district-level decisions rather than federal policy (Blauwkamp, Longo, and Anderson 2011; Heinz 2005; Mills et al. 2013), which belies the ways that neoliberal education policy requires state intervention to make rural areas "fit" the implicit urban default that such policies are based on.

These state and local policies are carried out at a local level, often with intense conflict over their implementation (Deeb-Sossa and Moreno 2016; DeYoung 1995; Elliott 2012; Freelon 2018; Good 2017; Green 2013, 2017; Jack and Sludden 2013; Sell and Leistritz 1997; de la Torre and Gwynne 2009). The rationalization and justification of school consolidation is not simply a top-down decision, but instead is the result of microsocial interactions between community members. Knowing that closures are distributed unequally and in ways that reflect existing marginality in urban areas (Alexander and Massaro 2020; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019; Westberg 2016), it is clear that school closure in rural areas may not be the rational, dispassionate policy decision suggested by its proponents, but instead may be impacted by preexisting patterns of marginalization. I will now turn to theories of the reproduction of marginalization to better explain how such marginalization may be leveraged to justify such policies that impact already marginalized people and places.

2.3.4 Urbanormativity reproduced at the micro level

The consolidation of Chauncey's schools presented in this case study is fairly typical of rural school consolidations generally: it was suggested by the local administration as a way to respond to state budget reductions and improve fiscal efficiency. A spatial inequality approach would lead to research about the impacts such a policy would have on where and to whom educational resources are available. Urbanormativity theory might lead one to view such a policy as part of the urbanization of schooling as an institution, where "bigger is better", and perhaps examine how culturally salient ideas about rurality are incorporated into education policymaking. I will do both in this case study. However, I argue that urbanormativity would benefit from

greater attention to the ways that rural marginality is reproduced not only through cultural representation and structures, but also through microsocial interactions that rely on these culturally salient ideas. The mere existence of such representations of rurality do not, in and of themselves, affect policies, until they are taken up by individuals and leveraged to enact change to the detriment of rural places or people. To incorporate such a lens, I now turn to Schwalbe and colleague's theory of the generic processes of reproducing inequality.

Schwalbe and colleagues argue that while a large body of research has examined and measured the outcomes of inequality, far less attention is paid to the processes by which those inequalities are produced and reproduced between groups (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Refusing to accept the framing of inequality as the product of structures beyond individual agency, they argue instead that any type of inequality is the result of actions taken or not taken by individuals. Thus, the processes of reproducing inequality occur at the micro level, depending on "face-to-face interaction" (Schwalbe et al. 2000 p. 420). Rather than imposed from reified structures, they argue that the systems of inequality that pervade our society are a kind of negotiated order between social groups that repeat patterns of action resulting in inequality.

Schwalbe et al. argued that there are common, generic patterns of interactions that can be mobilized in multiple settings to create, recreate, and justify marginalizing and oppressive conditions (2000). Based on qualitative studies of how social interactions reproduce inequalities between groups, they describe four generic processes of reproduction, patterns of action which are often deployed to reproduce inequality: othering, emotion management, subordinate adaptation, and boundary maintenance.

Othering refers to "the process whereby a dominant group defines into existence an inferior group" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:422). Subordinate adaptation refers to the adaptations that victims of oppression may engage in to deal with inequality. These responses by subordinated groups often have dual outcomes, to reproduce some inequality while challenging others. Boundary maintenance, or the creation and maintenance of lines of difference between groups, can be symbolic, interactional, spatial, or a combination of these (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Finally, emotion management involves conditioning or shaping the emotional responses that are possible or acceptable in the face of inequality. When inequality is reproduced over time, "destabilizing feelings of anger, resentment, sympathy and despair" are often created, requiring that those emotions are managed for the inequality to continue unchallenged (Schwalbe et al. 2000:434). This may include processes for regulating discourse around inequality, which imposes "a set of formal or informal rules about what can be said, how it can be said, and who can say it to whom" using a "rationalist discourse… a language of efficiencies, returns, and fiduciary responsibilities- that keeps compassion at bay and facilitates the pursuit of narrow economic interests" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:434). It may also include conditioning emotional subjectivity, or how "people's feelings towards things -other people, situations, events, objects- depend on the meanings they learn to give those things" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:436). Finally, this may include the scripting of mass events, or orchestrating events "to bring about an intended emotional result" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:438). In this study, I examine how residents of Athens County, in their efforts to justify policy decisions that target rural people and places, deployed and responded to

these microsocial interactions, as well as how the policy context in which these interactions took place facilitated some kinds of marginalization of rurality.

2.4 Research Questions

School consolidations have been treated as a policy tool to increase fiscal efficiency, improve academic outcomes, and expand equality for decades despite being based on shaky evidence for any of these goals. The evidence for negative community impacts, including economic and civic impacts, of consolidations is much clearer. Urban closure research has situated recent waves of closure as reproducing spatial inequality and spatial injustice, but the literature on the spatial distribution of rural consolidations is scanter and represents an avenue for further research.

There is also a gap in the rural literature regarding the processes by which school consolidations are carried out (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). More generally, relatively few studies have attended to how the process of debating such a controversial policy is itself a fraught process where preexisting inequality and marginalization can be leveraged at the micro level to affect the decision making process (but see (Deeb-Sossa and Moreno 2016) for an urban example). Further, while literature has suggested that increased opportunities may attend rural consolidations, the research suggests that the presence of these new options does not mean they are taken up. Indeed, research beyond quantitative surveys into the broader impacts of consolidation for rural students, parents, and communities remains a gap in the literature, as does research on how and why such impacts come to pass. To address these gaps in the literature on how consolidations are carried out, their impacts, and the general role of places-based inequality in school consolidation, I ask the following research questions:

RQ1: By what processes did state policy and the Athens County consolidation debates come to a resolution reflecting the experiences and preferences of some places and people over others?

RQ2: What have the impacts of the consolidations been on Chauncey's community, economic, and political life, and the beliefs of Chauncey residents as rural people?

By attending to how marginalization is reproduced through generic processes of inequality, I expand on urbanormativity theory to show how cultural ideas about rurality come to affect decisions to the detriment of rural people and places. Neoliberalism and urbanormativity as hegemonic forces offer lenses through which to view education and its goals, lending any argument that relies on them the credibility of being "commonsense" (Springer 2012). Attending to these processes and how urbanormative and neoliberal ideas are leveraged at the micro level between actors, each trying to see their policy preferences enacted, expands the view of urbanormativity theory. Where the transformation of cultural ideas into structural change has been taken for granted, I examine the precise ways that such ideas about rurality affect policymaking and politics. I also attend to the impact that this marginalization has for rural residents who experienced this marginalizing process, giving new attention to how rural people respond to urbanormativity in their everyday lives and contributing to the literature on rural political sentiments that has gained steam since the 2016 U.S. Presidential election of Donald Trump.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS AND DATA

To study how residents of Chauncey have been marginalized in decisions and institutions which impact their community and the long-term impact of that marginalization, I used mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. School consolidation is often opposed by the community losing a school (Elliott 2012; Green 2017) and, when it does occur, has negative impacts on community vitality, economic vigor, and public life (Elliott 2012; Lyson 2002; Rural School and Community Trust 2003; Sell and Leistritz 1997). The gradual consolidation of Chauncey-Dover Local School District into Athens City School District is thus a useful case study. Here, the needs of the rural county residents were marginalized and made illegible by education policies that centered urban and neoliberal ideas about schools and schooling.

To examine these processes and their impacts on Chauncey and Dover Village, I conducted a mixed-method retrospective case study using a variety of data collection tools. These included participant observation, oral history and in-depth interviews, content analysis, secondary data analysis, and survey research methods. My planned fieldwork period was interrupted by the Covid-19 crisis, which began in the U.S. in March of 2020. At the start of the crisis, I had intended to continue participant observation through the fall, increasing my participation in Village council meetings and public events that were often more frequent in the spring and summer. I also intended to translate this longer rapport period into a larger number of interviews, such as with former members of the school board and more local officials in the area. However, the virus and the surrounding crisis caused travel restrictions beginning in March of 2020 and continuing through spring of 2021, cutting off my ability to travel to Chauncey.

To accommodate this change in access, I reworked my methodological strategy significantly. I organized online interviews with the participants with whom I already had established relationships, but I found that establishing rapport or setting up new interviews was difficult in a community that primarily connected via face-to-face meetings and physically posted announcements. I then developed a survey of adult residents of Chauncey and Dover Township who lived in the area at the time of the Chauncey Elementary School closure to continue collecting data on residents' perceptions of the processes that would have been collected through further interviews and participant observation. I also bolstered my content analysis to include public social media posts dated from the time of the consolidation, again in hopes of gathering more perspectives directly from residents who experienced the consolidations. These steps buffered against the possibility that my project would rely too heavily on official narratives of the consolidation that remained readily available, such as meeting minutes and newspaper coverage.

In this chapter, I describe the process of data collection and their settings. I begin by situating the case as a lens through which to learn about rural marginalization and the reproduction of inequality. I then describe the ethnographic setting and the methods employed, highlighting the particularities of research in a rural setting. Next, I describe my methodological shift to online ethnographic and survey methods, including describing the survey instrument and distribution. Finally, I move onto data analysis strategies for the multiple forms of data generated by these methods.

3.1 Methodological Approaches

Because I am studying the processes and impacts of rural marginalization on rural people and places, I brought together the theoretical frameworks of urbanormativity and the generic processes of reproducing inequality (Fulkerson and Thomas 2019; Schwalbe et al. 2000) The central thrust of urbanormativity is that creating/maintaining urban systems is at once a structural process to extract resources from hinterlands for the benefit of cities (termed urbanization) and a cultural process of normalizing urban life and institutions while distorting those of rural places (termed urbanormativity) (Seale and Fulkerson 2014). This process is situated within a neoliberal and state-driven educational policy context, and this context and the phenomenon I am studying cannot be disentangled.

Because my phenomena of interest (the process of marginalization or rural people and the impacts of that marginalization) cannot be disentangled from the larger context of urbanormative and neoliberal politics, I selected a case study approach. Yin argues that a case study allows a researcher to study a "contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin 2018:15).

3.2 Ethnographic Field Work

I used a variety of ethnographic methods during my fieldwork period from July 2019 to March 2020. I conducted seven months of participant observation in Chauncey, primarily in the Chauncey Public Library and at Chauncey governmental meetings. I also conducted 10 in-depth interviews with key informants in the community, including present and former local government officials, leaders in the anti-consolidation

movement, and school employees. These key informant interviews provided long-range and institutional perspectives that supplemented the official narratives provided by meeting minutes, but they also bridged between a "top-down" and a "bottom up" approach to data collection (Glen 1995). I interviewed a total of 11 participants in 10 interview sessions, four of whom donated their interview to a public oral history of Chauncey Dover Local School District. Third, I used content analysis of materials documenting the public record of Chauncey's school closures, including traditional media coverage, school yearbooks, school board and government meeting minutes, and local government records.

3.2.1 Athens County and the City of Athens

Athens County is a micropolitan county in the Appalachian region of Southeast Ohio. Between 1950 and 1960, as the policy of revoking public school charters to incentivize consolidation of the region's small schools was beginning, the population of Athens County grew 2.5% to 46,998, significantly more slowly than the state at large, which saw a 22.1% increase in population. Like many rural Appalachian counties, the median income in Athens County in 1960 was significantly lower than the state at large. In 1960, the median household income was $6,171 in Ohio, while Athens County's median household income was only $4,321. A summary of these demographic and economic statistics is available in Table 3.1.

The region was initially colonized in the 18th century as settlers established salt mines and later coal, iron, and timber operations. By the 1960s, however, only a small minority of workers were employed in mining, 2.9% as of the 1960's Census. In 1960, 14,337 people were employed in Athens County, which was dominated by jobs in

educational services and government (21%) and manufacturing (15.8%). The county has been home to Ohio University, a public state university with a largely residential student body, since 1804, and it was and remains a major employer in the area. A large portion of the county is designated public land, including Wayne National Forest in the northeast and Stroud's Run State Park to the east.

Athens County had a population of 64,757 people as of the 2010 Census, up 4.1% over the 2000 Census count. Designated using the 2003 Rural-Urban Continuum Code, the county was a non-metro county with an urban population of 20,000 or more and adjacent to a metro area. Located approximately 80 miles southeast of the state capital of Columbus, the county lies in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and is among the original designated Appalachian Regional Commission counties. The county is significantly less racially diverse than the rest of the state of Ohio with 8.2% of residents listing their race as something other than "white alone" on the 2010 Census. The county's largest employment sector in 2010 was educational services, which employed approximately 28% of working adults in 2010, followed by the healthcare and social assistance sector at approximately 15.3% of working adults and retail work at approximately 9.9% of working adults. The county's share of manufacturing employment had declined (7.5%) as household names like McBee's Manufacturing became synonymous with years gone by, a pattern consistent with other rural counties between the mid-twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Green 2020).

Athens is also the name of the county seat town[1] situated on the Hocking River, first settled in 1797 and incorporated in 1811. Ohio University's campus was established in the town early in its history, and it is a common myth that the university's founders were intended to hike onward to another location but instead opted to stop and drink for the night, leading to the growth of Athens and the university on a major floodplain. By 1960, Athens had a population of 16,470, up 41.3% from 1950, growing more quickly than the state and Athens County. In the city of Athens, the 1960 median household income was $5,267, lower than the state average but still higher than the broader rural county.

Athens had grown to be a city of 23,832 people as of 2010 an 11.7% increase from 2000, surpassing the growth rate of the rest of the state. The median household income for 2010 was $63,370 (+/-$6168), higher than the state median and far higher than the county as a whole. In 2010, 16.8% (+/- 5.4%) of Athens families lived below the poverty line, similar to the rate of Athens County at 16.6% (+/-2%). Both were significantly higher than the state at 10.3% (+/- .01%) of Ohio families.

Athens includes the downtown region at its center, characterized by red brick streets constructed of a mix of original and replica bricks from the Athens Brick Company and other brick companies that arose alongside mining operations in the region. The city today foregrounds local food, breweries, arts, culture, outdoor activities, and an Appalachian heritage as central to its identity through tourism and marketing materials. It is also known regionally for its left-leaning and at times more left-wing politics, which is

[1] When referring to the City of Athens, I will use "Athens", but when I refer to Athens County, I will use "Athens County".

a point of division from other townships which have been more politically ambivalent in recent years.

On the southern side of the city lie the Ohio University campus and a few residential areas consisting of a mix of apartment complexes geared towards students and single-family homes closer to the city limits. The southern portion of town was served by Morrison-Gordon and West Elementary Schools in 2010. To the west are the local hospital and a mixture of single-family homes with rented student housing, also served by Morrison-Gordon and West Elementary Schools. The western and southwestern portions of town are noticeably less affluent than the eastern, which is predominately single-family homes and served by East Elementary School. However, the city limits continue east to include a stretch of large retail stores and some single-family homes and multifamily units on the far east side of town. It is interesting to note that these far-east residents do not attend East Elementary, but instead are included in the catchment zone of West Elementary despite being farther away. To the north, a small and visibly wealthier neighborhood overlooks the city and the Hocking River before the road descends back down, leaving the city limits and entering a stretch of smaller retail stores and social service offices before it winds north towards Chauncey and The Plains. This northern section of town is served today by The Plains Elementary School, while it was also served by Chauncey Elementary before its 2013 closure.

3.2.2 Chauncey Village

Athens County is divided into smaller locales that include the cities of Athens, and Nelsonville; eight Villages, including the Village of Chauncey; 14 Townships that once shared a school district between each pair; and many Census-designated places such

as The Plains and unincorporated communities such as Doanville. Chauncey, also known as the Village of Chauncey, is situated within Dover Township along Sunday Creek, a tributary of the Hocking River, north of Athens. Founded in 1839, a resident and history buff shared that the Village was founded for its proximity to a salt mine. In 1960, Chauncey Village had a population of 996, down 1.97% from 1950. An additional 3,158 people lived in the broader Dover Township in 1960. Data on the economic status of Chauncey and Dover Township residents were not delineated in the Census until more recent decades, but residents reported throughout my study that Chauncey was marginalized as a lower-income area at this time.

The Village itself had a population of approximately 1,049 as of the 2010 Census, which has been approximately steady over the last 40 years. The greater township of Dover, served by the Chauncey-Dover School District until its closure in 1967, had a population of approximately 3,626 as of 2010 and includes part of the Census-designated place of The Plains, the unincorporated communities of Millfield and Doanville, and a portion of Wayne National Forest.

Chauncey Village lies on Route 13 about 6 miles north of Athens. Route 13 leaves the city via an underpass of the busier Route 33, a divided highway that has a habit of adding bypasses around the small towns it once traveled through on its path towards the capital of Columbus. Route 13 is two paved lanes that wind around the base of the foothills with steep wooded inclines peppered with houses to the east and a narrow valley under agricultural cultivation to the west before the land rises to another ridge. This route between Chauncey and Athens is known to flood regularly, necessitating marked flood routes in an out of the Village by way of ridgetop roads. Entering the Village from this

route, the hills retreat to the east and open to a wider valley, heralded by a white "Welcome to the Village of Chauncey" sign. As Route 13 takes its final curve to the east, well-kept single-story homes and a Quaker fellowship hall that houses community events stand near the former Elementary school building alongside roads. Route 13 then turns back north to go through the Village proper, turning at a Marathon gas station with four pumps. Going straight at this intersection would take one past the southern tip of the Village and towards The Plains and Route 33.

Along the main stretch of Chauncey lie several closed store fronts, the former homes of such establishments as a popular local diner a steak restaurant owned by a large and well-known family in the area, as well as an active church that holds services and regular free dinners for the community. Today, one shop is open intermittently as a buy-sell-trade shop run by one man who, at the start of my fieldwork, would sell soda and used items and provided free pizza night each Tuesday frequented by the children of the library. However, after several break-ins, he paused his pizza dinners until further notice. Single and multi-story houses lined the main road, one of which was home to the former Chauncey teen club, marked with a plaque in the concrete.

Across from the Chauncey teen club is the American Veterans post building, housing a bar and small stage where local bands would play cover shows for fundraisers and community events. To my knowledge, this was one of the only spaces in the Village intended for middle-aged adult patrons to gather, apart from the children's spaces of the parks and libraries. After my fieldwork concluded, I learned that the American Veterans' station was also opening a coffee shop aimed towards those coming to ride the Bailey mountain bike trail.

Past these gathering spaces and houses, a small field sits open on the right with a large foundation stone marking the remnants of a restaurant owned by an influential family in Chauncey. The field and its stone are often home to games of kickball or scramble by the children at the library next to it in the summer or after school. The open field allows one to see the mural painted on the wall of the library behind the community garden. Around the corner from the library is the post office which houses all the Village's post office boxes, the only means of receiving mail in the Village, as home mail delivery was no longer offered for the Village. Beyond is the brick arch entry to the Chauncey High School football fields with a memorial reading "Chauncey-Dover Memorial Field" atop the arch. Along the hill behind the football field are the remains of a set of bleachers which made the Chauncey sports fields the pride of the community and a central gathering place on Friday evenings each fall. Today, the bleacher seats have been removed and relocated and the facility lies in some disrepair. Behind the bleachers, the land rises steeply, and atop the small ridge are two large, dilapidated buildings, the former schools "on the hill" of Chauncey Dover School District. The multi-story brick buildings on the hill among the trees are now grown over with brush, shrouded in foliage and only partially visible from below. One building had been transformed in apartment buildings for a time, but it was unclear how long the idea had been abandoned. The windows are largely broken or boarded up, and it is obvious that younger residents frequent the buildings to explore the fading bit of history of their home and leave their mark in spray paint and discarded cans.

Back at the bottom of the hill past the athletic fields lies the elementary school, a relatively new building of tan brick with a playground. The elementary school closed in

2012 and houses some school district offices and the preschool at the time of my fieldwork. The roof was allowed by the district to fall into disrepair after closing the school, so only part of the building is in use, but is the site of voting, community meetings, and the occasional social event in town.

Returning to the main road through town, there is a convenience store named Cee Dee's, after Chauncey-Dover, with a drive through that sells snack foods, beverages, tobacco products, and occasionally some local produce in the summer. The library kids would frequently run across the street to purchase candy and energy drinks during the summer, a combination only remedied by the head librarian bringing out the foam swords for a long game of tag. The convenience store is one of the few remaining businesses in the Village and is locally owned with an apartment above the store. Next door to Cee Dee's is the Village volunteer fire department followed by the "Village building", a two-story brick building that houses the governmental offices of the Village. The Village building is only open a couple hours each weekday as positions in the Village government are majority part-time or combined positions, a fact that impacted the ability of officials to participate in the decisions that impacted the Village but were made beyond its borders. On the front of the Village building is a drop box for residents to drop off their water bill payment, made through the Village local government.

The Village stretches further along Route 13, crossed by side roads with single family houses, some kept nicely and some showing signs of wear and tear. Residents informed me that the Village once had a more stable population, but in recent years people moved in and out more quickly and rented properties become more common. Investment in the outside appearance of homes became more difficult, compounded by

changes to property values after the loss of FEMA's flood insurance approximately 10 years ago. A few large brick buildings stand tall among the smaller houses, former homes of the library or a shop. As Route 13 winds out of town, a large park sits across the train tracks that cross the road. The park has several covered pavilions and children's play equipment and was planted with memorial trees, just saplings at the time of writing. As I finished fieldwork, this park also came to be a trailhead for the Bailey Mountain Biking trail, a network of trails being funded by a number of state and local agencies. Slated to be the largest mountain biking trail system in the region at 88 planned miles, the trail was anticipated to draw in a large number of tourists who would have different needs for the park's space than were currently being served. As such, multiple organizations and the Village were collaborating and debating the future of the park and how resources would be allocated to best serve the long-term residents of the Village and the cyclists looking to use the trail system. This is discussed at greater length in the Conclusion chapter.

Route 13 winds on after traveling through the Village with larger parcels of land and homes throughout. On further up the road is the Village of Millfield, then Glouster and Jacksonville, other small towns that split into a new school district when the state required the consolidation of the smaller districts in the 1960s.

3.2.3 Chauncey Public Library

I began my participant observation as a volunteer in the Chauncey Public Library. The library serves as a main site of public life in the Village, often hosting community meetings such as the mayoral debate. It is also a gathering place for children who live in the Village, theoretically allowing me to meet the children who attended Chauncey Elementary School before its closure in 2012. During participant observation, I attended

to how Chauncey children interact with one another, their community, and with the media they consume and how library staff convey messages about life in Chauncey to children through informal and formal messages. This fieldwork contributed to my second research question about residents' understanding of their community post-consolidation. As the library is a potentially important site of local control over informal education, I attended to the kinds of messages about Chauncey, its residents, and its place in the county shared there. These factors made it important for answering my research question about how the loss of the school as a center of public life has impacted Chauncey and Dover Township.

Chauncey Public Library is part of the Athens County Public Library system, which includes two "big libraries" in Athens and Nelsonville and five smaller libraries, Chauncey, The Plains, Wells (serving Albany), Glouster, and Coolville. Among the smaller libraries, Chauncey regularly records the largest visitor numbers as counted by the ticker on the entrance door. Beyond the typical stock of books and videos rented out by most libraries, CPL also loans out mobile Wi-Fi hotspots, learning tablets, laptop computers and tablets, bicycles, and bicycle equipment and accessories, among other items. It provides Wi-Fi from the building, which residents come to use either in the building or from their cars in the parking lot. This has been debated among community members, as some residents see the Wi-Fi as drawing crowds of youth after hours who then may cause trouble. Based on this concern, the library was instructed by county-wide library administrators to have Wi-Fi available from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm, one example of many when CPL must balance serving the needs of their community with safety, or at least the perception of safety in Chauncey.

The library itself is on the main artery running through the Village. Once in a larger, two-story building, it now occupies a small single-story corner building that abuts an open grassy lot next to the stone from the former restaurant. Across the street on the other side of the lot is a parking lot owned by a family member of a large family in Chauncey. Behind the library, separated by one house, is the Village post office, while a house and the local convenience store, CeeDee's Handy Mart sits kitty corner across the main road. The open space surrounding the library building and the store selling snacks give the children who attend room to play and spread out when the single-room building becomes too full.

The library is a small building of tan stone. A metal-roofed pavilion and paved pad line the exterior wall abutting the grass field with picnic tables to watch whatever game is being played or to eat the free lunches the library provides for children through the summer months. Next to the pavilion is a fenced in community garden of raised beds and pots, overflowing with cherry tomatoes when I first arrived to begin fieldwork. During my first field work trip, a man was working in the summer sun applying to a stand-alone locker a decal of the county library system's logo, a circle of book pages spread out like petals on a flower. Inside the locker were the bicycles and bicycle trailers that the library rented out for afternoon rides or trips into town if necessary.

The main door opened into a small lobby with a community billboard on the wall facing the door and a bookshelf of materials free to take home. From the next threshold, you can see the whole of the library. To either side, over the waist-high bookshelf hedges, are the children's section and the young adult section, tucked back to provide some sense of separation and privacy for sharing secrets and building block towers. In the children's

corner to the right lives the library's older mascot, Axel the axolotl, a small pinkish salamander. A children's-sized round table is encircled by four tiny chairs, but from experience, the chairs can handle a flexible fully-grown adult. A more comfortable, full-size chair sits behind the small table next to an outlet for any adult who needs to charge a battery badly enough to brave the children's corner.

On the other side of the entrance is the young adult section with several bright bean bag chairs. In the center of the patrons' portion of the library is a small couch with legs at an angle from years of use and repair, draped with a children's quilt and several pillows. Another comfortable chair, farther from the children's section but without access to an outlet, sits next to it. The couch faces a wall of desktop computers, paid for by a donation from the Athens Friends Meeting, a Quaker worship community in the Village. Having been loaded up with free online multiplayer games, the computers are a powerful draw for the children and teens who frequent the library. Deliberative debate emanates from this section about whether Fortnite or Roblox was the better game, but the jury is still out as of the time of writing. On the section's main bookshelf, a section is reserved for the monthly display, a collection of materials related to a theme, such as "2020 Vision" in January, or "Revolution" for July. Puns and wordplay were evidence that the head librarian took a strong lead on these displays.

In the back corner was a restroom with the door usually propped open. This discouraged kids from turning a simple knock on the door into a drum solo, but also revealed the world map and monthly challenge attached to the door, challenging patrons to locate all 49 landlocked countries or list all the countries of the European Union. The library walls in general are free real estate for the many posters and art pieces from past

children's programs. However, the bathroom could also be the only space of privacy for some housing-insecure patrons, whose needs for a place to wash up and fill water jugs tempered the lighthearted game of "I Spy".

A wall of shelves at the back of the building separated the patrons' space from the library staff's space. On the shelves of the checkout desk were displays of pamphlets and programing notes for the library's future endeavors in learning and providing for the community, as well as other services available throughout the community. During my first trip, there were colorful brochures advertising the county library systems' summer program theme of space exploration coupled with informational pamphlets about domestic violence resources, exemplifying the many needs the library met. In front of the check-out desk was another display of books, this one often dedicated to a social justice topic or history month. In June, it featured books about LGBTQIA Pride for all ages, while in February it had been swapped for Black History Month titles. This wall of shelves also featured another aquatic tank, this one housing two yellow-bellied turtles brought over by a library neighbor. Their names, Venom and Antidote, recall the memory of the assistant librarian who left in early 2020.

The checkout desk and wall of shelves and reptiles separate the librarians' office/storage/planning space. The desk houses memorabilia from past art programs with the occasional pipe-cleaner-person peeking out from behind a screen. A small return shelf sits next to the tower of laptop computers charging for patron use. Depending on the season, the space may include a full-sized refrigerator to hold the summer lunch meals provided by the tri-county community action network, or a mini fridge for the snacks the library provides year-round. The shelves and cabinets and boxes are filled with supplies

for cooking, art, and educational programs for children; books coming and going between libraries; and supplies for the adult weekly coffee hour. A leaning pile of foam and duct tape swords occupies the corner near the back exit, placed strategically in case a mouthy teenager does something to warrant the head librarian chasing them around the grassy lot with a sword. This happens with some regularity.

A small closet, packed beyond capacity and blocking full use of its door, houses sports equipment for use at the library, a microwave, and hooks for hanging coats and bags. The rear exit leads to the parking lot and the "outdoor office", the back corner of the library's lot where conversations that warrant more prudence than a single room library can provide are held.

3.2.4 Chauncey Village Council and Community Improvement Meetings

To address how Chauncey positioned itself politically in relationship to Athens in the wake of consolidation, I attended Chauncey Village Council meetings and meetings of the Council's subcommittee, the Chauncey Community Improvement Committee. The Village Council meetings were held monthly in the "Village Building", the governance center and mayor's office of Chauncey. The meetings were held every third Tuesday, usually at 5:30 or 6:00. The Community Improvement Committee meetings were also held monthly and varied month-to month.

Both meetings were held in the Village Building, a two-story red brick building on the main street of town next to the Village volunteer fire department. All apparent Village business was held in the lower level, and I did not learn what the second story was used for. To the other side and across the street from the building were single family

houses. A small parking lot with room for two or three cars faced the front of the building's main door. On the main door was a hand-written sign indicating the hours that the fiscal officer would be available and the office open. These hours were limited and varied to accommodate the multiple roles that every member of governance in Chauncey must fill. Below the sign, inside the screen door was attached a lockbox for depositing municipal water bill payments, which residents paid in person at the Village Building monthly.

Inside, the door opened to a small central room with a desk in the far corner and an L-shaped spread of tables with chairs forming a semi-circle with the desk, allowing the Mayor and Council or Committee members to hold meetings and discuss business. In front of the semicircle were about five chairs, arranged in two rows facing the semicircle for community members or guests of the council to sit in until called.

3.2.4.1 Chauncey Village Council meetings.

The Village Council is comprised of six elected members, or appointed members in the case of a vacancy that arises outside an election year. There was at least one open seat during most of my fieldwork, though the core group of five members were long-standing and regular figures on the Council and in the community. These core members, whose seats were never vacated, included two women in their thirties or forties, two men in their forties, and an older man in his seventies. The meetings were attended and led by the Mayor of Chauncey, a position first held by a veteran mayor of Chauncey for approximately 10 years. In the November 2019 election, he was replaced by a member of the Council and resident of Chauncey. The Village employed four other officials: the

Village solicitor; the Village fiscal officer; one full-time officer overseeing transportation, utilities, and grounds work; and a part-time maintenance worker.

There were usually between one and four guests, plus me, who usually had a particular reason for attending and whose presence was noted on the meeting agenda. These included representatives of the National Forest system, the Department of Natural Resources to discuss the Baily Mountain Bike Path, county-level officials there to discuss the county's flood plans, and property owners in the community looking to learn about zoning regulations on their rental properties. There was typically a sign-in sheet with a clipboard, but it wasn't always in use. Along the wall behind the community members' chairs were several tall shelves of binders containing past meeting minutes, reports, and filings of the Council, each marked with years. On the walls were maps and arial of the county and the Village.

The meetings typically lasted between an hour and two hours, assuming the Council had a quorum of members present. If more than one Council member was not present, the meeting was postponed for the next month. This happened once while I was conducting fieldwork. The meetings were typically orchestrated by the mayor according to a preestablished agenda and followed typical protocols of accepted the previous meeting's minutes, motions and seconds for actions, and roll-call votes. The majority of council members and other officers, before the new fiscal officer, had been involved in different capacities for years, meaning the collective institutional memory was long and the members went through the meeting procedures with relative comfort.

3.2.4.2 Chauncey Community Improvement Committee.

The Chauncey Community Improvement Committee (CCIC) was organized by the two women Council members and was attended by several other regular community members. It is noteworthy that in my time attending these meetings, they were never attended by a man. The Committee, appointed by the Council, organized community events, obtained funding through grants and other sources, and coordinated payment for events, among other tasks on an ad hoc basis.

During these meetings, all members in attendance sat around the L-shaped table used by Council members, including myself. Typical attendance included the two women on the Council plus between three and seven regular women participants, sometimes with their children. The meeting was typically led by the women on Council, which lasted between 30 and 90 minutes.

3.2.5 Community and Public Events

In addition to public events, I also took time to experience the spatial and topographical facets of the Village and its surrounding areas. I drove regularly throughout Dover and the neighboring Townships, committing road names to memory wherever possible, as this proved to be valuable knowledge if I didn't want to look like a complete outsider. I learned the flood routes used to leave the Village when the main roads were flooded, knowledge held with a sort of stoic and cynical pragmatism by residents and a reason to look sidelong at someone if they didn't know them. How well could someone know Chauncey if they didn't know the flood routes, after all? I tried running for exercise in the Village and realized that several fire roads show on maps had been allowed to grow over with weeds and saplings, presumably by the County. I drove the bus routes in bad weather.

3.2.6 Entrée and rapport.

I lived in Athens County for several years before moving for higher education, which is how I became familiar with the area and consolidation debates. I have friends and acquaintance ties in the area, which played an important role in entrée. I spent time establishing rapport with Chauncey residents particularly volunteering at the Chauncey Public Library, which provides summer and after school programming for kids. This was a way to meet parents and current students of Athens City School District and benefit the public sphere in the Chauncey area.

3.2.7 Approaching Participant Observation

From June 2019 to March 2020 (36 weeks), I traveled to Chauncey approximately every other week, staying between one and nine days, but most often staying Monday through Friday. Between beginning my field work in June of 2019 and ending the in-person fieldwork in March 2020, I traveled to my field site 14 times, spending a total of 70 active days in the field. I conducted 226 hours of participant observation at the Chauncey Public Library, spread over 61 days. I also observed 5 Chauncey Village Council meetings and 3 Chauncey Community Improvement meetings, totaling 13.5 hours. Beyond the regular meetings, I also participated in multiple public community events, spending about 9.5 additional hours observing. These events included the Village mayoral debate, a presentation to the community by a university researcher, and a local concert at the American Veterans hall, to name a few examples.

During my participant observation at CPL, I sought to capture how the children and adults of Chauncey situated and thought about Chauncey and its relationship to

Athens County and the broader urbanizing world. The participants at the library ranged from toddlers to senior citizens. Gaining and maintaining access to a shared multi-generational space meant bridging a least-adult role (Mandell 1988; Pascoe 2007) among the youth (mostly aged 9 to 16) and a leader role expected by the adults who ran or frequented the library (Mandell 1988). Early in my fieldwork, all participants implicitly placed me in the leader or supervisor role, expecting me to maintain library rules of decorum, report swearing or crude jokes, and to show limited interest in the children's activities between programmed activities.

While adults "cannot pass unnoticed in the society of children" (Fine 1987 222), I did seek to perform a least adult role through several important strategies. First, I planned my dress carefully, wearing a uniform of either jeans or denim shorts, a plain or locally branded tee shirt, running shoes, and a baseball cap. Beyond noting my familiarity with the area through the tee shirts from local stores and events, I wanted to achieve an aesthetically youthful and functionally athletic uniform. Participation in the summer games that happened in between hours at the computer was one of the first and most obvious markers of peer status I had to maintain (Mandell 1988). While the head librarian was very actively involved in the children's indoor and outdoor activities compared to other adults, she would often be the one deciding whether she would participate, rather than being treated as a peer to be invited. While this straddling made her popular among the kids, it also maintained her decision-making power.

To stake out a less authoritative role, I refrained from inviting myself into any of the kid-dominated spaces and activities. For example, I waited and observed the games, learning the home rules of activities like kickball and "scramble" and where they differed

from the library official rules of conduct. One day, a high fly ball came my way at my sideline post near the picnic table, and I caught it. Play halted. “Are you playing?” one kid, about 10 years old, asked. I hesitated and responded, “I don’t know, am I allowed?” After some deliberation, it was decided that I was in fact playing, and that the kid who threw the ball was out for that round. Over the next few days, the kids, almost all boys, asked me to come play if they needed another player, then more regularly. Gradually, it became expected that I would join them outside after computer time was over. However, my inclusion as a peer-like participant was always dependent on my full effort during games. In this way, my access was facilitated by my status as able-bodied. While I would be able to physically access the library’s single floor otherwise, the dynamic shift that followed that day of scramble highlighted this aspect of my identity as central to my rapport.

Even after I believed myself to have a level of access and understanding among the kids that was sufficient or even very good, I realized that there was a lot I had to know to more fully immerse myself and understand all that was being shared between kids (Mandell 1988). For example, there were many repeat phrases that the kids would shout at each other, which seemed random until one of them begrudgingly explained the inside joke stemmed from a meme or videogame. These explanatory moments placed me squarely outside the realm of kids, so I began spending my evening watching meme compilation videos, playthroughs and gameplay footage of games they played, and reading about apps and phone games they played. Being able to deploy memes as interjections in conversation without coming across as a “try-hard”, or someone putting in too much obvious effort in a social setting, was another balancing act that paid off in

my entrée with the kids, especially the girls in this case. Knowing the general purpose of TikTok and what made the videos funny led to being pulled aside to participate and observe.

The kids became accustomed to my participation, gradually also letting their guard down enough to engage in minor rule-breaking and teasing. However, there were still moments when they made it clear that I was not fully a peer, especially when rules of games were in dispute. The kids would occasionally turn to me to decide who was right, tossing an authoritative option my way. In most cases that didn't involve physical injury (these were preteen and teen boys, so injury did happen), I evaded the rule-making role, shifting decision-making power to the kids at the top of the kid-hierarchy (Mandell 1988). I also maintained a least-gendered role while playing outside (Pascoe 2007). Most formal and informal authority figures in the library were women, plus the boys maintained strict rules for effort that they often assumed only boys could maintain. I took up running to keep my physical fitness up during this time, and I found that among the most regular participants, putting in high effort during games was enough to avoid being used in masculinity rituals by the boys (Pascoe 2007). However, there were times when the older teen boys, who were less regular participants early on, did push against this least-gendered role to make jokes or comments about my being a woman, which carried over to question my least-adult role. I found that the boys would dismantle one another's masculinity performances through subtle jokes about each other, and this became my response of choice as well.

My least-adult role was also harder to maintain while inside the more closely watched space of the library. Here, I was expected to fulfill the role of a volunteer, which

could mean enforcing library rules. Here, I forged out a middle ground through many small decisions. For example, when adult patrons brought up the noise levels at CPL to the head of the county library system, the librarians had to hold a very formal sit-down meeting with the kids about the issue, which was never done before during my fieldwork. Oreos were distributed during the meeting, and the head librarian and I joked that by eating the Oreos, they had implicitly agreed to the new rules, thus birthing the "Oreo Compact". In future visits when the new rule about being quieter was being obviously broken in my presence, I would perform an ironic stoicism, reminding the kids about the Oreo Compact, creating an inside joke that downplayed my role in upholding rules but also had the necessary effect of lowering volume levels. While there were times when I dropped my least-adult role for the sake of safety, these performances allowed me to perform the duties expected of a library volunteer while not stepping into the role of a rule-enforcing adult.

Of course, this performance wasn't only visible to the kids, and it meant serious tradeoffs were possible in other settings. While inside, I would take time to interact with the library staff and perform needed tasks like re-shelving borrowed books. Rather than partition my roles and pretend that they were natural, I instead opted to be transparent about my research and the things I was noticing. This was helpful on multiple fronts. First, I believe it helped maintain my image as a capable adult performing a job in the eyes of the library staff and adult patrons. I quickly found that my least-adult performance aged me down in the eyes of passing adults. A man who lived near the library stopped me during kickball to ask how old I was, and after encouraging him to take a guess, he estimated 16, a decade younger than my actual age. By sharing my

insights and thoughts about the project with those who frequented the library, it became more difficult to only think of me as the woman who plays with the kids. Second, the library staff and patrons were a group of curious and observant women, and their insights and historical knowledge of the area was incredibly useful throughout the project. They could provide context to my observations, background to events, introductions and family histories to people based on a brief description, and theoretical suggestions to connect ideas. Their input was incredibly valuable and would have easily been missed if I had tried to only perform a least-adult role. Finally, by sharing my interest and analysis of the school closures as potentially having a negative impact for rural Chauncey, I often found that a defensive wall between the resident and myself, presumably an urban, out-of-town researcher trying to figure out what was wrong with Chauncey, began to lower just a bit. Again, had I tried to partition my researcher side as separate from my leader role, these assumptions may have remained unstated.

There were surprising moments of recognition during my fieldwork at CPL. My participation after the big moments of entrée reminded me profoundly of my teenage years in a rural area with a small central Village. I recall at one point at closing time, the kids were going to "ride bikes", which usually meant riding around town in a big group, visiting other kids' houses, finding places to explore or ride, and generally goofing off beyond the direct supervision of parents and adults. They invited me along, seeming to forget I didn't have a bike. This moment was incredibly nostalgic, reminding me of the miles and hours I spent riding around with my own friend group. While I declined, citing my lack of bike and thinking to myself about the ethical implications of spending unsupervised research time without kids' parental approval, this moment highlighted for

me another issue with situating myself in CPL, namely the balancing of an insider-outsider role (Cramer 2016). There were activities that felt so familiar, I likely missed opportunities to ask the children what they meant to them, instead filling in the blanks with my own memories and understandings. While I tried to remain conscious of this possibility, there were times when my participation overshadowed my observation.

My rapport-building in Village and CCIC meetings took significantly less conscious negotiation than with the kids, mostly due to the structured nature of the meetings and the shorter duration. During these, I again found that being perceived as an outsider coming to observe Chauncey's goings-on raised defenses. I was asked with a raised eyebrow by the Village Solicitor if I was a local reporter. Again, I found that transparency about my purpose and openness about the impacts of the consolidations on Chauncey started conversations that may have otherwise not happened. In this way, my role with adults could be seen as seeking a least-urban position, as urbanicity seemed to be characterized by a certain piteous gaze at Chauncey, seen as a victim of its own making. While it compromised any claim to "objectivity", sharing some of my theoretical approaches and lived experiences as a rural person who experienced school consolidation, too contributed positively to my rapport.

However, these meetings were another area where my least-adult performance came with tradeoffs was in attending Village Council meetings, described next. The meetings began immediately after the library closed and were only a two-minute walk across the street. Telling the kids that I couldn't play because I had a meeting to go to would be shattering to my peer status, so I often showed up to these meetings out of breath and generally unprofessional. Because of the visibility of the library from the

Village Building, it was common knowledge that I'd just come from playing with the kids, which forgave me some of my appearance. But it was also telling that my role as a researcher did not stick with members of Council at first, with several only remembering my role after multiple introductions. In this way, my participation in the meetings was facilitated by the rural setting where public life was concentrated in very few places and where Village Councilmember was something done after your fulltime job ended for the day. Multiple members attended right after work, so the idea of wearing a job uniform rather than business casual clothing wasn't out of place.

3.2.8 Data Collection in the Field

In general, I used multiple note-taking strategies in different settings. In busy settings where I would be conspicuous or awkward if taking paper notes, I took brief shorthand notes on my phone and transcribed and expanded on these by hand after the event. I also made use of audio recorded field notes and memos, recording thoughts between events, dumping out details on drives between locations, and recollections that came at inopportune moments. I later transcribed and expanded on these as well. I chose later in my field work period to type up these notes to facilitate coding. At the end of my fieldwork in March 2021, I had handwritten 103 pages of fieldnotes and expanded to 70 double spaced pages of typed fieldnotes.

3.2.8.1 Participant observation at CPL.

While in the field, I volunteered in the library as part of my participant observation every weekday, setting my hours around the library's needs and the children's schedules. In the summer, when the daily free lunch program was in full

swing, I would arrive between 12:00 and 1:00 to help distribute lunch and stay until 6:00 when the library closed, or 7:00 if there was an evening program for teens. During the school year, I arrived between 3:00 and 4:00 and stayed until the end of the day at 6:00. In total, I conducted 226 hours of participant observation spread over 61 days at the library.

Early in my fieldwork at CPL, I attempted to take mental notes of things to write down once the library closed and I was in my car with a pen and paper. I quickly realized that this approach left a lot of detail out, and I tried new approaches. For the remaining period of study, I took brief, shorthand notes on my phone throughout my day at the library, retreating to the bathroom for notes that took longer than a few minutes. If I was passively observing a program or hearing a large group conversation, I took more detailed notes in the moment. I often spoke with the head librarian, Liz, about what I was noticing and welcomed her filling in gaps in my knowledge of the area and her thoughtful musings and sense of curiosity about the social world of Chauncey. I also sought to maintain a transparent approach to my fieldwork, recognizing that it was not my place to keep secrets about things I observed in the public space she worked in and cared about, with the exception of things that individuals asked me to keep private.

After leaving the library or between the library and Village Council meetings, I would record audio field notes to myself including descriptions of events from the day and preliminary analytical memos (Saldaña 2013). If I was not going to another event, I would then expand on the text notes in my hand-written field notebook that evening or soon after, adding analytical memos and expanding in detail. For recorded notes, I typically waited longer to write out and expand my notes, as I often found myself without

the privacy to listen and write simultaneously. I tried to transcribe these notes soon after each trip was complete.

3.2.8.2 Participant observation at CVC meetings.

I would leave from my participant observation at the library and walk to the Village Building, sometimes accompanied by the head librarian at Chauncey Public Library who was active in the Community Improvement Committee and in Village life generally. I sat in the back row of the community members' chairs and took careful notes of the meeting's proceedings and observations about interactions and meaning making. Being a formal meeting, this wasn't nearly as unstructured as during my library time. To avoid seeming suspicious or as though I were taking notes to evaluate anyone's actions, I would very occasionally offer up information from my notes if there was a need to recall something from a previous meeting.

I would stay for the duration of the meeting, taking careful notes and listening attentively, both for my research and to demonstrate an interest in the goings-on of Chauncey. I generally did not ask questions or talk during the meeting, but I would occasionally introduce myself to community members in attendance. Early in my fieldwork, I would wait until the end of the meeting, in which I was obviously the only person who wasn't known by everyone in the room, to introduce myself to at least one person in attendance. Multiple people, including the first mayor and the Village Solicitor, assumed I was a reporter, which I corrected and assured them that I would not be writing anything identifying up about them for public consumption.

About three meetings in, I was invited to give a very brief formal introduction of myself and what I was doing. I briefly explained that I was working on a research project looking at the history of Chauncey's schools. This was met with some interest and discussion of the history of the schools. The consolidation often came up organically among adults in the community, obviously marking it as a salient moment of collective memory and something to which people attached a lot of meaning. Once I was more regularly recognized, I would stick around after the meeting formally ended and visit with the remaining Council members, usually members of the CCIC, and answer any questions about my project. I shared my business card with members who thought they might know someone I should seek an interview with or if they themselves would consider it.

3.2.8.3 Participant observation at CCIC meetings.

During Chauncey Community Improvement Committee (CCIC) meetings, I was viewed as a more active participant and was asked to help with some tasks, such as finding a DJ for the Village Halloween street fair, an event that would fall through due to a combination of forces. I took notes and more readily offered details from previous meetings if I was able.

3.3 Interviews and Oral History

I conducted ten key informant interviews with a total of 11 participants, one of which was an interview of a married couple together. These ranged from 34 minutes to 149 minutes. Six interviews occurred in person before travel restrictions, and four occurred remotely after travel restrictions halted my travel to Ohio. Four interviewees

donated the recording and transcript to a publicly available oral history of the consolidation, described below.

3.3.1 Interview purpose and protocol.

I was interested not only in collecting the narratives about CDSD and the consolidations, but also the meanings that residents placed on the closures and their experiences of the processes. As such, my interview protocol reflected these prompts alongside asking about narratives. Interview protocols are available in Appendix 2 for the three target participant groups: Adult former students of Chauncey-Dover and Athens City School Districts; Current students of Athens Middle and High Schools who experienced the closure of Chauncey Elementary; and Adults involved in the consolidation debate, including formal and informal participation.

To capture the multiple narratives about consolidation in general and the Athens County consolidations in particular, I aimed to interview people both within and outside positions of formal authority. This followed methodological recommendations made by Glen (Glen 1995) in his research analyzing the oral history of the War on Poverty in Appalachia. In this work, he warns against falling to either extreme of historical authority, granting only to those in positions of power *or* to those who directly experienced events on the ground to "move beyond these problematic and simplistic dichotomies of powerful versus powerless and outsider versus insider" (Glen 1995).

Following this advice, I interviewed both those involved in formal decision-making and those engaged in the movement to prevent consolidation, as well as those who were not actively engaged in either side but nonetheless had opinions and

experienced the consolidations. I also followed this in the data collection through other methods. For content analysis, I collected both official documentation, such as minutes and newspaper coverage, and personal accounts, such as opinion editorials and social media content. I also observed in formal spaces of governance and informal public community spaces. Rather than treating any one source as the official record of the consolidations and their aftermath, I sought perspectives from multiple social and spatial locations throughout the county.

3.3.2 Oral history rationale.

The rationale for oral history interviewing is two-fold. First, oral history interviews focus on both an articulation of the lived experience of individuals and the meanings they make of those events (Oral History Association 2009). By conducting oral history interviews, rather than relying exclusively on content analysis of minutes and media coverage, I sought to avoid giving sole historical authority to those who wield more bureaucratic power, namely administrators who documented the decision in the form of minutes and memos. While these documents were important, oral history has the potential to change the relationship between positions of power and authority (Geiger 1990; Glen 1995).

My second rationale for using oral historical methods is political. Appalachia has been represented and misrepresented by outsiders to pursue often-exploitative agendas for several centuries (Catte 2018). I intended to counter this tendency by producing interviews that will not remain only in my hands but will be available in their original form to those who participate in constructing the oral history. This did not necessarily

safeguard my project against exploitation, but relinquishing sole control of the knowledge produced was a first step (Geiger 1990; Gluck and Patai 2016).

Ritchie argues that interviewing becomes oral history "when it has been recorded, processed in some way, made available in an archive, library, or other repository, or reproduced in relatively verbatim form for publication" (Ritchie 2014:8). As such, I plan to archive the interviews produced in this project with the regional history center, located within Athens County. After negotiating the transfer of ownership rights with participants, I will submit both the audio files and transcripts to the history center. This necessitated obtaining both informed consent and a deed of gift from each participant. I was open to cases where participants may be open to a confidential interview but not a publicly available interview, which happened in a majority of cases. Ritchie suggests a negotiated decision in this case, in which oral history participants may allow their interviews to become public at some later date rather than holding interviews as closed indefinitely (2014). I negotiated this decision with each participant.

3.3.3 Participant Recruitment.

I sought interviews from a range of age groups and positions in the community and employed different strategies for different groups. For adult former students and leaders of the movement surrounding the consolidation, I relied on introductions made through connections to CPL, the local Historical Society, and the Village Council. I found that recruitment strategies recommended by the Institutional Review Board tended to have both an urban and a class bias which made recruitment difficult. For example, the Board advises advertising the study in public spaces, but public spaces in rural areas like Chauncey are significantly more limited than in urban areas. Further, emailing potential

participants seemed to assume a relationship to email more typical among office jobs than other kinds of working-class professions.

Despite these drawbacks, I recruited participants using a combination of methods. For all participant groups, I advertised the study using flyers in the post offices in and near the Village, the Village Building, the library, and the local convenience store. I also solicited interviews with adults from survey respondents, described below.

For potential participants under the age of 18, I approached the child at the library to describe the project. I waited until I was a fairly familiar face to the child before bringing this up. If they were interested, I gave them a parental consent form to take home and share with their parent or guardian. I shared my cell phone number, already listed on my business cards, with an invitation to text me if they wanted to participate or had a question. After their parent or guardian signed the forms, I intended to meet the potential participant at the library and accompany them to their house at closing time for a semi-supervised interview, but I did not have any interviews with youth take this form. I pursued several other unfruitful attempts to connect directly with the library regulars' parents, such as organizing a library craft program in which we made juggling equipment, with the hopes that parents might accompany their child to the event. However, I found that the children in my age range were largely independent enough that I rarely, if ever, met their parents, and no consent forms ever returned to me signed.

I also made a point to talk about my project at community events, such as the mayoral debates, during which I met several longstanding community members and former teachers. Finally, I accepted as many invitations to be introduced to residents as possible, which proved very helpful. Early in my fieldwork, I met a long-time resident

who had served as a pastor in the Village. We connected over our shared Cleveland Browns fandom, and when I later described my need to meet people in person, he offered a solution. He drove me around the Village to friends he thought I should speak to and knocked on doors, describing my project and making introductions. This connection led to a majority of my interviews.

For interviews with public figures, I looked for public contact information associated with their position. This included the mayor and one Village Councilmember who used an email address. However, many members of local governance, the School Board, and Administration had either retired or did not use a publicly available email address. As Councilmember in the Village is a part-time position rather than an outright profession as it is in other locales, members generally did not have email addresses only for Council work.

3.3.4 Interview procedure.

In the time leading up to each interview, I provided each participant with a copy of the Informed consent to review. At the time of the interview, I provided another copy to sign if they had not signed their copy already. Three of the seven interviews took place at the participant's house or a family member's house, three took place at a private space in a public setting, as requested by the interviewee, and one took place over video-call. When interviews took place in a home or private space, I shared the address and expected duration with a confidant off-site, a precaution as a woman in fieldwork but luckily never needed. After signing and providing a copy of the informed consent, we negotiated whether recording would be acceptable, which it was in all cases. I also explained that I would be taking notes to remind myself of follow-up questions, and that my writing

doesn't mean I think what the participant said was wrong, salacious, or what I needed to hear. I started the recorder and we proceeded with the interview. I took notes to remind myself of follow-up questions, make preliminary analytical memos, note aspects of life history to reference in later questions, and general thoughts.

After concluding the interview, I stopped the recorder. In some cases, this reminded the participant that it was running, as they said they forgot it was on. We then discussed whether the recording was acceptable for the oral history project at all, if it would be acceptable with some delay or omissions of names, or not at all. The appropriate donation of interview forms were signed, and we usually spoke for a while longer. The interviews themselves lasted between 34 minutes and 149 minutes, but the interview sessions often included discussion before and after the interview, lasting between an hour and four hours total.

To compensate interviewees for their time, I offered $25 local grocery and gas gift cards to each participant. Participant incentives have been found to increase willingness to participate (Kelly et al. 2017) but may increase feelings that the interview was impersonal (Goodrum and Keys 2007). Offering local gift cards was intended to make the research relationship more reciprocal, while the local nature is less impersonal than cash (Goodrum and Keys 2007). However, a majority of my participants refused the gift card. In these cases, I waited until it was certain that they would not accept the card, then offered instead to make an equivalent donation to the Chauncey Public Library instead, which was accepted in each case.

3.3.5 Transcription and Analysis

After each interview session, I audio recorded structured fieldnotes to myself about first analytic impressions of the interview (Tracy 2013). I also wrote physical notes as soon as possible after arriving in a location where it was feasible. I then transcribed the audio recordings using audio software and a word processor.

3.3.6 Shifting Online

In March of 2020, travel restrictions halted my in-person trips to Chauncey. To supplement the data that would now be difficult to collect, I took two central steps. First, I expanded my use of content analysis to include an additional daily student newspaper, social media posts, and online content. Second, I developed a survey of residents in the Village. Including the additional student newspaper allowed me to contextualize the role of schools as they were perceived by members of the University community. The social media posts and survey bolstered the data I could collect from the perspectives of residents that the loss of potential interviews left underdeveloped. The social media posts especially bolstered this aspect of my study, as they offered me access to the responses of residents in-the-moment, rather than retrospectively through interviews. However, while these posts were not filtered through a decade of reflection, they were filtered through the lens of online representation.

3.4 Content Analysis

I sought data from a variety of document and media sources to meet multiple methodological goals. At times, I used document analysis as a corroboration tool to complement my other qualitative data sources, such as to check details on events that

were reported by my participants or to situate recalled events in a timeline (Bowen 2009). I also analyzed the documents as sources of unique data from a variety of perspectives themselves. The traditional and social media and the meeting minutes all offered data on the narrative of the consolidation as it was going on, bolstering my interview and participant observation data that were exclusively retrospective on the part of participants. Each source records a different perspective on the process and outcomes following consolidation, allowing for examination and comparison of these multiple perspectives rather than relying exclusives on the formal public record. I included the meeting minutes from local governments and the school board to study the official positions taken on the decision to consolidate. I included newspaper coverage to assess the narrative that the broader community had created and was receiving about the consolidation, as well as the contextual information that the traditional media deemed central to include to frame the communities and their schools. I included social media to capture resident's responses in-the-moment to the decision and process of consolidation, rather than relying exclusively on retrospective views on the topic. These social media posts also allowed me to better understand the community's narrative around what was going on and capture the emotional details of events that were often left out of the formal record of events. In total, I collected articles and material for the content analysis from local newspapers, schoolboard and government meeting minutes, public Facebook pages, yearbooks, and other materials. A full inventory of materials collected is available in Table 3.2.

3.4.1 Newspapers.

I scanned 156 months' worth of the local daily newspaper, spanning 1960 to 1970 and from January 2010 to December 2013 and 120 months of the University student daily newspaper from 1960-1970. I identified and analyzed approximately 1,459 articles from The Athens Messenger daily paper (1,344 in the 1960s era and 115 in the 2010s era) and 251 articles from The Post student daily newspaper, totaling 1,710 relevant articles.

I used a combination of visually reading microfiche archives and digital searches using key terms to search for coverage of the consolidation and surrounding events. For the local daily and weekly newspapers, I started by visually scanning microfiche and saved relevant pages as PDFs to be coded. This was possible until travel restrictions were enacted. After this point, I purchased a subscription to Access Newspaper Archive, a private archival service that had access to relevant years of the daily paper. After this point, I used a combination of relevant search terms and visual scanning to assess whether each instance of a term being used should be marked for inclusion. Since I was not long able to scan each paper individually, I used a combination of search terms to ensure coverage and sorted results by date to give a narrative meaning to the results. I first used the search term "school", resulting in 3452 individual instances within the first year being scanned. After using this method once and taking methodological notes alongside my scanning, I adjusted m strategy to be more targeted and to get better coverage. For the following years, I searched for the search terms "Chauncey Dover", "Athens City school" "Consolidate/consolidation", "County school", "Charter revoked", "state board of education", "bond issue", "Levy", "Dr. Chase" (a key figure), "School survey", and "curriculum", resulting in individually scanning 1196 unique results rather

than the 3452 unique results given by the term “school” alone. I repeated this for each year of news coverage to be examined, taking analytical and methodological notes via word processor along the way to adjust my search and create a narrative of the events.

For the student daily paper, I used digital search tools in the University library website to search for a list of relevant terms for each issue. The coverage of the consolidation was much less frequent for the student paper but still revealed ideas about the Chauncey and Athens communities being circulated. I used the search terms “Chauncey”, “bond” (to capture tax and levy issues), “rural”, “school”, “community”, and “Appalachia” for each year. When an instance was highlighted, I evaluated its relevance and downloaded the issue of the paper if the usage was relevant.

3.4.2 Meeting minutes.

I also obtained official meeting minutes from the Athens City School Board and Athens City Council. For the Athens City School Board, I downloaded minutes from the Board’s website from Fiscal Years 2009-2010 to 2013-14. For Athens City Council minutes, I filed an open records request for the minutes with the City government according to the state’s Sunshine Law, obtaining digital copies of the minutes for Fiscal Years 2008-09 to 2011-12. I transferred all files to PDFs for scanning and creating notes and memos.

3.4.3 Yearbooks.

I also scanned high school yearbooks from Chauncey Dover High School, The Plains High School, and Athens High School for the 1966-67 school year and the Athens High School yearbooks post-consolidation for the 1967-68 though the 1969-70 school years. I

located physical copies from the local Historical Society's library and scanned them in their entirety to PDF format.

3.4.4 Social media.

I also collected publicly available social media data from Facebook. I first searched Facebook for the terms "Chauncey" and "Chauncey Dover", which returned public and private pages. I then examined the public pages for relevance and whether they covered the necessary dates. After screening the pages, I selected one main page dedicated to the push to save Chauncey Elementary from closure where the most relevant posts were saved. I then saved the page in its entirety as a PDF for coding, resulting in a 115-page collection of posts. I made sure to open all nested comments to fully capture the full conversations that were being held online, especially in the wake of the consolidations, as the loss of the schools also represented a loss of public space where such conversations may have otherwise happened. I also collected photos from these pages where available for contextualization.

3.4.5 Miscellaneous materials.

Throughout my fieldwork, I scanned or collected copies of library programmatic materials, flyers, notices, and other materials sporadically for context or out of interest or curiosity. These materials were not collected systematically, but still colored my fieldwork and my understanding of the places I was working. I also noticed that what I was collecting revealed my concerns about the topics I was studying and served as a sort of reflexive check-in for myself. For example, while eating breakfast at a diner in Athens, I noticed and recorded a petition to preserve the East Elementary School building because

it is home to the chimney swift, a small bird that makes its home inside brick chimneys like the one on the school. I recall vividly the sense of irony that a school would be saved for such a latent function as an animal habitat, but not for its manifest function of educating children. I thus documented both the petition and my reaction as a fieldnote for future analysis and reflection.

3.5 Resident Survey

I used a survey of adult residents living in the Chauncey-Dover area during the 2012 consolidation to address how residents of Chauncey think about the process and impacts of consolidation and the salience of feelings of marginalization more generally. I designed the survey following the travel restrictions beginning in March of 2020. I developed the survey using both a grounded approach, driven by the 7 months of fieldwork I had conducted by that point, and a theory-driven approach, driven by Schwalbe and colleagues' theory of generic processes of inequality reproduction (2000). Schwalbe and colleagues outline four generic processes that qualitative research has identified in the reproduction of group inequalities: othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management (2000). My fieldwork and pilot research to this point led me to develop question items focused on boundary maintenance, subordinate adaptation, and emotion management.

The survey revolves around three central topics. The topics were as follows:

1. Chauncey and/or Dover Township residents' perceptions of lasting impacts of consolidation
2. Chauncey and/or Dover Township residents' perceptions of the processes by which the consolidation decision was reached
3. The salience of generic processes in the reproduction of inequality in the community more generally

3.5.1 Survey Instrument.

The survey instrument is included in Appendix 1. I developed the survey after 7 months of field research as part of my response to the Covid-19 virus crisis and the accompanying restriction on travel. There was a total of 20 questions in the survey.

The first block of questions, Questions 1 through 9, asks residents to reflect on life in Chauncey during and following the 2012 consolidation of Chauncey Elementary School into The Plains Elementary School, including the impacts of the consolidation on their participation in the school district and the perceived impacts on Chauncey children. The second block, Questions 10 and 11, as about the 1967 consolidation decisions. The third block, Questions 12 and 13, ask about the processes and sources of marginalization in Athens County more broadly. The fourth and final block, Questions 14 through 20, are demographic and life history questions. A more detailed breakdown of the questions and their purposes is included in Appendix 1.

After the survey questions, I offered extended space for respondents' thoughts in an open-ended prompt. I then included a solicitation for interviews if the participant was interested in discussing the topic further with me. Two respondents indicated interest in an interview, and one resulted in a completed interview.

3.5.2 Sample and Data Collection.

The population of interest for this survey was residents of Chauncey or Dover Township who had lived in the area since at least 2010 who were at least age 18 at the time of the survey. The consolidation of Chauncey Elementary School was debated in 2011 and finalized in 2012. People targeted by the survey had lived in the area through the decision

to consolidate and the intervening decade. Chauncey Elementary also served the outlying areas of Dover Township, which justified their inclusion in the population.

I used a purposive sampling strategy by targeting those people who had potentially experienced the consolidation of Chauncey Elementary School and its later impacts (Hibberts et al 2012). The results are not generalizable to a broader population, but instead are intended to assess the salience of ideas encountered in interviews and participant observation for residents of Chauncey and Dover Township.

The survey was available for completion on paper to be picked up at the Village Building or printed and online via Qualtrics. I purchased a domain name to facilitate easy navigation to the survey. I advertised the survey using flyers in the same locations as the interview flyers. I also shared a link to the mayor of Chauncey, who shared it online on places frequented by residents. My survey methods yielded 20 completed or partially completed survey responses, 19 online and 1 on paper. I transferred and coded the open-ended responses into a word processor which totaled 6 double-spaced pages of text.

3.6 Secondary Data

To contextualize the consolidations and to examine changes to the demographic, political, economic, and community changes leading to and following consolidations, I collected and analyzed publicly available secondary data from a variety of sources. I obtained demographic and economic data at the county-, place-, township-, and school district-levels from the Census Bureau's Decennial Census, Census Long-Forms American Community Survey 1- and 5-Year Estimates, and Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates. I obtained political participation and election outcome data from the Ohio Secretary of State Election Results dataset. I obtained economic data at the county-

and regional-levels from the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Finally, I obtained educational data at the school- and district-levels from the Ohio Department of Education's School Report Cards and their repository of online data. I describe the specific variables used and analyzed more fully in Chapter 4.

3.7 Data Analysis

In general, I followed an iterative approach to data analysis, drawing at times from the modified grounded approach often used by qualitative researchers (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Glaser and Strauss 1967) but also returning to the literature and theoretical writings on my topic in addition to the data for insights (Srivastava and Hopwood 2009). I engaged in an inductive process in which I allowed insights to arise from the data to inform the further collection and analysis of data, and I paid particular attention to allowing different sources of data to inform one another. This was important to avoid treating either the formal historical record or the on-the-ground experience of the consolidations as the definitive narrative of consolidation and its aftermath (Glen 1995).

I also iteratively returned to the theoretical underpinnings of my project in the development of my coding schemes and writing. Namely, I examined the data explicitly for examples of Schwalbe and colleagues' generic processes of reproducing inequality, especially along spatial lines.

3.7.1 Participant observation analysis.

After each session of participant observation, I recorded structured fieldnotes and memos using an audio recording app (Tracy 2013). There were occasions when my participant observation schedule put me in different settings back-to-back, in which case I recorded

highlights and reminders in between events. At the end of the day or the following morning, I sat down to write further fieldnotes, recalling as many details as possible to accompany the audio notes. I transcribed the audio notes and the handwritten fieldnotes into a word processor for coding.

Throughout the fieldwork period, I conducted preliminary coding of notes on subsets of the data for presentations and article drafts. This practice served as a grounded approach, as preliminary passes over the data led me to attend more closely to elements and situations I had not previously. For example, my first pass over the activities that the kids participated in after the start of the school year led me to notice instances of them responding to rural stereotypes in videogames. I then paid closer attention during computer time to what they were playing, and I was rewarded with deeper interaction during these periods with the kids showing me gameplay and narrating their thoughts about the game to me.

3.7.2 Interview analysis.

After each interview and participant observation session, I recorded structured audio fieldnotes and analytic memos as a first pass at analysis (Tracy 2013). I listened back to the interview recordings and transcribed the interviews verbatim with these analytic memos on-hand to further clarify and expand on my analytic memos. During the transcription process, I made further memos and notes about vocal tone and other meanings shared beyond the content of participants' statements. I engaged in the grounded theoretical approach of using these memos to shape future interviews and interactions with participants (Charmaz 2014; Corbin and Strauss 2008). These early memos also shaped the construction of my survey questions.

At the conclusion of my data collection, I returned to the interviews and my collection of analytic memos in their entirety and began the process of focused coding, examining relationships between the patterns I noted during my initial passes through the data and combining recurrent ideas that arose from the data (Charmaz 2006).

3.7.3 Content analysis of newspapers, meeting minutes, and social media.

During and after the scanning process for these documents, I used open coding to break the data narratively into different eras in the consolidation saga and to note stories and sections of interest in the larger data corpus. During this first pass, I engaged in preliminary narrative coding (Saldaña 2013) to construct a timeline and story of events that changed the school policy landscape or that interviewees had described as central to their story of the consolidations. Narrative coding orients one to the story that participants are creating and how they relate meaning and events (Saldaña 2013). This is appropriate to understand how the consolidations shaped the stories both school and government leadership and the residents of Chauncey tell about the consolidation and the relationship of Chauncey to the larger county and district.

3.7.4 Content analysis of yearbooks.

The purpose of the yearbook data was to examine changes to the opportunity structure of the consolidated high schools in the 1960s. Multiple interviewees told me that while the consolidation of Chauncey-Dover and The Plains High Schools created new opportunities at the school, those opportunities remained stratified by space in practice, at times enforced by violence. Because the official narrative of consolidation often cites the creation of new opportunities as an objective good, I sought to corroborate this claim that

the goods of consolidation were unequal. There were three questions I sought to corroborate: first, in continuous activities offered at all schools, were students from certain schools of origin more likely to remain active in those activities; second, were the new opportunities created at the school disproportionately taken up by students from a certain background or school of origin; and third, among teachers and staff, were people from certain origin schools more likely to maintain their positions, either in full or their extra-curricular positions such as coaches?

I began by creating a list of activities offered by each individual high school in 1967, the year before consolidation, then created a list of activities that were offered by the new school, noting which activities were newly created. To address these questions, I created a list of all students who participated in each activity at the consolidated school for the years 1967-68 to 1969-70, noting leadership roles such as team captain or student body president. I then used the 1967 yearbooks to identify each student's high school of origin and examined the list for disproportionality. I did not test for statistical significance of the origin group, but rather assessed about how far off from a representative group each activity was, as well as noting any differences between continuing and newly created activities. I then repeated this for teachers and staff, including their extracurricular activities.

3.7.5 Survey analysis.

I downloaded the resulting survey data at multiple points during its administration to support my modified grounded approach to data collection (Charmaz 2014). For items with discreet answers, I began by creating simple descriptive tabulations of the most common response, then examined cross-tabulations in responses according to the

personal and life-course characteristics of the respondents, such as gender, whether they or their family members had attended school in the district, and in what part of the district the respondent lived. While inferential measures are inappropriate for data generated by this survey, I used the results to offer insight on the salience of ideas generated in interviews among other participants. For open-ended responses, I transferred or transcribed the responses and coded them as I did interview transcripts and applied the responses to the closed-ended questions they gave as though they were also codes.

Table 1 Sources of Data

Data Type	Sources and Number
Interviews (total, non-exclusive categories)	• 11 interviewees, 12.5 hours of interviews o 2 former Chauncey-Dover students o 6 parents of former Chauncey students o 4 former employees of Chauncey schools o 4 current or former Chauncey government officials o 3 participants in the Save Chauncey Elementary movement o 1 former local journalist who reported on the closure
Participant Observation	• 4 sites over 70 days in the field, 249 hours observing • 61 days at Chauncey Public Library, 226 hours • 5 Chauncey Village Council Meetings, 8.5 hours • 3 Chauncey Community Improvement Meetings, 5 hours • Other public events 9.5 hours
Content Analysis	• ACSD School Board Meeting Minutes o Fiscal year 2009-10 to Fiscal Year 2013-14 • Athens City Meeting Minutes o Fiscal year 2008-09 to Fiscal year 2011-12 • Ballot Measures • State policy documents • 2 Local Newspapers (1 daily, 1 with 4 issues per week) o Local Daily: Jan. 1, 1960-Dec. 31, 1970; Jan. 1,

	2011-Dec 31, 2013 ○ Student Daily: 1960-61 School year-1968-69 School year • Social Media posts ○ 1 Public Facebook Group page spanning Nov. 2011-May 2012 • School Yearbooks ○ Chauncey-Dover High School 1966-67 ○ Athens High School 1966-67 ○ The Plains High School 1966-67 ○ Athens (post consolidation) High School 1967-68, 1968-69, 1969-70 • Other documents- 10 scanned documents

Table 2 Athens County, Athens City, Chauncey Village, and Dover Township Demographic Data

Variable	Athens County	Athens City	Chauncey Village	Dover Township
1960 Population	46,998	16,470	996	3,158
Percent population change 1950-1960	2.5%	41.3%	-1.97%	-9.8%
2010 Population	64,757	23,832	1,049	3,634
Percent population change 2000-2010	4.1%	11.67%	-1.7%	-
1960 Percent of the population who are not white	2.3%	1.8%	-	0.16%
2010 Percent of the population who are not white	8.2%	13.62%	3.43%	-

1960 Median Family Income, nominal dollars	$4,321	$5,267	-	-
2010 Median Family Income, nominal dollars (+/- margin of error)	$48,170 ($2,276)	$63,370 ($6,168)	$36,250 ($26,368)	
2010 Percent of families below the poverty level (+/- margin of error)	16.6% (2)	16.8% (5.4)	26% (15.7)	-

Table 3 Interview Participant Demographics

Interviewee	Pseudonym	Approximate Age	Gender	Residence Status	Relationship to Chauncey
1	Mitch	70s	Man	Greater Athens County	Former CDHS student during consolidation era
2a	Anthony	Early 80s	Man	Chauncey Village	CDHS graduate, long-term resident
2b	Robin	Late 70s	Woman	Chauncey Village	CDHS graduate, long-term resident, involved in school
3	Dolores	Early 80s	Woman	Chauncey Village	CDHS graduate, long-term resident, former school employee
4	Bill	40s	Man	Out of State	CES student, long-term resident
5	Alice	70s	Woman	Greater Athens County	CES former employee, long-term resident
6	Viviane	30s	Woman	Chauncey Village	Long-term resident, former school employee
7	Chrissy	50s	Woman	Greater	CES student,

				Athens County	long-term resident, anti-consolidation movement leader
8	Jennifer	40s	Woman	Chauncey Village	Chauncey government official
9	Rachel	40s	Woman	Chauncey Village	CES student, long-term resident, anti-consolidation movement leader, Chauncey government official
10	Ellen	Late 20s	Woman	Large city in bordering state	Former reporter

CHAPTER 4. THE LOCAL CONTEXT AND MACRO-LEVEL PROCESES OF MARGINALIZATION

Between 1962 and 2012, Chauncey, Ohio went from a community with an independent school district operating multiple community elementary schools to seeing its final school, Chauncey Elementary, closed. While these closures had the trappings of democratic processes, with ballots cast and public comment periods, I argue that the structural forces that guided Chauncey's schools towards closure were suffused with urbanormativity that justified the repeated targeting of Chauncey and other rural areas in Athens County.

In the 1960s era of consolidation, the state redefined standards in education that included enrollment minimums as a proxy for curriculum breadth, which meant many rural schools suddenly found their charters to operate revoked. The escalating Cold War provided rhetorical justification to push these changes to educational standards in an effort to "modernize" schooling, and higher education (Biddle and Azano 2016; Rury 2012). The consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local School District also coincided with the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission and President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, during which he stopped in Athens, Ohio. Both contexts resulted in increased federal involvement in the Appalachian region of Ohio. In discussing this era, I focus on the state's authoritarian approach to rural education.

In this chapter, I will outline the structural, macro-level processes by which Chauncey Dover Local Schools and Chauncey Elementary School were consolidated, a process that spans over 50 years. The role of the state in shaping education has shifted over this time, and as such, I rely on two general theories about the state's role in

governing institutions like education: high modernism as theorized by James Scott and neoliberalism. As outlined in Chapter 2, both of these theories focus on the rationalizing and efficiency-inducing practices of the state. However, where high modernist theories see the state as engaging in authoritative efforts to control rural institutions it deems as provincial and ungovernable in the face of urbanizing progress, neoliberal theory highlights the extent to which the state retreats from its role in public services, justified by the argument that free market forces are most likely to result in ultimate cost efficiency and rationality. While elements of both can be seen in both eras, I found that the 1960s consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local School is better described as a high modernist state project of controlling rural schools and standardizing their practices according to professionalized ideas about education and curriculum. The 2012 closure of Chauncey Elementary School, however, was more so the product of the transfer of state education funding and control to non-state actors, such as charter schools, vouchers, and non-state funders.

This difference, as I will explore, led to different pathways towards closure, with the closure of Chauncey Elementary far less determined by the state than the consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local School District. Where the decision to consolidate districts was very tightly controlled by the state, with direct intervention in local ballot measures and decisions, the consolidation of Chauncey Elementary School was never a directive, instead being the result of budget cuts and funding structures that made closing Chauncey one lucrative option among several.

Both resulted in the closure of rural schools, loss of rural autonomy over democratic institutions, and the concentration of negative outcomes in rural places, as I

discuss in Chapter 6. In short, they are both urbanormative, but through very different processes. I pose here two concepts to better understand the processes by which urbanormativity is reproduced: urbanormativity by commission and urbanormativity by omission. The processes by which the state actively targeted Chauncey's district and schools for closure, defined their schools as insufficient because of their size, and conflated rurality with provincialism and inadequacy are examples of urbanormativity by commission. On the other hand, policies in which the state and non-state actors created policies and procedures which failed to account for unique rural circumstances or assumed an urban default are examples of urbanormativity by omission. While overlapping significantly throughout my case study, I found examples of both processes at work that contributed to the decision to consolidate Chauncey's schools.

4.1 Chauncey and Athens Schools- Then and Now

In 1959, before discussions of consolidation began, Chauncey Dover Local School District was one of 13 school districts operating in Athens County and consisted of one high school, Chauncey Dover High School, a junior high school, and three elementary schools, Chauncey Elementary in Chauncey Village, Millfield Elementary in the nearby village of Millfield, and Sugarcreek Elementary in the former mining community of Sugarcreek. The first high school in Chauncey was established in 1904, but the school buildings known to the 1967 graduates would not be completed until 1935, according to The Omega, the somewhat ominous name given to Chauncey Dover High School's final yearbook for the 1966-67 school year. Chauncey Dover High School saw 38 Blue Devils graduate in its final high school class, and 230 students appeared to be attending Chauncey Dover High School that year.

Athens City School District was also home to one high school, Athens High School, as well as Athens Middle School, and three elementary schools, East Side Elementary, West Side Elementary, and Morrison Elementary. At the time of consolidation discussions, Athens High School enrolled approximately 460 students. The Plains Local School District, part of the Athens County School District, was home to The Plains High School, which had approximately 120 students in total.

By 2010, just before the end of my period of study, Chauncey Dover Local Schools and The Plains Local Schools had consolidated into Athens City Schools. The Plains Elementary and Chauncey Elementary schools remained in addition to West Elementary, East Elementary, and Morrison-Gordon (formerly just Morrison) Elementary, but Chauncey-Dover's and The Plains' other schools had been closed. Chauncey Elementary School would be consolidated with The Plains at the end of the 2012 school year.

4.2 Chauncey And Athens Schools in Context

The consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local Schools into Athens City Schools was part of a larger trend in district consolidation in the state. From 1930 to 1950, the number of school districts in Ohio declined from 2,066 to 1,509 (Dorn 1953; Kenny and Schmidt 1994). This trend towards district closure and consolidation increased during the 1950s with the number of Ohio districts declining by nearly half to 880 in 1960, then slowing to a gradual decline until 2011, then the state had 613 districts (Asbury et al. 2011; Kenny and Schmidt 1994). In Athens County, this pattern of decline was comparable, with the number of districts declining from 24 in 1920 to 14 in 1953 then to 5 by 1970 where it remains today (Dorn 1953). Historical and modern sources attribute this trend to various

measures of efficiency and the state's incentive structure which prioritized economies of scale (Dorn 1953; Kenny and Schmidt 1994).

This reduction in the number of districts in the state was later followed by a reduction in the number of school buildings as well. In 2008-2012, the period of time leading up to the consolidation of Chauncey Elementary School, building closure and consolidation was becoming increasingly common. While the number of schools operating in Ohio had been very gradually rising from 3,813 schools in 2000 to 4,025 in 2008, the number of schools fell by 20.7% to 3,193 by 2012 despite an increase in population at this time (Asbury et al. 2011). As will be discussed later, this coincided with a number of policy decisions which incentivized closure, especially of smaller rural schools. However, as I will discuss, the policy incentives that facilitated this wave of closure more frequently centered the ability for a private educational market to solve the problems of public education, rather than placing emphasis on a stronger hand on the part of the state in regulating education.

4.3 Consolidating Chauncey Dover Local School District

Chauncey Dover Local Schools' consolidation with Athens City School District fell at the end of this period of rapid consolidation in the 1950s and early 1960s. At the start of the 1960s, Athens County had 14 independent school districts, which would reduce to five by 2000. This reduction in the number of districts was initiated by the state through the creation of new guidelines for schools, districts, and their curricula. The state Board of Education commissioned faculty at Ohio University to study the rural districts of Athens County before revoking a majority of the charters for high schools and using the survey to recommend consolidation plans. Although the state did not at the time had a

legal mandate to force consolidation (Dorn 1953), through authoritarian interventions in rural decision-making and school finance decisions that disadvantaged low income rural places particularly, the districts ended the decade consolidated largely according to the state's guidelines.

4.3.1 Revoking Charters to Drive Consolidation

While the Ohio School Board attributes this rapid consolidation during the 1950s to incentives provided by the state legislature to small districts to merge (Asbury et al. 2011), many cases of consolidation across Southeast Ohio, including Chauncey Dover's, were initiated when the state school board revoked the charter giving their high schools license to operate. The Athens Messenger reported that in January of 1962, nine of Athens County's 13 high schools' charters were revoked, including Chauncey Dover and The Plains alongside the rural high schools of Ames-Bern, Carthage-Troy, Glouster, Rome-Canaan, Shade, Trimble, and Waterloo. Athens High School and neighboring Nelsonville High School of Nelsonville City School District were not among those charters pulled, alongside only two rural County system schools in York and Albany.

This wave of charters being pulled was preceded by the Ohio State Department of Education's release of new guidelines for assessing the quality of public high schools. The state's guidelines, in addition to requiring expanded curricular offerings by high schools, also defined quality high schools primarily according to their enrollment: a minimum of 500 students per high school was required, but enrollment of 750 students

was seen as a more ideal minimum. Schools smaller than this represented “exorbitant costs to taxpayers and still offer a poor education”, according to Superintendent Plant.

All of these districts would be left with no operating high school in their district, assuming no action was taken. While revocations could be contested, as would happen in Meigs County to the south, the risk of continuing to operate in hopes of repealing the revocation of the charter was high: the high school could not confer diplomas to their graduating classes and would not be eligible for state funding. These districts could send their students to high schools in other districts but would be assessed tuition for these inter-district transfers, making the cost of operating a district without a high school bureaucratically difficult and financially burdensome.

Multiple Athens County School District administrators commented at the time that this action was a means to force the consolidation of districts and high schools, which would come to pass in all but a few high schools in the county. The state did not, at the time, have a mandate to force consolidation of school districts (Dorn 1953). This measure, the rural administrators suspected, was a means to circumvent this local autonomy and force consolidation without naming consolidation in the policy itself.

Letters from the state Board of Education listed a variety of criteria supporting their decisions, with all nine letters naming school enrollment being too low for a permanent high school, but also including such failings as lacking a full-time guidance counselor, teachers assigned outside their fields, and heavy teaching loads. While they do not name rural schools as deficient for their rurality, these criteria do disadvantage rural schools in multiple ways. Rural schools are, and were, less likely to have enrollments that allow teachers to teach only one subject (Eppley 2009). Local administrators rebuked the

report, stating that the data collected on their schools were not sufficient pictures of the activities going on in their schools and focused too narrowly on curriculum. These opinions, shared during an all-district meeting of administrators in 1962, exemplify the central argument made by Scott in his analysis of the state's means of addressing rural institutions (1999).

Throughout these debates, the state Board of Education and the Ohio University survey team that they contracted conflated improvement with consolidation. The Ohio Board of Education initiated these reports following the publication of several private research reports that indicated that smaller schools could not offer a broad, standardized curriculum. Representatives of the Ohio Board of Education explicitly tied these reports to increased public attention being paid to education in the wake of the U.S.S.R.'s successful launch of the satellite Sputnik into orbit. The curriculum needed in public schools, the state Board argued, was not one suited to the local economy or to the local communities, but one that would serve the state at large, preparing graduates to fill roles needed nationally, not locally. Corbett would, much later, make a similar argument that modern schools function to prepare students as future mobile workers, participants in an increasingly globalized economy (Corbett 2007), but at this point, the state sought to standardize the rural schools and curricula that it saw as provincial and inadequate in the face of a technological race taking place outside even the same atmosphere as Chauncey, Ohio.

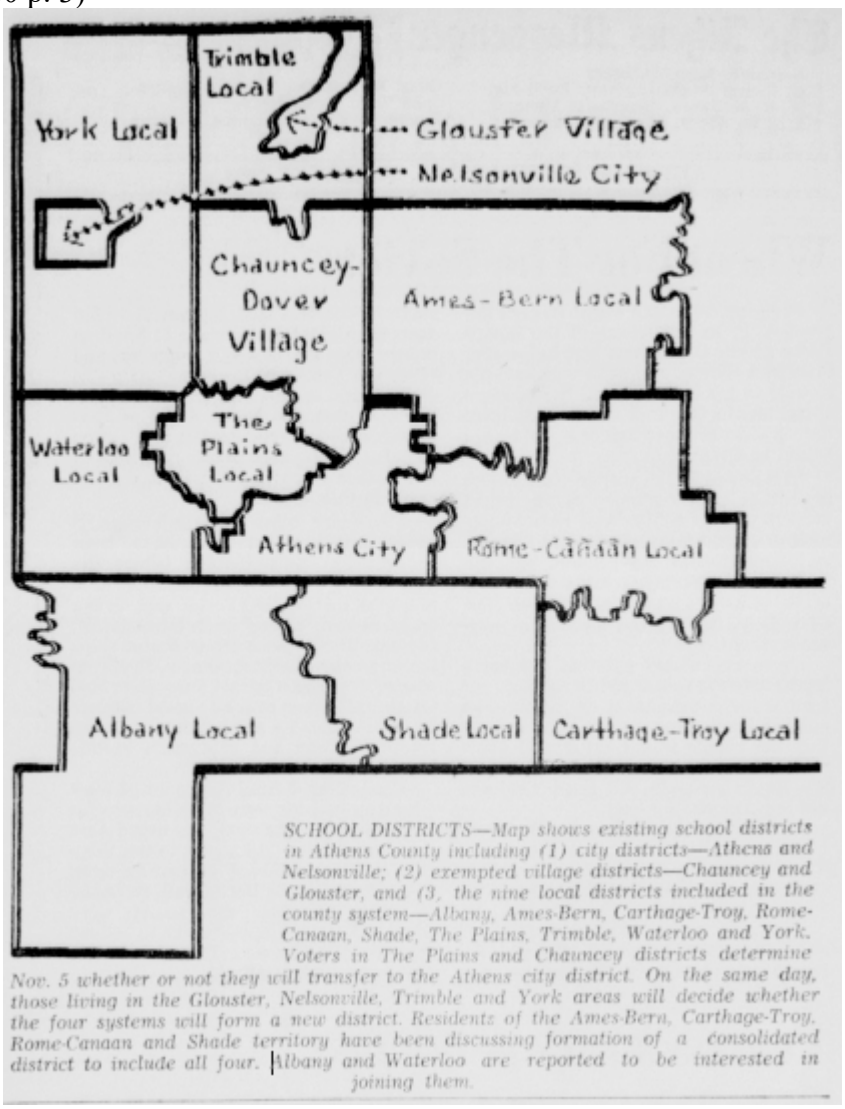
Beyond being used to justify the closure of rural schools, this pressure to standardize curricula negatively impacted rural students in another way by virtue of the intersection between class and place. While the guidelines for high school quality

assurance specified broadening curricular offerings, popular notions of curriculum focused explicitly on college preparatory curriculum, as when the Athens City School Superintendent Clyde Plant lamented The Plains' High School's dearth of college preparatory English courses. At this time, over 84% of students in the rural Athens County schools had expressed a desire for vocational training in their high school years, measured via survey in 1962, while only around 36% of Athens City School high schoolers expressed plans for vocational careers and a desire for vocational education. This mandate for expanded curricular offerings was not applied to vocational education, which became a major political divide in the county.

4.3.2 Voting and Closure- State Authoritarianism and Democratic Institutions

Following the revocation of their respective high school charters, voters across Athens County debated options for consolidation that would meet the state's guidelines. However, as I will describe, this democratic process was still significantly curtailed by the state Board of Education. This strong hand in the democratic decision-making of rural communities marks a second similarity to Scott's other examples of the state's influence in rural institutions. Rather than allowing rural districts to consolidate in any way that met the guidelines, the state limited which options for consolidation would be allowed to go to a vote at all. Further, the tax base recommendations included in the guidelines limited the flexibility with which the rural districts could meet these new requirements, another example of how class and rurality intersected to negatively impact rural people's autonomy. The status of district boundaries prior to any consolidations in Athens County are presented in Figure 4.1 for clarification.

Figure 1 The School Districts of Athens County, 1960 (source: Athens Messenger Oct. 16, 1960 p. 3)



SCHOOL DISTRICTS—Map shows existing school districts in Athens County including (1) city districts—Athens and Nelsonville; (2) exempted village districts—Chauncey and Glouster, and (3) the nine local districts included in the county system—Albany, Ames-Bern, Carthage-Troy, Rome-Canaan, Shade, The Plains, Trimble, Waterloo and York. Voters in The Plains and Chauncey districts determine Nov. 5 whether or not they will transfer to the Athens city district. On the same day, those living in the Glouster, Nelsonville, Trimble and York areas will decide whether the four systems will form a new district. Residents of the Ames-Bern, Carthage-Troy, Rome-Canaan and Shade territory have been discussing formation of a consolidated district to include all four. Albany and Waterloo are reported to be interested in joining them.

In the wake of the news that a majority of high schools in Athens County had lost their charters, multiple possible plans surfaced for debate. In an ironic coincidence, the state superintendent of instruction, E.E. Holt, made his formal recommendation that Chauncey Dover transfer to Athens City School District on Independence Day of 1963. Other possible plans included Chauncey Dover merging with the rural districts of Glouster and Trible to the north, which would meet the minimum number of students required under the new guidelines. At a meeting that summer, school administrators from

Trimble expressed a desire to see this consolidation be taken to a vote, naming the hypothetical district Sunday Creek Local School District after the creek that ran through all three townships. Glouster leadership reportedly asked for more information and expressed that access to vocational education would be central to their decisions. The Plains entertained options to merge with Nelsonville City Schools, with Chauncey Dover alone, and with the Sunday Creek group, with community members referring to Athens City Schools as a "college prep high school" unfit for their students in opinion editorials. Any of these options would have met the minimum number of students required at the merged high schools.

To the south of Athens County, Albany, Shade, Rome-Canaan, Ames-Bern, and Carthage-Troy School Districts met to discuss a merger of all four schools to have 545 high school students. Albany school administrators stated to The Athens Messenger that they were willing to meet with any district except Athens City Schools about the possibility of a merger, while Ames-Bern refused to approve the 4-way plan until after they had discussed the possibility of merging with Athens. Around the county, the possibility of merging with Athens City Schools elicited strong opinions in both directions.

In addition to this size minimum, the state also recommended that each school district operate with a $20 million tax duplicate, a financial bar that required poorer rural districts to consolidate even further to meet, compounding the impacts of rurality and class in places like Chauncey. For example, in southern Athens County, a 4-way merger of Albany, Shade, Rome-Canaan, Ames-Bern, and Carthage-Troy could exceed the minimum number of high school students at 545 students, but they would have to add

Waterloo School District to achieve the required tax duplicate at $27 million. The resulting district would have been far larger at 818 high school students, but still only marginally above the minimum tax duplicate. This argument was also levied against the hypothetical Sunday Creek Local School District, despite all schools expressing interest. The state refused to allow these mergers to be placed on the ballot, regardless of the ability of the districts to increase their tax rates to pay for the schools.

In Chauncey, the choice between a consolidated rural district and consolidating with the nearby city school asked voters to weigh competing concerns. The Athens merger option, being relegated to a smaller minority within their new district rather than one of a plurality of rural communities, raised questions of access and participation. As multiple opinion editorial writers would discuss, consolidation with Athens City Schools invoked fear of being swallowed up, with writers raising fears of losing their athletics spaces, parent-teacher associations, and other local school-based institutions. Meanwhile, members of the Chauncey Dover school board favored the plan to merge with Athens to facilitate transportation. Being closer to the school would allow students to participate more readily in the activities provided at any newly consolidated school. Unfortunately, as I will discuss in Chapter 6, neither of these problems would be solved by this merger.

Despite this proliferation of options, E.E. Holt announced that the state board would only approve a limited list of proposals to be brought to the ballot, and even went so far as to propose new merger possibilities that had not been discussed in local leadership meetings. In the summer of 1963, the State Board of Education announced it would allow Chauncey and Dover Township as well as The Plains residents to vote whether to join Athens City School District. Trimble, York, and Glouster would vote

whether to join with Nelsonville. The decisions of the southern half of the county would not be placed on the ballot during that election. Ames-Bern, which courted inclusion into ACSD and shared a boarder with Chauncey Dover, was not given a ballot option, nor was the Sunday Creek proposal put to a vote. Instead, voters across rural Athens County were asked to decide to either accept the closure of their high schools and pay tuition for their students to attend high school elsewhere or to accept the consolidation plan approved by the state Board of Education.

In this vote, Chauncey voters elected to merge with Athens City Schools, with a final tally of 408 for the merger to 351 votes against. The Plains, however, refused the consolidation with 268 for the consolidation and 285 votes against consolidation. Meanwhile, in the northern half of the county, the plan to merge Nelsonville City School District with York Local, Glouster Local, and Trimble Exempted School Districts was defeated by a 3-1 margin by voters in every district. The Plains', Glousters', and Trimble's statuses as school districts would remain the same for the time being, but they would be expected to articulate a plan to meet the state's guidelines for high school by the following June, leaving a short timeline for enacting any alternatives. Following the vote, the state assistant director of education presented options to 150 gathered residents of The Plains, where he explained that their charter could be extended for one year if "maximum effort" was put into consolidation, despite the voters' recent vote against such an action.

In those intervening years, Ames-Bern, Carthage-Troy, and Rome-Canaan were given approval to vote on their own merger by the state. Ames-Bern attempted to raise a petition to join Chauncey in merging with Athens but after a lengthy battle over the

petition, voted instead to merge according to the state Board of Education's recommendations, forming Federal Hocking Local Schools. The school boards of Waterloo, Albany, and Shade Local Schools decided to merge without putting the decision to a vote but left the option open for The Plains to join if they chose. Whether due to the multiple panels hosted by current and former members of the State Board or simply by virtue of the threat of losing their high school, voters of The Plains returned to the ballot box in February 1964 and voted to join ACSD as well, 531 to 301.

These structural limitations on the decisions available to rural districts in Athens County are perhaps exemplified in the wording of Chauncey Dover's School Board members' letter to the editor following the consolidation vote, where they thank Chauncey voters for supporting the annexation of Chauncey Dover into Athens. The irony of saying that Chauncey *supported* their own annexation, a term typically reserved for the unilateral taking of territory, is palpable given the extent to which their options were limited by the actions of the state and academic authorities from Ohio University.

4.4 Shoring Up the City- When Progressive Visions are Underpinned by Anti-rural Practices

Chauncey and Dover Township voted in November 1963 to merge with ACSD, but the consolidation of the schools would not begin until the 1967-68 school year, leaving several years for the two districts to plan for a successful merger. This period in Appalachian Ohio was colored by the early years of President Johnson's War on Poverty, during which he visited Athens and announced his support for Ohio University to serve as a hub for the Appalachian Regional Commission's work in Ohio's 24 Appalachian counties. ACSD, during this period of progressive interest in the region and in education,

pursued multiple progressive educational changes. However, throughout these efforts, decisions about the curriculum, policies, and boarders of the new district would repeatedly disadvantage not only Chauncey, but rural Athens Countians in general.

Multiple bond issues were put to a vote between the consolidation of the districts and the closure of Chauncey Dover and The Plains high schools. The first new bond issue of the combined ACSD was announced in February 1964 to fund the building of a new high school that could house all the students of the newly merged districts. Despite the vocal misgivings about the lack of commitment to vocational education, voters across the newly formed district supported the bond, with the exception of one precinct in Millfield and one near The Plains. Construction began on a new building between The Plains and Athens with capacity for 1200 students and 90 units, which would include some space for possible vocational courses that may be added to the curriculum.

Athens City Schools, in the years leading up to the consolidation, were offered the opportunity to join the Joint Vocational Education program, which would allow students of ACSD to enroll free-of-charge in vocational training at the planned vocational school. At this time, over 84% of students in the rural county schools had expressed a desire for vocational training in their high school years, measured via survey in 1962. The district refused this program, instead deciding to require interested students to enroll at the vocational school on a tuition-basis and offering a limited range of vocational classes within the new Athens High School. Proponents of the vocational school turned instead to nearby two nearby counties to meet the state requirements for tax duplication for the vocational school. As such, ACSD residents were not offered a chance to vote on joining

the vocational school district, nor on the levy and bond issues to support the district in 1965.

Despite the attention being paid to curricular expansion, in Athens City Schools, this call only applied to expanding curricular offerings to college-bound students of the newly formed district. This policy did not actively name rural and working-class students as less deserving of curriculum expansion, but the confluence of factors- requirements for expanded curriculum being readily applied to college preparatory classes but not to vocational curriculum- resulting in the requests of rural and lower income students being excluded from the creation of the new Athens High School, even before their arrival. This refusal to expand curriculum, however, did not merit intervention by the state in the way it had with rural schools.

A third school levy in 1967 reflected a shift in support from Chauncey and The Plains, as well as the possible origin of the narrative interviewees described upon reflection with me that Athens school administrators never counted on rural voters to support a levy. The school board asked in May 1967 for an operating levy to support the creation of a progressive new curriculum for Athens High School, which would be ungraded and involve tracking for college-preparatory students. This levy, unlike the previous bond issue and levy, was voted down 1,937 to 2,206 with the largest margins in rural precincts, where 13 of 14 precincts voted against the measure.

In response, the school board met to “eliminate opposition” to the levy, as described by The Athens Messenger. A campaign fund was created, funded by the school board and the Parent-Teacher Associations of Athens’ elementaries, but not those of Chauncey, Millfield, Sugar Creek, or The Plains elementary schools. That summer, the

Superintendent recommended placing the levy on the ballot again in November. Where in May, levies required 55% support to pass, in November, only a simple majority of votes were required. Rather than shore up support for the measure by including enrollment in the Tri-County Vocational program, they relied on the different criteria in place to pass levies in general election season. Despite the eventual endorsement of Chauncey-Dover PTA, the levy did not fare well in rural areas. In November, voters supported the levy 2,571 to 2,219, a slight majority, but rural precincts again voted overwhelmingly against the levy. The district passed the November levy, not by expanding support, but by bypassing the support of their newly consolidated rural regions.

In addition to this second levy, the ACSD school board also sought to change their borders to expand their tax base to better fund their expenses. East of ACSD, the newly formed Federal Hocking School District received the news that manufacturing company McBee's Manufacturing planned to build a new factory in Stewart, a village inside their borders. In response, board members of ACSD announced that they believed 15 school children living near the factory site in Stewart would be better served by attending East Elementary School in Athens, rather than remaining part of Federal Hocking. Stewart, part of the former Rome-Canaan district, had recently voted against the decision to merge with Athens, and Federal Hocking administrators opposed this transfer. The factory was planned beyond both the school district and the city limits of Athens, firmly in Canaan Township and Federal Hocking Local Schools. The board of ACSD sought in 1968 to transfer this portion of Federal Hocking Local Schools to Athens City School District in order to benefit from the tax value of the new plant.

In April 1967, the State Board of Education weighed in on a similar transfer request in northeast Ohio between two larger school districts and a Ford Motor plant, refusing to allow a transfer of territory because of the negative impact the move would have on the district losing the plant. However, while waiting for the state board to rule on the school transfer, the Athens County Board of Commissioners approved the annexation of the land into Athens City, a move that only required majority vote by Commissioners. Residents opposing the annexation could petition to have the issue placed on a ballot, but local officials declared that since the measure would be placed on the ballot in Athens, the petition would require signatures from 10% of the Athens electorate, not of smaller Canaan's electorate. Residents living in the region would now be subject to Athens City taxes as well as their own township taxes, and the possible addition of ACSD taxes, the highest school district taxes in the county, would increase this rate further. While I was unable to find details on the transfer of school district territory, the later boarders of the two school districts show that the state Board of Education abandoned its precedent and approved the transfer of territory from rural Federal Hocking Local Schools to ACSD sometime after 1969.

Following these events, the consolidation of Chauncey-Dover, The Plains, and Athens High Schools into the newly constructed building occurred in September of 1968. The building, despite being new to all students and located in The Plains, was called the home of the "110th graduating class" of Athens High School, solidifying the character of the new school as a continuation of Athens City Schools, rather than the creation of a new school as was done in Federal Hocking. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, this will be reflected in the impacts of the consolidation on residents of Chauncey reflect this, as

power over the school and its resources more often accumulated to Athens students and residents.

4.5 Closing Chauncey Elementary School

By 2011, Chauncey Dover Local Schools has been reduced to only one elementary school, Chauncey Elementary. In mid-November of 2011, stories began appearing in The Athens Messenger about the district facing a budget shortfall of $1.6 million by the 2014 fiscal year, which could balloon to $22.9 million by 2016 if action was not taken to reduce spending and account for reduced revenue from the state's flat education appropriations. On November 20th, Superintendent Carl Martin stated in the Messenger that the possibility of an elementary school closure was mere speculation, though reporters stated that both West and Chauncey Elementary schools were being considered for closure.

By December 14, the messenger featured the headline "Chauncey on Chopping Block" above the fold. In the face of shrinking state contributions to education, increased emphasis on school choice policies, and the privatization of public services like school facilities maintenance, Martin made a proposal to the school board to address the coming budget shortfall: close Chauncey Elementary, move its students to The Plains, and then consider other cuts to the district. While the measure that could save the district $1 million annually according to the report, the school board later stated that the closure would still leave a $3.7 million shortfall if no other actions were taken. The school board held multiple public listening sessions between December 14th and the February 2012 school board meeting, which I detail in Chapter 5. On February 23rd, the board voted unanimously to close Chauncey Elementary School at the end of the school year.

4.5.1 Chauncey Elementary and Neoliberal Policymaking

While similar in many ways to the consolidation of districts in 1963, the consolidation of Chauncey Elementary School occurred in a different policy context, one less characterized by authoritarian state intervention in rural schooling and more by the retreat of the state from public services like education in favor of a market-driven approach. At this time, Ohio was positioning itself on the cutting edge of neoliberal educational policy changes. It was among the first states to receive a Race to the Top grant, a policy which treated the privatization of education as a solution to underperformance, emphasized individual teacher performance through value-added measures, and opened alternatives to state teacher education programs (de Saxe et al. 2020). Ohio also adopted the Teach for America model of alternative teacher education in 2011, which allowed for teachers to enter the workforce through methods other than state licensed teacher education programs (Heilig and Jez 2014). Further, the 2011 state budget expanded vouchers for charter schools and modifications to charter school accountability measures (van Lier 2011). The Athens Messenger reported on then-Governor John Kasich's support for a bill that would further expand vouchers in November of 2011, despite formal opposition by the Athens City School Board. Rather than the approach described during the Chauncey Dover district consolidation, which emphasized the state's direct control over rural public schools, this period is characterized by the retreat of the state from public education in favor of reliance on market mechanisms.

The structural antecedents to Chauncey's closure thus differ from those that preceded the consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local School in 1963, but both high modern state approaches and neoliberal free market approaches result in policies that

disadvantage rural schools and communities. As mentioned in Chapter 2, school choice policies are often built on an urban default, where there are enough students to support multiple schools competing in the "free market" of education. Despite Athens being a small city, the county is micropolitan and rural, far smaller than urban centers and larger suburbs where districts often have multiple high schools. Rural places, like Athens County generally and Chauncey specifically, therefore contend with budget cuts that all school districts face in addition to policy solutions that are not viable in rural areas.

This context represents an example of urbanormativity by omission, where rural places are neglected in policymaking. Further, this made rural districts more vulnerable to the demands made by private and other non-state institutions' policies that also exclude rural places from consideration, such as the Ohio School Facilities Commission, which I discuss next. These omissions compound with one another, leaving rural places with little room to maneuver around policies that exclude them. I argue here and in Chapter 5 that neoliberal policies practiced in Ohio are urbanormative by omission, leading to districts choosing to deal with budget constraints and limited solutions by sacrificing their most rural schools, as happened in Chauncey. I now turn to a discussion of the Ohio School Facilities Commission's role in the decision to close Chauncey Elementary.

4.5.2 Prioritizing Closure: The Ohio Schools Facility Commission

Unlike the revocation of charters and creation of urbanormative guidelines for school quality in the 1960s, the budget cuts that Athens City School District faced in 2011 did not explicitly target rural schools. Instead, a series of incentives and funding opportunities made the closure of rural schools like Chauncey the clearest option in the minds of administrators. I will focus here on the role of the Ohio School Facilities

Commission as an example of these policies which do not name small schools as the problem, but instead are structured to incentivize school districts to sacrifice their small schools to fund their districts as a whole. The Ohio School Facilities Commission is operated privately using public funds, placing it outside any democratic decision making, but it shaped the decisions of elected decisionmakers, such as the ACSD school board. I argue here that this exemplifies the shift from a state approach to rural institutions from high modernist attempts to make rural institutions more legally legible and controlled towards a neoliberal approach that de-emphasizes the state in public services. Alongside this, the state has shifted from engaging in urbanormativity by commission, when it dictated the elimination of rural schools, to urbanormativity by omission, when it failed to intervene in policies that ignored the negative impacts neoliberal policies would have on rural schools.

The Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) is an organization dedicated to funding school facilities construction and renovation projects in Ohio (Fleeter 2016). Established in 1997, the OSFC was intended to rectify the lack of school facilities funding in the state, a failure that was deemed unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court (Fleeter 2016). Initially created to facilitate the rebuilding of all of Ohio's schools within 12 years, the OSFC provides funding, manages oversight, and provides technical assistance to school districts engaged in reconstruction and renovation projects (Millane 2008). Between its inception and 2009, the OSFC "received over $7.0 billion in capital appropriations and disbursed more than $5.5 billion". Their major funding source gave rise to the moniker in Chauncey as the "tobacco fund", as a large proportion of the fund's appropriations came through Ohio's securitization of its portion of the Tobacco Master

Settlement Agreement, a major national settlement in which "the four largest tobacco companies in the U.S. to settle dozens of state lawsuits brought to recover billions of dollars in health care costs associated with treating smoking-related illnesses" (Millane 2008; National Association of Attorney's General 2019). Other sources of funding were minor, including revenue from the state's "racinos", combination horse racing and casinos.

In its funding program, the OSFC prioritized serving "low wealth" districts first but also includes caveats for the number of students a school must serve to be eligible. Districts in the state were initially ranked according to their wealth, measured by a combination of property values per pupil and district residents' incomes, and lower wealth districts were marked for first construction and were required to provide a smaller local share of funds (Fleeter 2016). In addition to the widely publicized wealth-based prioritization, the OSFC also required or preferred to fund buildings with a minimum enrollment and to ensure funding for maintenance of buildings through taxation. While no official number was made available, Superintendent Martin reported that the OSFC preferred to fund building repair only on schools serving at minimum 350 students. Further, districts were required to pass both a property tax bond levy to generate the district's share of funds and a "maintenance levy" of ½ mill to maintain the newly constructed facilities (Fleeter 2016), but some locally funded repair projects could retroactively count towards the local share.

The first mention of relying on OFSC funding to rebuild or repair school facilities in Athens City School District in board meeting minutes came in July 2009, when the superintendent shared with the board his desire to apply for the funds in the coming years

and retroactively count renovation dollars spent in 2000 as a portion of the local contribution. By June 2010, he was predicting receiving affirmation to begin plans within 2-3 years. According to an email posted to the Save Chauncey Facebook page, Athens City Schools had initially been ranked 474th out of Ohio's 612 school districts with regard to priority for funding projects, but with time, the district was approaching eligibility.

While this funding scheme is progressive in terms of prioritizing poorer districts, I argue that the enrollment criteria coupled with the taxation requirement constituted urbanormativity by omission on the part of the OSFC and the state. Further, this demonstrates that place is an independent axis of inequality that intersects with, but is not interchangeable with, class. These criteria fit squarely within the logics of efficiency and cost-minimization that have been discussed already, as refusing to fund repairs of buildings serving a small number of students would maximize the efficiency of Commission dollars. The inclusion of enrollment-based requirements incentivized, intentionally or not, the closure and neglect of smaller schools common in rural areas. Athens City School District, for example, began discussing the OSFC application in 2009, just after the OSFC received a large influx of money from tobacco settlements in 2007 (Nagel 2012). In the wake of this influx of cash and expansion of OSFC capacity, Ohio had its first major reduction in the number of schools in operation, declining from 4025 in at the start of the 2007-08 school year to 3612 in 2009-10 and 3283 in 2011/12. While this decline in the number of schools also coincided with other economic forces, such as the Great Recession and the inauguration of the Race to the Top federal grant program for schools, the combination of economic downturn and increased funding likely

increased the willingness of districts to seek approval for a master plan funded by the OSFC.

The requirement for districts to cover a local share of the repair costs and to ensure maintenance of the buildings into the future also both serve to ensure the funding was used efficiently. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, residents of Chauncey proposed, though begrudgingly, that a levy be considered to cover the budget shortfall that directly led to discussion of Chauncey's closure. This option, residents perceived, was not given due consideration, and the Superintendent seemed reticent to discuss the option during meetings. Meeting minutes indicate that the district was already reliant on an emergency levy being funded continuously. The Board and the Superintendent both responded to calls for an additional levy be considered by stating their desire to see costs cut before an additional levy could be considered.

While not stated outright, the impending requirement of one levy to fund the local share of district renovation costs and an additional maintenance levy disincentivized the board from considering additional levies that would help the district avoid closing Chauncey Elementary. Again, there was no requirement in the OSFC that local districts not propose levies to address other financial circumstances, but the program did fund projects at the district level rather than the school building level. This opened minoritized communities and schools to be neglected by their districts for the district as a whole to seek funding, marking this policy as urbanormative by omission.

Through this inattention to the unique impacts on rural communities and their schools, the OSFC engaged in urbanormativity by omission, but these omissions did not themselves lead to the closure of Chauncey Elementary. The leadership of Athens City

Schools, though operating within the constrained options created by the state and OSFC, repeatedly enacted policies which would sequester costs and negative outcomes in Chauncey, processes I refer to as urbanormativity by commission. As will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 6, through urbanormativity by commission, Chauncey was constructed as a sacrifice zone for the district, a place where negative impacts could be sequestered to minimize impacts on the district more broadly (Scott 2010).

As mentioned above, the OSFC disincentivized the implementation of levies and additional renovation spending which may impeded the district's capacity to provide the required local share of renovation funding. However, there was no requirement that the district forgo a levy to cover their impending budget shortfall, as was recommended by the district administration during a special session discussing the decision to close Chauncey Elementary School. This demonstrated the district administration's willingness to make sacrifices to be more competitive for state funding, but this scrupulous adherence to the health of the OSFC proposal was not applied equally to all parts of the district. For example, though the levy to avoid closing Chauncey was not considered, the Board was asked by the superintendent to fund a new roof project for West Elementary School. A member of the Board asked on August 18, 2011, about the decision to move forward with the replacement given that the OSFC would not approve West Elementary for renovation. Martin responded that the project was necessary given that the renovation plans were yet several years away. While other renovation plans were also approved during this period with an eye towards including these costs in the district's local contribution, it was acknowledged at this time that West Elementary School would not be approved for renovation and these sunk costs could not be recuperated in the form of credit. The

administration was thus willing to sacrifice Chauncey Elementary to avoid risking the approval of the OSFC plan but would not sacrifice West Elementary School despite knowing its time as a functioning school was already limited[2]. Thus, the decisions of the administration to respond to these difficult circumstances in differing ways, sacrificing Chauncey but preserving West, in concert with other processes of marginalizing Chauncey, constitute urbanormativity by commission.

4.6 Conclusion

The policy which initiated the consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local Schools into Athens City Schools was the decision to revoke the district's charter to operate based on perceived inadequacies, including curriculum limitations and concerns about size. These issues could have been addressed by redistricting or the consolidation of rural districts together into a fully new district, but instead the result was the consolidation of Chauncey Dover *into* Athens City Schools. Likewise, when the superintendent of Athens City Schools recommended Chauncey Elementary for closure, he was responding to generic budget cuts and a building incentive program which would fund renovations for schools with a minimum number of students.

These open-ended policies that allowed for urbanormative applications are an example of what I call "urbanormativity by omission". They do not actively name rural places as the target for downsizing, loss of funding, or decreased quality of services, so it may appear that they are neutral with regard to space/place. However, the boundaries of these policies are created in such a way as to ignore unique rural circumstances or inadvertently allow rural places to be targeted in the application of these policies. For

[2] By 2021, West Elementary was indeed closed and Athens City Schools reduced to only 3 elementary schools.

example, in her work on No Child Left Behind and rural schools, Eppley found that the measurement tools for evaluating teacher quality did not account for the unique circumstance of rural teachers, who often teach multiple grade levels and classes rather than multiple sections of the same class (Eppley 2009). The labeling of "highly qualified" teachers doesn't have any particular provision that actively targets rural schools, but it omits consideration of unique rural circumstances that affect the results. As such, the NCLB High Quality Teacher provision could be an example of a policy that is urbanormative by omission.

The intersection of rurality and social class compounded the impacts of state budget cuts and the OSFC policy. While the OSFC's ranking system placed ACSD as a relatively low priority, the inclusion of Chauncey and The Plains in the wealth calculations likely moved it higher in the rankings than it otherwise would have fallen. The ranking system relied on property values and incomes, and Chauncey's lower average socioeconomic status would have improved the district's ranking. This spatial concentration of poverty in rural Chauncey meant that the district's ranking benefitted from Chauncey's economic status, but the closure of Chauncey's only school ensured that the benefits of that funding wouldn't come to Chauncey directly.

The failure to recognize the incentive to close rural schools created by this policy, as well as the failure to address the spatial concentration of poverty in rural places, are examples of urbanormativity by omission. The state and privatized OSFC failed to account for rural circumstances and provided limited solutions that could be employed by districts like Athens City that are not urban enough to employ the neoliberal solutions posed by the state, such as schools choice, but also have outlying rural areas contained

within. The local government actors, including the school board and administrators who proposed solving the problem by targeting a rural school and would deny that such an act was a "drastic measure", engaged in urbanormativity by commission. The state policy and OSFC offered incentives that excluded smaller schools but did not require they be shuttered, only that they would detract from the district's funding priority. The local district responded to this incentive structure by closing small schools, rather than finding an alternative or supporting those schools locally. Chauncey Dover Local Schools, had they still been in operation as an independent district or been allowed to consolidate with other rural districts in the 1960s, would likely have been prioritized more highly in the OSFC funding structure. However, with the consolidation into Athens, Chauncey instead saw their last school closed in response to a policy designed for low-income communities like theirs. This highlights the ways that progressive policies that fail to attend to the place and rurality as independent axes of inequality will repeatedly disadvantage those communities.

In the case of Chauncey Elementary School, the state did not directly order the closure of a school to address the budget shortfall. Instead, through policies that excluded rural districts from consideration and private decisionmakers like OSFC, Athens City School District was incentivized to close Chauncey Elementary to secure funding for their other schools and facilities. However, the open-ended nature of budget cuts meant that other solutions could have been pursued, rather than sequestering the costs to Chauncey. With the decision to close Chauncey Elementary, I found far more examples of microsocial interactions between residents of Athens City School District that sought to justify the closure of Chauncey as the only reasonable interpretation of these open-

ended policies, many of whom relied on urbanormative depictions of rural people and places. I now turn to the microsocial processes by which the decision to close Chauncey's schools was justified.

CHAPTER 5. LET'S NOT DO ANYTHING DRASTIC

Despite the neoliberal and rationalizing character of the state's policies leading up to the decisions to consolidate Chauncey Dover Local Schools and close Chauncey Elementary, the state did not mandate these particular solutions. Especially in the case of closing Chauncey Elementary, the state and other non-state institutions created unspecified policies and procedures which could then be interpreted more readily as justifying the closure of rural schools. The process also involved social interactions at the micro level which reproduced Chauncey as a natural target for closure. To examine the social processes by which these unspecified policies were given specific local form, we must examine the microprocesses by which Chauncey and its surrounding areas were marginalized.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the policy contexts that led to the decision to consolidate Chauncey Dover Local School District in 1967 and to close Chauncey Elementary School in 2012 were characterized by the desire for utilitarian rationality, standardization, and economic efficiency. In 1963, the state engaged in authoritarian approaches to rural education, revoking the charters of a majority of Athens County's rural high schools and limiting the options available to rural districts to merge, all but requiring the consolidation of rural districts into their nearby city districts. However, in 2011, Chauncey Elementary was never explicitly identified for closure by state policy. Instead, state policies and private funding agencies engaged in urbanormativity by omission, requiring either curricular or financial restructuring but stopping short of directing rural schools to close. Rather than being a state decision, Athens City School District chose the closure of Chauncey Elementary among other options that could have

distributed the cost across the district. In Chapter 4, I examined the macro-level processes which contributed to the decision to consolidate schools in Chauncey. In this chapter, I will examine the micro-level social processes that marginalized Chauncey and allowed this concentration of the districts woes in rural places to be seen as rational and justifiable.

State policies which center urban-biased solutions and ways of thinking about education, but which do not overtly mark rural institutions for closure, are practicing what I will call "urbanormativity by omission". The policies, whether intentionally or not, marginalize rural arrangements by treating urban as the default, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. However, they differ from the active process of ensuring that rural places bear the brunt of social problems, which I will call "urbanormativity by commission". Urbanormativity by commission occurs when a community seeks to sequester the burden of a budget shortfall to a rural community, rather than sharing the burden across all members of the school district. Urbanormativity by commission, as I will explore here, is a social process which includes justifying rural people and places as acceptable targets, perpetuating anti-rural stereotypes and prejudices, or targeting rural people or places for active discrimination. It is facilitated by the logic of neoliberalism, as in the valorization of "bigger is better" and economies of scale, and of high modernism, as in the belief that the most standardized and regimented organization system is best. Whether faced with state funding austerity measures or with too few spots on the football team to include the players from both championship teams, urbanormativity by commission as a social process can be leveraged to ensure that resources tend to accrue to urban people and places.

5.1 Theorizing Rural Marginalization at the Micro Level

Rather than focusing exclusively on the microprocesses by which Chauncey's marginalization was reproduced, I situate these social processes within a larger context of urbanormative policymaking. As described in Chapter 2, urbanormativity is a framework for examining the cyclical relationship between structural urbanization, or the processes by which the social world is structured to support urban places and move rural resources towards urban centers, and cultural urbanormativity, or the cultural norms and values which justify rurality's marginalized status (Seale and Fulkerson 2014). These processes play out cyclically across nested scales of space, from global shifts towards urbanization and mass culture to the place-level (Seale and Fulkerson 2014).

Urbanormativity theory attends to the interplay of cultural and structural forces in the creation and maintenance of urban systems while also focusing on how the processes occur in space. However, much of urbanormativity literature has examined the content and context of rural representations, but not how those representations and stereotypes are then deployed in interactions between individuals to reproduce rural-urban inequality and rural marginalization. Here, I focus on how individuals deployed urbanormative ideas about rural people and places in interactions and how urbanormative policy contexts facilitate their use.

5.1.1 Generic Processes in Reproducing Inequality

To examine the microsocial processes by which Chauncey was marginalized when it came time to implement the state's policies, I use Schwalbe and colleagues' theory of generic processes of reproducing inequality, described in Chapter 2. While Schwalbe and colleagues examined a multitude of processes, here, I will focus on the key

processes by which I saw Chauncey's marginalization being reproduced during the debate: emotion management and othering.

Emotion management involves conditioning or shaping the emotional responses that are possible or acceptable in the face of inequality. When inequality is reproduced over time, "destabilizing feelings of anger, resentment, sympathy and despair" are often created, requiring that those emotions are managed for the inequality to continue unchallenged (Schwalbe et al. 2000:434). This may include processes for regulating discourse around inequality, which imposes "a set of formal or informal rules about what can be said, how it can be said, and who can say it to whom" using a "rationalist discourse… a language of efficiencies, returns, and fiduciary responsibilities- that keeps compassion at bay and facilitates the pursuit of narrow economic interests" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:434). It may also include conditioning emotional subjectivity, or how "people's feelings towards things -other people, situations, events, objects- depend on the meanings they learn to give those things" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:436). Finally, this may include the scripting of mass events, or orchestrating events "to bring about an intended emotional result" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:436).

I diverge with Schwalbe and colleagues in an important point regarding the role (or existence) of structural forces and inequality. In contrast to Burawoy, Schwalbe and colleagues argue that there is no imperative that qualitative researchers of the micro level link to local and extra-local social structures as this "would rest on a reification- 'structure' being a metaphor for recurrent patterns of action involving large numbers of people" (Schwalbe et al. 2000:439). The local and extra-local social arrangements in Athens County and the U.S. more broadly provided policy circumstances that relied on

treating rural locales as peripheral and inimical to the true purpose of education. The processes of reproducing rural and class marginalization that I discuss here rely on policy definitions and practices that legitimize them, lending any argument that relies on the hegemonic representations of rurality offered by neoliberalism and urbanormativity the credibility of being seen as "commonsense" (Springer 2012). The process of scripting the closure of Chauncey Elementary School was legitimized by the state's policy of defining school quality in part by size and by per-pupil spending, for example, so any argument predicated on the claim that a better school is a bigger school benefits from that structural context.

5.2 Different Framings of Closure

The night of the announcement by the superintendent to close Chauncey Elementary, a Facebook page titled "Save Chauncey Elementary" (SCE) was created by an alumnus of the school. It gained support quickly, with over 100 followers within the first day. The decision to close Chauncey Elementary was not a neutral policy suggestion. The majority of residents surveyed (82%) were strongly opposed to the consolidation at the time of the debate, with another 3 somewhat opposed. No respondent reported feeling neutral or positive at the time of the decision to consolidate Chauncey Elementary. Early online rhetoric from resisters about the announcement to close Chauncey Elementary centered emotion, community needs, and attachment of the community to the school as a source of pride and community history. Greene (2016) highlighted that this is one side of the debate around consolidation, which is often a divided discussion with community issues on one side and neoliberal arguments around efficiency and economies of scale on the other.

Chauncey resisters' early rhetoric focused on Chauncey residents needing to share their feelings about their school and the potential for closure. At this point, residents repeatedly promised one another that they would share their stories about the role the school played in the lives of children and past generations of Chauncey graduates, as well as in the community. The creator of the page posted early that he would share all information about meetings of the school board "so all supporters can show up and tell the board how we feel" and that they would "let the school board know that little old Chauncey won't go down without a fight". This seemed to imply that this line of argumentation, if they could simply mobilize enough people to share their stories, would impact the decision to close the school.

Posts about the consolidation had strong emotional undertones from the beginning, with many residents using emotional language framing the plan as a tragedy, a fight to be had, or as an example of oppression. Multiple posters described the plan as likely to harm the children of Chauncey, with one poster begging the board "Don't do this to the kids", and another simply commenting "What a tragedy". This framing, in line with the concerns of the community-oriented research on school consolidation debates, also focused on the role of the school in the community and the experience of marginalized students within the school that could be lost through closure.

The most common framing among posts were those framing the plan as a fight against the school board clearly viewed by many as external and not representative of Chauncey residents. While posters reminisced about their experiences of Chauncey when the news first broke of the plan, one leader commented "Our school board wants to take these wonderful experiences away from us". Another resident implored readers, "So let's

go down with a fight, don't just lay down and let these want-to-be politicians [in reference to the Super Intendent] do whatever they want to OUR kids", (emphasis theirs) clearly drawing a line between "us" (the Chauncey school community) and "them" (the school administration and board). This framing of the school administration as outsiders was prevalent and is an example of a kind of counter-othering, defining the school board not as local elected officials who were members of the community, but as outsiders to Chauncey regardless of where they were from. While Schwalbe and colleagues define "othering" as "the process whereby a dominant group defines into existence an inferior group" (2000: 422). Here, the subordinated residents of Chauncey are defining themselves as a cohesive group separate from the rest of the school district that must come together in this fight.

While many posts that framed the debate as a fight engaged in this defensive othering, marking the sides as Chauncey versus the school administration, some posters who framed the debate as a fight also sought solidarity from parents and residents of other elementary schools. Multiple posters commented that other elementary schools could be closed next, with one particularly heated regular poster stating "We have to make a stand here and now. This is like the ALAMO people. Our school is first then money gets tight and your school is next. Let's all stand together" (emphasis theirs).

Residents also framed the plan as oppression of Chauncey within the school district, often connecting to the perceived tendency to oppress the Chauncey area more broadly. This became more common as the debate went on, rising mostly after the first school board meeting formally announcing the plan was held. One poster reflected that "'Chauncey bashing' has been a sport within the ACSD for as long as I can remember",

while another poster lamented that “They don’t’ care about us over here in this part of the county. They’ve been trying to get rid of our kids for years”. These examples focus on place (Chauncey versus the school administration) as the axis of oppression, but other resisters also framed the oppression of Chauncey in terms of class and place together. One poster made this connection between place and class clearly, posting “Of course the snobbish ones would want to close Chauncey as if scraping us off their Prada heels”. This example demonstrates the clear connection perceived by Chauncey residents between Chauncey as a marginalized part of the district marked not only for its rurality and otherness, but also a place marginalized by class dynamics.

While Chauncey residents framed the decision to close Chauncey Elementary as a fight, a tragedy, or as injustice, administrators and members of the school board framed the decision along neoliberal lines, namely an issue of fiscal efficiency. The superintendent of Athens City School, Carl Martin, told the local newspaper that he “recommended closing Chauncey based on looking at the financial reductions in the state and how we would deal with that,” stating “This was a budget-based decision.” Early in the debate, members of the school board mirrored this framing, with the president of the school board quoted in the paper saying, “If we hadn't had budget cuts, we'd never would have looked at this as an option it would have been unthinkable, but to some degree our hand is being played for us.” This claim also highlights the extent to which the closure of Chauncey based on budget cuts was viewed as an inevitable decision. One characteristic of the financial justification that lent to its sense of inevitability was the underlying truth of the budget problem. It was true and stated repeatedly in the paper and during meetings that the board faced a one-million-dollar budget shortfall for the upcoming school year,

with approximately $12 million shortfall in five years if no changes to the budget were made.

The administration and the school board did not frame the closure of the school through the lens of social injustice, but as the debate wore on, they did address this discrepancy in thinking more explicitly. For example, Superintendent Martin explicitly denied that social factors still shaped educational and local politics, stating for the paper that "I understand some of those issues [perceptions of inequity] existed when I came here because that's what I heard. Over the past 15 years, I haven't heard that." This is in direct contrast with the injustice framing through which Chauncey residents viewed and talked about the closure.

In addition to not framing the closure plan as impacted by social inequities, the neoliberal framing used by the board and administration, as well as community members beyond Chauncey, included the view that *where* Chauncey children were educated did not matter, and not being educated in Chauncey was not a downgrade in education. For example, president of the school board Chris Gerig described the board's instructions to Superintendent Martin to the paper, stating "Our instructions to Dr. Martin were to come up with the least impact for the educational mission of educating all of the students across the board and to make this as painless as possible. This [closing Chauncey Elementary] was a suggestion based on the instructions we've given him. I think Chauncey is a great elementary school; I'm very proud of what we've accomplished in Chauncey." This reflects typical neoliberal ideas about education which treat schooling as an independent, place-less endeavor which should prepare children for participation in the labor market anywhere, rather than a locally informed process (Corbett 2007).

There was also framing work done by the local paper. For example, the local newspaper provided coverage and context for the debate, and the reporting done on the process legitimized specific topics as important to the decision of whether to close the school. Alongside the article first announcing budget concerns for the district, a new set of preliminary rankings of each school and district in the county were presented. These rankings were based on a combination of test scores and per-pupil spending in each school. In the same month, new legislation was announced that proposed a school voucher program that would shift public school dollars to a charter or private school voucher should a parent decide to move their child to one such school. While the article announcing the budget concerns did not reference the rankings or the vouchers directly, these stories characterize the policy situation in which the debate occurred. Their inclusion also reveals absences- while the paper would continue to report on the metrics used by the administration justifying the closure, such as building repair costs or test scores, evidence related to the resisters' arguments, such as Chauncey Elementary's role in the community, did not make it to print.

These opposing ways of framing the plan to close Chauncey Elementary reflected fundamentally different ways of seeing the possible closure of Chauncey Elementary School. On the one hand, Chauncey residents framed the potential closure as a tragedy, while the school board president's comment about their instructions to the superintendent being suggests that the closure was not framed as a tragedy, nor even as a negative, for the children of Chauncey's education. While Superintendent Martin denied that social issues shaped the proposal and educational politics in the region generally, Chauncey residents readily framed the plan as an injustice to be fought against. These frames

shaped what strategies were available for residents on each side to use to affect the decision, as well as what beliefs and feelings residents were or were not allowed to express within the bounds of the debate.

5.3 Early Strategies by Chauncey Resisters

The earliest planned responses by those opposed to the closure of Chauncey Elementary revolved around telling the board how the residents felt about the school and the possibility that it might close. Resisters to the closure shared their stories about the school via Facebook, often reflecting on the sense of community within the school between kids, parents, and school staff, as well as what the school meant to the community of Chauncey. A leader in the movement who created the Facebook page posted in the page's creation encouraging Chauncey residents to "tell the board how we feel" and commented that "We are going to let the school board know that little old Chauncey won't go down without a fight". In the 86 pages of Facebook data, a call to share emotional and community impacts as a means to impact the decision were used at least 11 times. These early posts were optimistic that sharing these stories would impact the board's decision, and attitude which would shift over the course of the debate. By the time I surveyed residents in 2020, zero survey respondents reported feeling that alternatives to the closure were seriously considered, highlighting the shift in perception over time.

Resisters to the closure very frequently posted online calling for civic participation, encouraging Chauncey residents to call and email the school board members, to write into the local paper to share their concerns, and most importantly, to attend the school board meetings where this would be discussed. The importance of civic

engagement was consistent to Chauncey resisters' strategy over time, with leaders posting calls to action regularly throughout the decision-making period.

In addition to calls to action, resisters posted about their skepticism and confusion about how the proposal was developed from the beginning. Chauncey's residents responded frequently that they were taken off-guard, unclear about the process, or left wanting clarification, suggesting that, regardless of the intentions of the administration, the process was not perceived as transparent. One poster lamented that Chauncey had great teachers and was always well kept, adding "I really would like to know the reasoning behind this decision." This perception that the process was opaque was not limited to Chauncey residents, as demonstrated by the local newspaper editor's initial comments on the proposal, where they "jeered" the school board, stating of the process "After all, we expected any recommendation on a school closing to come after public discussion. And by not having that public discussion, it appears- and probably feels to those with a stake in the elementary school- as though Chauncey never stood a chance." It is important to note that these comments, which carry an air of finality about a plan which would not reach a board vote for two months, treat the proposal as an inevitability. Clarity would not come with time, either, as a 2020 survey respondent whose two children and spouse attended schools in Chauncey said in their response to what they now believed impacted the decision to close the school:

> I honestly do now know why or how they decided to close Chauncey. I believe it was because it was supposed to save the district money because the school did not have enough kids attending and so they were going to close and save money by not running the building. But then they put administration in there and are running the building anyways so… I don't know what their reasons were.

In an interview later, she shared further skepticism, saying

> Some of the reasons they gave for Chauncey needing to close were ‘It was too expensive to keep the building open. There weren't enough kids there to make it worth it.’ They just didn't fly because it's still open. It's just administrative offices now and it still has the preschool there now. So, it really just didn't fly about you know. I think it created some distress between parents especially in this area and administrative people, especially the Superintendent.

Here, she makes the important connection between the opacity of the process, the unaddressed skepticism of Chauncey resisters, and deepening distrust between the region and the school board.

In addition to calls for transparency, other posters questioned the content of the plan, especially around the financial details of the plan and how Chauncey Elementary School was selected for closure among the district’s five elementary schools. The proposal suggested that while Chauncey’s students would be moved to The Plains Elementary School and Chauncey functionally closed as an elementary, the building would remain in use as administrative space and potentially as a pre-school or as classrooms for students with developmental disabilities. Chauncey resisters questioned how such a plan, which involved continuing to operate the school building, would result in the necessary savings, with at least 12 posts referencing skepticism about the financial underpinnings of the plan. Others posted asking why Chauncey’s building, which was among the newest and most spacious, was to be closed while other buildings which had significant structural problems were not considered for closure and movement to Chauncey or The Plains. One leader of the movement reflected in an interview that “No one felt like the reasoning for Chauncey to close were the right reasons at that moment.”

These concerns, while focusing on specific point of contention, often also included insights into how the plan treated Chauncey’s students as less important to the

district or at least less carefully considered. These oversights, pointed out by Chauncey posters and writers to the paper, point out examples of urbanormativity by omission, as the children of Chauncey were being negatively impacted by their rurality not by actions which explicitly targeted them, but by being overlooked. For example, when one poster suggested that students of West Elementary be moved to Chauncey, rather than keeping three elementaries open in Athens and closing Chauncey's only school, they also relayed the response they heard to the suggestion: that if the school bus route flooded between Chauncey and Athens, students would be unable to attend school. The poster went on to point out that with the proposed plan, Chauncey's children wouldn't be able to get to school in The Plains in the same circumstance. The poster's point that this concern was immediately raised for Athens' children but not for Chauncey's children is an example of urbanormativity by omission in action- the specific needs of rural people and places were not considered, potentially harming rural people in the process. These concerns and the underlying critique of place-based inequality were ubiquitous in the early period of the debate. with many sharing that they believed the plan specifically targeted Chauncey. Posters to the Facebook group levied the claim that the plan unfairly targeted Chauncey at least 12 times. This relates directly to the perception that the proposal to close the school was an injustice, and this belief led many to call on the board to demonstrate that they had considered alternatives or to do so before voting.

Other posters, however, went further, suggesting that alternatives should be examined more closely and more transparently. Resisters to Chauncey's closure would present multiple alternatives as the debate period went on, but the suggestion that another elementary be considered for closure garnered the most attention from others involved in

the discourse, as will be discussed next. There was a strong perception that alternatives were not considered because Chauncey was perceived as the region least likely to resist the decision. This perception that Chauncey could be targeted with minimal resistance was captured succinctly by Rachel, a parent of three Chauncey Elementary children and a participant in the Chauncey Community Improvement group, who referred to Chauncey as "low hanging fruit." This belief was raised in multiple interviews, survey results, and content analysis of the newspaper and Facebook page, demonstrating the salience of this perception.

5.4 Emotion Management of Chauncey Resisters

The debate process in Athens City School District meetings and among resisters was fraught with examples of emotion management and the othering of Chauncey along lines of place and class. Two specific means by which community members and teachers from other schools managed Chauncey residents' emotional responses were through the management of discourse and appeals to utilitarian rationality to justify sequestering the impacts of the consolidation to Chauncey alone. Calls to "be rational" are examples of what I have called urbanormativity by commission. In calling for "rational" decisions to be made based on what will impact the smallest number of people, the baked-in implications of this logic will *always* target rural people.

The neoliberal criteria set forth by the state and administration offered a set of informal rules as to what types of concerns would be legitimized during the debate, and community members seeking to shield their own schools from consideration for closure were able to leverage these rules to justify targeting Chauncey for closure. Further, the structure of meetings themselves constrained the types of engagement that Chauncey

resisters could engage in. In addition to these examples of emotion management, Chauncey was also othered by the school administration through narratives about their place in the district and their support for school levies. By framing Chauncey as unreliable for school funding, it was implied by administration that Chauncey was a second-class sector of the district. Taken together, these processes of marginalization served to limit the discourse that would be tolerated and taken seriously in the decision over how to address the district's budget shortfall.

5.4.1 Overt Emotion Management

As the debate garnered greater attention, the frames and early responses of Chauncey resisters to the proposal to close Chauncey came into contact with the broader discourse. While posters to the Save Chauncey page responded with a mix of emotions and demands, supporters of the closure (or at the very least those not resisting the decision) responded most directly to calls for other schools to be considered for closure. This suggestion, while no more drastic than the suggestion to close Chauncey, was met with a vitriolic response. One resident from outside Chauncey explicitly shamed Chauncey resisters for what they perceived as "bashing" West Elementary, posting "Wow I know that the possibility closing of Chauncey has everyone upset… but throwing all the other schools under the bus is not going to solve the problem". The critic then went on to shift the conversation towards the fiscal management of the district's budget as the topic that "ought" to be in focus. The proposal to close Chauncey Elementary was never described as "bashing" the school, however. The newspaper also gave voice to residents who sought to shape the discussion through emotion management, quoting a parent and teacher from West Elementary as stating "In making difficult

decisions we must expect Mr. Martin and the school board to do so based on facts, not emotions."

Both critics here regulated the debate discourse through emotion management, or "a set of formal or informal rules about what can be said, how it can be said, and who can say it to whom" (434), clearly staking the claim that suggesting the closure of a school other than Chauncey is a line of debate outside the bounds of discussion (Schwalbe et al. 2000). In focusing on the "bashing" of other schools and being unemotional, these comments reduced the anti-oppression critique of the plan to an emotion-driven retaliation on the part of Chauncey. This tendency to constrain the responses resisters could share re-railed the discussion towards "rational" arguments to the exclusion of Chauncey's community-oriented and justice-focused arguments. It also relied on an unspoken stereotype of rural people as less rational and overly sentimental (Fulkerson and Lowe 2016). The other points raised by Chauncey resisters, such as framing the issue as unjust or pointing to how the plan relied on the urbanormative exclusion of Chauncey from consideration, were not typically addressed by these posters or the newspaper commentators.

Upon reflection, Chauncey residents were split on whether they believed the opposition group members were being perceived as overly emotional. Seven survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that opposers to the consolidation were seen as overly emotional by others, while four reported that they disagreed that opposers were seen as overly emotional. Four additional survey respondents remained neutral, suggesting this perception was common but not salient for all. Surveyed residents were also mixed on whether they perceived a space for expression of their feelings about the

debate. When asked whether people on their side of the debate had to keep their feelings to themselves about the consolidation, 45% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed. Five survey respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed that they had to keep their feelings to themselves.

5.4.2 Urbanormativity by Commission- Rationality Logics and Rural Marginalization

In addition to calling for Chauncey residents to be unemotional and neutral in the decision-making process, residents from outside Chauncey, especially those affiliated with West Elementary, leveraged utilitarian, neoliberal logics to argue that Chauncey was the only rational choice for closure. For example, one West parent and teacher claimed during the first school board meeting with hearing time on the matter staked their claim clearly, stating "In order to affect the fewest number of families, the obvious choice is to close Chauncey elementary." The teacher from West Elementary who earlier stated that the superintendent must make decisions based on facts, rather than emotions, went on to add "We must expect Mr. Martin and the school board…to act in the best interests of all the students in the district," implying specifically that this interest meant not spreading the costs of the budget to schools beyond Chauncey.

Another West parent also spoke during the meeting, going further to say "The issue of shared sacrifice sounds equitable, but if you are looking out for the best interest of students, why would you diminish the educational experience of thousands of students to save a school that has 153? Every student does count, but your children's education is not diminished by moving to another school. But if you cut music, art, physical education, or have pay-to-play sports and band? All those things would save money, but it would severely affect every child in the Athens city school district." They went on to

say, “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few” This parent explicitly called for Chauncey to bear the burden of cost alone in order to preserve the experience of the rest of the school district. These claims fit squarely within the logic of rationality and cost-benefit analysis that was made legible by the board’s focus on fiscal efficiency, while the claims that this logic was at the root of the injustice of the proposal made by Chauncey resisters were largely ignored in the public discourse. The accepted rationality and ‘common sense’ of these neoliberal approaches to policy (Springer 2012) obscure the fact that such an approach will always target rural places for repeated negative treatment and marginalization, as rural places are smaller populations by definition. Neoliberal discourse that relies on these logics and rationalizations will always be urbanormative.

5.4.3 Emotion Management of the Debate Process

The structure/conditions of the closure also shaped the emotional tenor of the debate. News of the debate came just in time for Thanksgiving, the bulk of opinion pieces were published the week leading up to and following Christmas and was completed in 2 months. Chrissy, a leader in the consolidation debate and a Chauncey parent, described the impact of the bureaucratization of participation:

> “People spent the holiday season trying to rally together to figure out a plan. Board meetings only happen once a month, you have to get on the agenda. So, there’s all this other structure to be able to be heard, you have to know the process, a lot of our families didn’t know that process. Trying to organize an effort for people to have a chance to be heard”.

Despite these details, multiple sources called for parents on all sides to be rational in their arguments (i.e., focus on the numbers, especially dollars). Again, this causes a rub between the ideal rational discussion and the perceived emotionality and sentimentality

of those rural parents. Upon reflection, it was noted by an interviewee that this decision was made via proposal, followed by brief public comment periods, and finally a board vote was called; when the decision of how to consolidate other schools was raised a couple years later, a comprehensive committee was formed to organize the process. The decision of whether to closure Chauncey Elementary was not deemed to be of great enough importance to be given such transparent and lengthy treatment.

The first meeting in the debate highlighted the structural ways that emotional discourse was curtailed and reshaped into rationalized processes, to the detriment of the rural resisters. The SCE page recorded over 130 people intent on attending the first school board meeting after the announcement was made. The school board, perhaps intent on maintaining the standard process, refused to move the first meeting to a larger space to accommodate the crowd. Chauncey had spent a week mobilizing support, and the meeting was described in the paper as packed with high turnout. However, the official public comment period for the decision was not scheduled until the meeting in early January, 6 weeks later. As such, the resisters were allotted time only at the end of the meeting in 10 standardized 3-minute slots, a structure which had not been announced formally but was reflected in the formal rules for school board meetings. The rationalized process for participating in the board meeting could not be altered, even in such circumstances. Reflecting on this, the page creator posted “I hope that the January meeting is more organized so everyone can speak that wants to”, lamenting that even he was not allowed a speaking slot. Here, adherence to process, even in the face of high civic participation, served to curtail the emotional response of Chauncey resisters.

A leader in the debate reflected during her interview that the structure of the entire debate process felt constraining and demoralizing, stating that:

> Chrissy: “People spent the holiday season trying to rally together to figure out a plan. Board meetings only happen once a month, you have to get on the agenda. So, there’s all this other structure to be able to be heard, you have to know the process, a lot of our families didn’t know that process. Trying to organize an effort for people to have a chance to be heard. And then there’s… you get this letter home that says there going to be this change. You kid’s school is being taken away; they have to go somewhere else.”

5.4.4 Othering by Place and Class- Chauncey and Levies

In addition to the emotion management of Chauncey and the marginalization of their concerns, Chauncey was also marginalized through a self-perpetuating cycle of othering and defensive responses between the school district leadership and residents of Chauncey revolving around the topic of school levy support. In multiple instances throughout my fieldwork, residents of Chauncey reported that the leadership of Athens schools, both present and past, perceived Chauncey as unsupportive of school levies. This perception, they believed, was used by administration to justify the negligent treatment of Chauncey residents reported in interviews and survey results that Chauncey was perceived by the school board as unsupportive of levies. Viviane, a long-term resident with family ties to the school, stated this explicitly, saying,

> Viviane: “[Closing Chauncey] had nothing to do with quality, its building in the district was the newest.
>
> JMM: “Right and so it sounds like you're saying that the parents here were the least likely… they had the least money and they got swept under the rug, right?

> Viviane: “That's exactly what it was. What it was, like I said, it goes back to Carl Martin and saying he never relied on Chauncey to pass a levy because we didn't have the money to do it. So, it all came down to the parents, and at West and Morrison-Gordon primarily and East have money, and… they're going to fight for the parents who will support them financially before they will for the parents of children who actually need to help.”

Viviane’s point here that those with financial resources are more likely to be catered to is reflected in the work of Jessica Calarco on help-seeking in schools. She found that middle-class parents sought to secure their children’s good standing in school despite breaking rules around work, relying on the fact that schools are what she called “privilege-dependent organizations” that must cater to those who provide the school with the resources needed to operate (Calarco 2020). Here, Viviane is articulating a similar perception, that the school leadership marginalized Chauncey within the district as unreliable sources of financial support.

This situation differs from Calarco’s work in the sense that Chauncey, as a numerical minority, does not have the power to fail a levy vote. Instead, it is the mere perception that Chauncey is unsupportive that is used to mark the area as “other” within the district. It was not even clear that Chauncey had voted against any levies in the recent past, though the refusal of Chauncey and other rural areas in the district to pass a second levy shortly after the consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local Schools was perceived as the origin of this perception.

Residents of Chauncey perceived that this economic perception mattered for how different areas of the district were responded to by the district leadership. John, a leader in the Save Chauncey movement and administrator of the Facebook page said of the proposal “They don’t care, it’s all about where they get their levy money from,” outright

stating that this perception of Chauncey affected the proposal directly. Chrissy, a leader of the Save Chauncey movement and Chauncey Elementary parent, stated that when another round of consolidations was proposed in 2015, after the study period, the parents of the other, more wealthy elementary schools threatened to refuse to pass levies if their school was not among those to remain. She went on to point out that those schools were among those remodeled, making the connection between the threat and the seriousness with which their concerns and demands were met.

Other residents of Chauncey shared skepticism and cynicism about levies, perceiving that regardless of the history of levies passing in Chauncey, the benefits of these levies would not be felt in that part of the district. In a passionate opinion editorial by a long-time residents and graduate of Chauncey Dover High School, a resident described the fate of a former Chauncey Dover School District building after the 1960s consolidation, stating that the building had been sold for a paltry $19,000, which was not reinvested in Chauncey. He went on, stating, “All the money the board received from the sale of all the property went into who knows where. to my knowledge, none of it was spent in chancing. And since then, the citizens have never supported another school levy. With the latest situation I doubt if they will ever support another one. if the school closes there is nothing left for them to support.” This attitude encapsulates the cyclical nature of this othering process. As the perception that Chauncey didn’t support levies deepened, so too did the belief that Chauncey wouldn’t benefit from the passing of future levies, as nothing of the formerly independent school district was left to support.

While I didn’t come across any first-hand instances of school leadership claiming that Chauncey was unsupportive of levies, I did observe instances of Chauncey being treated

as separate from the rest of the district when it came to financial issues. For example, when pressed in the newspaper on the proposal to maintain Chauncey's school building as administrative and pre-school space if it couldn't be maintained as a school, the superintendent responded defensively, exclaiming that he was "looking for ways to keep that building occupied and alive so that it doesn't become trash… If that's the case, we might as well just board it up and tear it down. We would be a lot better off." In this instance, it is unclear who "we" would be if not the district excluding Chauncey. Certainly, Chauncey would not be better off for having their school closed and unused. This suggests a certain separation between Chauncey and the rest of the district in the mind of the administrator, as though having a school in Chauncey is a favor to the area, rather than a duty to the tax-paying residents of the community.

5.5 Adopting the Accepted Framing

In the wake of the emotion management and othering of Chauncey, the tone of the debate online shifted from a focus on emotional impacts to a more rationalized, data-driven approach on the part of Chauncey resisters. Posters to the Facebook group responded to the accusations of "bashing" other schools with emotional self-regulation and defended themselves against such claims in the future. The arguments for how to impact the decision also shifted away from a focus on sharing how Chauncey residents feel towards researching alternatives and financial details of the proposal. This at times was described by leaders as "doing the board's job for them" as resisters studied and proposed plans of their own. Responses to these suggestions were telling, however, as board discussion spaces became times to debate what constituted a "drastic" solution. In addition to this rationalization of the discourse, a late-game attempt by the broader

Athens district community arose, focusing on a rights-based framework to resist the closure, but this framing proved unsuccessful and unwelcome due to the group's inattention to the intersections of class and place in Chauncey.

5.5.1 Emotional Self-Management and Discourse Maintenance- Internalizing Urbanormativity?

Some Chauncey resisters responded to these instances of emotion management by falling into line with the rules of discourse set forward by the other residents. Emotion self-management became a pattern on the page, as some supporters took on the rules of engagement laid out according to anti-rural stereotypes about rationality and over-emotionality. One resister reproduced these norms in her comment following one of the public comment sessions: "Was also proud of my community [Chauncey] as a whole for discussing, sharing, and talking like adults tonight". Online, this looked like internalized emotion management. For example, a few days after the poster called out Chauncey members for "throwing other schools under the bus", a Chauncey parent chided another Chauncey resident, saying "I am as angry as I know you are, but name calling, mud-slinging, yelling will not help our kids". From then on, it was common for posts which called for alternatives to the closure of Chauncey to be prefaced with statements that the poster is not attacking others, or "I'm not bashing other schools…" as one parent put it. After this call-out post, multiple Chauncey resisters also ceded the alternative of closing a different elementary school, with at least four posts referencing taking closure of any other elementary school off the table as an alternative. Some resisters still called for consideration of closing a different school, most often West Elementary School in Athens.

In the wake of the initial call-out post, I coded at least 14 instances of Chauncey resisters engaging in emotional self-management of resisters and their allies. At times, this included actively discouraging Chauncey resisters from getting angry, as with one poster who commented "As a team trying [to] save Chauncey we don't want [to] embrace comments from others that [are] angry or mean towards West", while other instances including praising of posts viewed as "rational" or "logical." This coincided with the shift away from emotional framing towards a more rationally framed strategy more generally. Finally, Chauncey resisters policed their own emotions and those of their allies by praising behavior perceived as "classy", engaging in what Schwalbe and colleagues might describe as defensive othering, the process by which members of a marginalized group distance themselves from a stereotype by accepting its veracity but labeling themselves and those immediately around them as exceptions (Morris 2012; Schwalbe et al. 2000). This suggests that both emotions and the more general image of the rural residents engaged in the debate were being policed from within.

5.5.2 Rationalization of Chauncey's Resistance

In addition to the self-policing of emotional reactions to the proposal in response to the general image of Chauncey resisters, some posters called for greater attention to facts and details in the fight to save the school. These two needs were connected for some posters, with one Chauncey resident criticizing the movement generally by stating "I understand people are upset and frustrated, as am I, but blame is being laid in places it doesn't belong and the people making statements to media outlets and social networks are just making the situation worse by being misinformed." Here, he refers to emotional calls from other resisters that asked for alternatives to be considered and for perceived

financial inconsistencies to be investigated more publicly. To make what he perceives as emotion-driven public statements will negatively impact the cause.

At this time, the content of posts online began to focus more frequently on facts and details of the proposal and its potential impacts on Chauncey's children and the financial straits of the district in general. For example, when the creator of the page responded defensively to being told not to "throw other schools under the bus", he later went on to ask "Would the district save $900,000 if half of the Chauncey students elected to go to West? Some people are going to speak from passion alone, and they might not say the right thing, but they do this because they love their school, staff, and their children.". In future posts, discussion of closing West would be couched not in terms of the potential impact on the communities (West is only 1.3 miles from the next nearest elementary school and under a mile from the middle school, while Chauncey is in another town), but in terms of fiscal efficiency and other more metrics for evaluating the plan. In the wake of these interactions curtailing the discourse, the dialogue from Chauncey resisters shifted from a community-oriented and emotional response to more often couched in the language of efficiency, fiscal concern, and specific policy implications. Long threads on the SCE page were dedicated to discussions about the comparative cost of repairs to different school buildings, the pay structure of teaching staff, and enrollment numbers.

As the broader discourse shifted, the framing and strategy that Chauncey resisters used changed from focusing on the emotional and community impacts of the proposed closure to instead focusing on facts. In planning for the second school board meeting, for example, one leader of the movement and frequent poster posted that "We have a lot of

work to do to gather information to convince the board that we do not want Chauncey closed". This was a marked shift away from sharing how residents felt about the plan towards a research-based approach to convince the board that viable alternatives existed. Throughout the 86 pages of posts, posters referenced focusing on facts and knowledge as impacting the decision at least 21 times, with these codes becoming more frequent after the instances of emotion management online and in the first board meeting.

Chauncey resisters also attempted to engage in the neoliberal discourse by conducting independent research on topics related to the decision. Interestingly, this was spurred on by a frequent poster in the page from another county[3]. This woman, living in another rural area in the state, had experience with a local school consolidation a few years prior and often weighed in on the Chauncey page to share advice. This advice often included participating within the accepted structures of governance, such as when she suggested "I would call GOVERNOR KASICH office and start asking!" in reference to specific funding sources the district may be seeking. At this point, she revealed that Athens City School District was seeking what she referred to as "tobacco money" to rebuild school buildings. This referred to the Ohio School Facilities Commission, discussed in Chapter 4. Other topics of independent research by resisters included the funding sources of the high school football stadium, the process by which Chauncey's teachers would be moved and their salaries, and the necessary repairs that each individual school building needed.

[3] Even more interestingly, the consolidation of this poster' elementary schools were also led by the current Athens City Schools' Superintendent Gibbs in his previous job as Superintendent of Warren Local School District. This pattern of rural Superintendents overseeing consolidations in rural Ohio schools then moving on to larger school districts goes back to the 1960s, when the Superintendent of Athens City Schools who oversaw Chauncey Dover's consolidation then moved on to a larger, more urban district.

While the discourse shifted from emotional and community-driven towards more objective metrics, some posters still focused attention on the injustice of the proposal and even saw this shift as its own injustice. For example, in her interview reflecting on the planning, one leader of the movement recalled pointing out that this consolidation would result in over 60% of the children eligible for free-and-reduced-price lunches would be segregated in one school. Another community member relied on legalistic and rationalized language in his opinion editorial that appeared in the local paper close to the decision meeting:

> Dan: "Closing the school would be an insult to the community of the greatest magnitude. The constitution of the United States guarantees all citizens equal protection of the law and freedom from discrimination. Those least able to absorb the closure of this Community School are the very ones the district Superintendent has thrust closure upon.".

Other commentators brought forward thoroughly researched alternatives to the closure of Chauncey to present to the board during the final public comment period in January. Developed primarily by Chauncey teachers, the group presented a plan to reduce Chauncey's classrooms by half, with the remaining Chauncey teachers retiring or leaving, as well as sharing a principal between Chauncey and The Plains Elementary Schools. Because the proposed savings came mostly from salaries at Chauncey, the group was able to present financial figures that relied on the same data as the board itself. These proposals, with others presented online and in the newspaper, were examples of the extent to which Chauncey resisters were willing to engage within the bounds of discourse set forward by the administration and broader district community. The shift in focus is highlighted in the way one leader of the group evaluated the second major meeting with the school board, where he focused on the information presented, rather than the

community cohesion and stories shared he focused on last time: “I personally feel that we presented a lot of information and options that the board may not have considered, so they need more time to explore these options.”

5.6 Let’s Not Do Anything Drastic- Responding to the Rational Route

As emotion management and self-management were levied repeatedly, resisters collectively began re-evaluating the rationalized arguments in the less regimented space of the Save Chauncey Elementary (SCE) page. They had ostensibly participated in the debate according to the rules of engagement set forth by the administration and the supporters of the decision to close Chauncey during the second meeting and during the planning period leading up to the final decision. By the end of the debate period, strategizing on the SCE page took on a much more neoliberal framing. However, the responses by parents from around the district and administration varied, with some parents attempting to engage in solidarity, but failing to account for the intersections of class and place, while the superintendent weighed in to negotiate which alternatives would be considered by the board.

An ardent resister sought to ask the superintendent about this “tobacco money” and its role in the decision. Upon his response, the superintendent engaged directly in the management of discourse, relying on the stereotyping of rural residents as “simple”, or uninformed. In his public response, he claimed not to know about any “tobacco money”, despite it being common knowledge that an upcoming infrastructure funding program that the district is planning to apply to is funded in part through tobacco securities. He deflected the accusation but did not deny the plan. This attempt to engage within the

bounds of neoliberal discourse was still met with emotion management, shaped by the stereotyping of rural people as uninformed or simple.

5.6.1 Defining Drastic- Responding to Chauncey's Rationalized Turn

The shift in approach taken by most Chauncey resisters, while a marked change, did not fully change the shape of the discourse on closing Chauncey. Some topics, even those that fell within the bounds of fiscal efficiency and neoliberal rationality, remained outside the scope of the discussion. For example, during the special meeting on fiscal matters, the last before the Board vote, the Board President responded to Chauncey resisters' proposal to reduce administrator positions in the district as part of a cost-saving measure. The President asked Superintendent Martin, in attendance at the meeting, to examine this possibility. According to a public opinion editorial in the Messenger, Martin's response was that he was not ready to take such a drastic measure at that time. The Board, according to meeting minutes, asked that the Finance Committee plan to examine a more detailed list of budget items earmarked for cuts, but no further edits or challenges to the list were proposed. Meeting minutes and newspaper coverage, as well as the timeline for the vote only 8 days later, suggest that the alternatives proposed by Chauncey did not receive lengthy consideration.

I highlight this exchange between Chauncey resisters, the Board, and the Superintendent because it is revealing of how the discourse around Chauncey's closure, while wrapped in the language of rationality, relied heavily on the social meanings those involved placed on schools and their roles in communities. As stated by the opinion editorial author who recounted this exchange, "I don't know about the rest of you, but closing a school is a pretty drastic measure to me". Engaging in the neoliberal discourse

around their school was not a panacea to Chauncey being prioritized in the school district, as simply presenting numbers could not counter the pervasive idea that closing the last remaining school in Chauncey was not seen as a drastic measure. Despite the rationalized vocabulary being used throughout the process, what was and was not drastic is wrapped up indelibly with values about whose needs matter, what costs can be justified and to whom, and who can mandate sacrifices be made by whom.

5.6.2 Attempts at Solidarity- Inattention to Intersections of Place and Class

While much of the discourse from other parts of the district and school leadership focused on making the decision to close Chauncey seem natural and inevitable, some attempts at solidarity with Chauncey residents also occurred. These instances differed in the extent to which they recognized the intersections of class and place in Chauncey's marginalization.

Late in the debate period, as the voting meeting approached, a group of broader Athens residents created a group they called "Save Our Schools- Athens," aimed at preventing the closure of any elementary school in the district. While the group attempted to speak for the district in its entirety, several details about the launch led to the group's demands being rejected by the pre-existing Chauncey movement. For example, the group penned a letter to the editor, in which they stated, "Monday was the start of the Save Our Schools campaign," despite being launched nearly two months into the decision-making process. Thus, while the group leadership included members of the Save Chauncey group, it positioned itself as a separate endeavor and did not acknowledge the work already being done in Chauncey. The group posed three "guiding principles," first that "We care about the children of our community," second that "Our children deserve to

receive a high-quality education in their own neighborhood," and lastly "We are willing to pay for such an educational system, but in return we want parents to make decisions on any big changes to the system."

These principles, the group argued, were being violated by the decision to close Chauncey without parental input. This argument was rooted in a framework underscored by the ideas of rights, namely the right to be involved in decisions about the schools. As such, the group claimed that the second and third principles were being violated by the proposal to close Chauncey Elementary. The group also opposed the alternative suggested by Chauncey residents to create grade-level buildings that would include using Chauncey as a school for all preschoolers to second graders. Rather than close any school, they demanded that a levy to raise the money to curtail the budget problems. "If parents are happy with our basic education system," they opined, "why would the school board and Superintendent Martin consider such radical changes without asking us to pay for what we have right now?" The letter and following article included signatures and interviews with two Chauncey leaders as well as one parent from Morrison Gordon Elementary and the larger Save Our Schools- Athens group.

This alternative was not accepted by the Chauncey resistance group that had been gathering online and in-person for the past two months, as posts following the letters made clear. The responses focused on the impracticality of asking for another levy and highlight the difference between what I have described as a rights-based framework versus the injustice-based framework that Chauncey had levied from the beginning. One poster to the Save Chauncey page was emblematic of the response, saying "This is a very bad time to ask people for MORE money. We have given the school VERY good ideas,

and some tough choices will have to be made." Throughout the debate, posters had pointed out that levies had been passed regularly and shared skepticism that any levy money would ever be used in Chauncey, with one poster attributing such a decision to the superintendent stating, "Carl [Martin] has rarely, if ever, prioritized Chauncey and we have no way to guarantee the money would secure our school."

In the wake of the backlash from Chauncey peers, the leaders who were affiliated with the Save our Schools- Athens group denounced the levy proposal, and the group itself soon backpedaled on the proposal. Less than a week later, the group leaders were interviewed again, this time stating that they were backing down on the idea of passing a levy, despite some members remaining personally supportive of the idea. One West Elementary parent reported, "I wouldn't take it off the table as an option."

The posters from Chauncey highlight the importance of recognizing the intersections of place and class in the decision to close Chauncey. The problem is not simply the district budget woes, but also that Chauncey had historically been marginalized within the district and had historically been the last to benefit from the district's past levy support. By focusing merely on the "right" of parents to have a say and to choose to place another levy on the budget ignored the financial and social realities of Chauncey as a lower-income and marginalized area. While people in poverty certainly exist in Athens itself, they are more likely to be spared from the place-based policies that negatively affect other parts of the school district because of their physical proximity to wealthier areas. Meanwhile, Chauncey is physically separate and marginalized by class, opening it for place-based policies such as the closure proposal to be carried out which concentrate the negative impacts in Chauncey alone. Similarly, the

concentrated poverty in the area makes such decisions as a levy less financially feasible for a larger proportion of people in the area, but their numerical minority status means they will remain unable to meaningfully have a say in the decision of whether to pass a levy. For an Athens-based group to suggest that the district should simply place a levy on the ballot ignored the perception that Chauncey would be unlikely to benefit from a levy which they wouldn't be able to afford and which they would have no meaningful way to oppose, even if they wanted to.

Other community members from outside Chauncey, however, articulated their discontent with the plan using the justice framework that Chauncey resident were frequently using. While these comments were infrequent, they highlighted the difference between solutions that treated all people and places in the district as on equal footing versus acknowledging the way the proposal would sequester the harm to the most marginalized parts of the district. The president of West Elementary's PTO exemplified this, quoted in the paper during the meeting as stating, "I will feel guilty for the rest of the time my children go to West Elementary, knowing that Chauncey was closed and their kids were moved to The Plains, and we in the city of Athens allowed them to take the brunt of everything." This sentiment, while infrequently shared, highlights the way that place and marginalization were intersecting in this decision, marking the difference in treatment between Chauncey and "we in the city of Athens."

5.6.3 The Board's Decision

Despite not wanting to be remembered as "the board that killed the community", per the President of the school board, the board voted unanimously during the final meeting to close Chauncey Elementary School. The meeting, which took under an hour,

took place two months after the initial announcement that Chauncey was being considered for closure, and the school was slated to close at the end of the school year. In their remarks, board members repeatedly commended everyone involved for handling the process "in a civil way," echoing the emotion management common throughout the process. A second theme in closing remarks was insisting that this change was not severe for Chauncey students and that they would not see a decline in educational quality. For example, one member stated that even after the closing "the average class size in the elementary grades will be about 19, which is far better than most other districts." It is important to note that these statements were not necessarily promises that action would be taken to ensure educational quality but instead that the closure itself wasn't expected to have a negative impact that needed to be addressed. Stating that class sizes in the district would be relatively small, for example, does not address the fact that the overall size may be small, but two schools would be looking at major increases in class size. Only the Chauncey and The Plains Elementaries would be impacted by this decision, so using a district-wide measurement does not address the targeted impact that this change would have. It merely discounted the possibility of a problem. A final theme that characterized the decision was the claim that this decision was inevitable, with the President stating he "doesn't see any way not to take this action tonight." Each of these claims would be questioned in the days and months following the closure as parents and community members prepared for the closure of Chauncey Elementary School.

5.7 Conclusion

Chauncey resisters first attempted to engage with an authentic community-based argument about consolidation, believing that sharing their feelings and emotional stories

about the importance of Chauncey Elementary to their community would impact the decision. In the face of emotion management, the othering of Chauncey within the district, and the bureaucratic management of the meeting spaces, the resisters' approaches were re-shaped. Resisters were "herded" into more neoliberal argumentation strategies, such as arguments about building quality and cost, believing that if they could leverage evidence, that would impact the debate. However, after the consolidation, only a small minority of residents perceived these neoliberal reasons as having impacted the decision, revealing a crack in the façade. Many after the fact reported that the only things that mattered was how loud the oppositions groups were and who was an insider and who was an outsider to the district. Some even reported that given the shallow nature of the debate, they would have preferred to have not had the debate in the first place. This is important for how rural residents perceive the political process and will show up later for how rural residents engage with the school system as part of the public sphere. Neoliberalism is not just a strategy for political decision-making which seeks to place all of life into the realm of markets; it is also a useful frame which invites debate. That debate strategically decenters issues of justice but does not require that its proponents honestly engage in objective argumentation. They only need to appear to do so while neoliberal arguments provide cover for the reproduction of tired inequalities.

Neoliberalism, with its focus on rationality and cost-benefit analysis for decision-making, offered a line of argumentation that would make Chauncey's closure seem the best option. First is the underlying assumption that *where* Chauncey children are taught is irrelevant. Being taught in Then Plains is no different from being taught in Chauncey when schooling is viewed as a place-less endeavor and schools are not viewed as

community institutions but mere training grounds for future mobile workers. By managing the discourse in this way, the only relevant question is whether students' classroom experiences will be affected. It becomes possible to say that no harm will come to students who simply go to a different school. To argue otherwise was labeled as sentimentality at best and selfishness at worst.

Second is the call to sequester the costs of the budget shortfall to Chauncey alone by arguing that it would minimize the cost side of the cost-benefit equation by impacting a smaller number of people. This new framing presented during the school board public comment period had an obvious effect on the greater closure discourse, with the formerly-sympathetic editor of the newspaper writing the next day that "whatever the school board decides is in the best interest of the school district as a whole and in the long term," which by this point was used to mean not allowing costs to come to schools beyond Chauncey. That the negatives will always befall the same rural people under such a logic is swept under the rug using language of neoliberal rationality. This line of argumentation is an example of urbanormativity by commission, as Chauncey as a rural area will always be a numerical minority, which is used to justify treatment that also makes Chauncey a marginalized political minority as well. Utilitarian rationality and neoliberal cost-benefit logic such as this will by definition target rural areas for negative treatment in order to "reduce harm" to the larger majority, regardless of the injustice of this action being pointed out by Chauncey resisters.

CHAPTER 6. IMPACTS OF CONSOLIDATION, THEN AND NOW

In this chapter, I outline the impacts and coincidental changes that accompanied the gradual consolidation of Chauncey's schools. Beginning within the schools, then radiating out to affected parents and the community at large, I found that the negative impacts of consolidation were born mostly by Chauncey's students and residents. The closure of Chauncey Elementary, for example, was not framed as problematic for its impact on school class sizes in the district, but this overlooked the fact that Chauncey's children saw an increase in the number of children in their grade-level of over 200%. This concentration of negative impacts occurred even in circumstances where all students were intended to benefit. For example, in both generation of closure, parents and school personnel in Chauncey described processes by which Chauncey's children were excluded from participating in the amenities provided at the new school. These negative outcomes spilled over from the schools outward, as parents and community members of Chauncey described becoming less involved in the school system and generally less likely to attend school events.

I argue that this concentration of negative effects and exclusion to Chauncey and its residents mark Chauncey as a political sacrifice zone. The concept of a "sacrifice zone" was initially used to describe the phenomenon of certain places being allowed or forced to bear the environmental costs of energy production in order to serve the 'greater good' (see for example: Fox 1999; Kuletz 1998; Lerner 2012; Scott 2010). For example, Fox described the tendency for mining-dependent parts of Appalachia to bear the costs of mountaintop removal mining, in which the top of a mountain is blown up to expose and extract coal, with the rock, soil, and debris pushed into valleys and ponds of chemical

waste created nearby to wash the coal, sacrifices deemed necessary for the nation's energy needs (Fox 1999). Scott examined the social processes by which West Virginians came to allow for their homes to be treated as sacrifice zones, paying particular attention to the role of masculinity and national identity in convincing people of the justifiability of this treatment (Scott 2010). By embracing the production of coal and accepting the sacrifice that came along with it, West Virginians, especially men, were able to carve out a place in the national identity that has often been barred for Appalachians as victims of othering (Scott 2010). Thus, the construction of a sacrifice zone is not merely a question of convenience or necessity but is intimately tied up in the production and reproduction of inequality.

This concentration of costs in Chauncey to serve the "needs of the many" in the school district, plus the exclusion of Chauncey's children and residents in the new schools, are evidence that Chauncey became a political sacrifice zone. Initially coined in relation to environmental injustice and the relegation of certain communities as expendable, here I argue that environmental harms are not the only negative outcomes that can constitute a sacrifice zone. In Chapters 4 and 5, I outlined how the policies and narratives that justified the closure of Chauncey's schools relied on urbanormativity of omission and urbanormativity of commission in concert to make policies that impacted only a small minority of people seem like an acceptable option. The processes by which the schools of Chauncey were gradually shuttered and the impacts that radiate from those closures constitute the creation of Chauncey and its rural area as a political sacrifice zone.

6.1 Educational/student impacts- reinscribing rural marginalization

As I noted in Chapter 2, the literature on school consolidation suggests that attrition and absenteeism may be short-term impacts of school consolidation for students whose schools are closed. This literature generally has not examined the social processes by which this attrition occurs, instead focusing on the possible structural changes wrought by consolidation, such as changing bus schedules. Here, I will outline the impacts of the consolidations on Chauncey Dover Local Schools and Chauncey Elementary School on student's educational experiences. I found that, rather than being the product of only structural changes, the post-consolidation periods featured the reproduction of Chauncey's marginalization along lines of place and class as children from Chauncey were excluded from participation in the new opportunities afforded by the consolidation.

6.1.1 Historic Marginalization- the Impacts of the Chauncey Dover Consolidation

The consolidation of Chauncey Dover Local School District into Athens City Schools was justified largely on the basis that a larger school district would allow for greater breadth of curricular and extracurricular offerings, as outlined in Chapter 5. However, not all types of curriculum expansions were equally accommodated by the consolidations, and the pattern of decisions constituted urbanormativity by omission. As discussed in Chapter 4, Athens City School District was, at this time, experimenting with an alternative curriculum and grading scheme for placing students into academic tracks. Upon consolidation, however, Chauncey's parents requested that the district expand its vocational offerings beyond those included in this curricular change. Athens City Schools opted not to join the tri-county vocational high school that would have accomplished this request. Instead, the district proposed that Athens City students attend the vocational

school on a tuition basis. This decision was emblematic of the ways that costs were externalized to Chauncey and decisions made that ignored unique rural needs from the earliest days of the consolidated district.

Further, throughout multiple interviews and during participant observation, residents of Chauncey made clear that in the immediate aftermath of consolidation, Chauncey's students were explicitly or implicitly excluded from participation. This process of reproducing the rural-urban and class-based hierarchies within the new school contrast with the above example where rural needs were simply not considered. Here, anti-rural stereotypes were leveraged to affect who had access to the limited resources of the new school, constituting instead urbanormativity by commission as teachers and other students actively sought to marginalize Chauncey's students.

Mitch, a student who graduated just before the Chauncey Dover consolidation, described in his interview a particularly violent example of Chauncey students' exclusion when his cousin joined the newly merged football teams. In the year prior to consolidation, both Chauncey Dover's and Athens City's football teams won their respective football championships. He described the consolidation of the teams as a microcosm of the larger consolidation, with tensions running high over who would make the team. Mitch's cousin, coming from the Chauncey team, was violently excluded from team following an injury he sustained during practice at the hands of an Athens teammate.

While the story of Mitch's cousin was particularly brazen, stories of othering and exclusion like it were common. In their interview, Robin and Anthony, the parents of a

talented Chauncey high school girl described their daughter's first few weeks of school in Athens' new advanced English course:

> Robin: The first day of school they asked all their names and the teacher asked what their parents did… And of course, Tony at that time was working [a job that required] trigonometry, you know, you're not a dummy. But [our daughter] said [that job] and she said before class was over… Well, she came home, and she said "Mom, some of my grades might go down in some of my classes." So, I said "Why?" and she said "Well, I'm going to concentrate on English. There's no way I'm not going to be in there" because I guess the teacher said at the end "Well, I'm glad you're all here but we're going to have to weed some people out."
>
> Julia: Oh really. And this teacher knew there needed to be weeding on day one?
>
> Both: Mhmm [confirming]

Their daughter attributed her experience of othering, of being marked as not belonging in the advanced curricular classes, to her teacher's perception of their family's class status, but it is also important to note that this process of "weeding out" was deemed important in the context of the newly consolidated schools. In the face of newly available resources, the perceived class of students was used to determine who did and did not deserve to take advantage of them. However, the consolidation of Chauncey Dover with Athens City was the incident that incited this new wave of exclusion, implying a view of Chauncey's rural students as simple, incapable, or unprepared. The teacher may have used a marker of class to weed students out, but it appears she thought of Chauncey's crop of students as particularly weedy.

Anthony and Robin went on to say that their daughter's experience of exclusion on the basis of class and place was not unique. Anthony went on later in the interview to reflect on Chauncey students' ability to participate in new or continuing activities at the new school, with Robin reflecting on the extent to which that pattern remains:

> Anthony: Yeah, they [Chauncey] had a good band. Had a good football team. Basketball, baseball. You know, they didn't have all the other sports then, like tennis and soccer and those, but football, basketball, and baseball. Then after they consolidated it was more luck than anything. There'd be at least one, maybe two kids from Chauncey playing on the consolidated team.
>
> Robin: Now that changed after a while a little bit. It was very difficult at first. Very difficult. But on Friday night here, the whole, you know… Just about everybody in town would go to the football games, you know.

In the survey, one man who was the second of three generations in a row to attend schools in Chauncey connected this experience to Chauncey's rurality, stating of the decision to consolidate with ACDS "We were a proud community that was absorbed into a huge system where our kids were looked down upon".

This perceived pattern held when examined on using document analysis. Based on the high schools' yearbooks before and after the consolidation, the rosters of student activities did appear to have fewer students originating from Chauncey than from Athens for both the activities that were continuing and from the new activities. This exclusion is particularly important given the fact that expanded opportunities was such a central justification for the revoking of Chauncey Dover High School's charter to operate. The consolidation proponents argued that opportunities would be expanded, but access to those opportunities remained highly stratified. Chauncey Dover schools were consolidated to improve their access to educational opportunities, but without closer attention to the social processes of marginalization, these new opportunities were much more likely to be taken up by students who were already privileged along lines of class and place.

6.1.2 Modern Marginalization- Losing Chauncey Elementary

Residents of Chauncey at the time of the study remained skeptical of the extent to which the promise of expanded opportunities for their community's children was kept. As with many school consolidations, the closure of Chauncey Elementary was justified in part by the promise that the closure would expand educational access to Chauncey's children but also (and very importantly) not result in any cuts to opportunities in other schools. Closing Chauncey, the argument went, at least would not result in any losses of activities across the entire school district. Chauncey's children could, at least nominally, participate in programs that were offered to the school system at large.

Despite these justifications, residents of Chauncey reported similar perceptions as in the 1960s that Chauncey's children were excluded from participation in activities in their new schools. Approximately half of survey respondents reported that because of the consolidation, the children of Chauncey were actually less able to access new school opportunities after the consolidation, with 53% saying Chauncey children are able to access opportunities less easily than before the decision. As with the closure of Chauncey-Dover, the children from Chauncey Elementary were othered after the transition, as Rachel, the parent-leader introduced in Chapter 5, described. She said of her children's experience of moving into The Plains Elementary and eventually Athens Middle School "Well, everyone knew who the new kids were and knew if they were from Chauncey or not. And the residents of Chauncey always felt like second-class citizens anyway". Two survey respondents reported that it is just as easy today for Chauncey children to access these new opportunities, while only 35% of survey respondents report that it became easier for Chauncey children to access new opportunities.

As discussed in Chapter 5, a second key justification in the consolidation of Chauncey Elementary was reducing the negative impact of the budget shortfall on other buildings. By closing Chauncey, the students of other schools would not need to shoulder the burden of budget cuts that would befall them if the shortfall were distributed throughout the district. This is evidenced in the meeting minutes of the school board meeting where the decision was made. In the official record, the closure of Chauncey is the only budget-reduction item that is listed as an action item. All other actions, including to "review" bus routes, staffing and administrative positions, the use of substitutes and overtime pay, professional leave, field trips, and curricula; "discuss" compensation and benefits; and "monitor" energy conservation measures.

At other points, the concentration of negative impact in Chauncey and, to a lesser extent The Plains, was obscured. For example, in the public comment period on the decision to close Chauncey, a West teacher in favor argued that with the consolidation, the district's average class size would only rise from 17 students to 19 students. This use of statistics obscured the fact that only Chauncey and The Plains children would see a direct impact on their class sizes. Based on school census data, Chauncey children grades K-6 saw on average a 221.1% increase in the number of children per grade level when they moved from Chauncey Elementary to The Plains Elementary. The largest increase was for Kindergarteners, who experienced a 384% increase. The Plains, after being the default school into which Chauncey children were transferred, saw a 23.2% increase in the number of students per grade level. The other elementaries in the district saw an average increase of only 11.6% over the same time period. Literature suggests that increased class size may negatively affect academic achievement (Howley et al. 2011)

especially in elementary school aged children (Etim, Etim, and Blizard 2020), as well as decrease the number of student-teacher interactions in the classroom (Blatchford, Bassett, and Brown 2011). The decision move Chauncey's students to The Plains did not only open Chauncey and The Plains students up to the potential negative impacts of consolidation. The decision to move the students to the second-most economically disadvantaged and rural school in the district also concentrated the negative effects of class size increases to the most marginalized as well.

The impacts of the consolidation on how inequality was concentrated in the district was not obscured from Chauncey residents, who frequently pointed out the ways that the closure caused further class-based segregation between the schools. Chrissy stated that she "really did feel like the low-income population in this district was being targeted. Not only Chauncey, but also The Plains as the community that Chauncey had to relocate to. It made sense because they had space, and I don't think that was the full intention of the process, to do that. But that is what happened. I don't think that was really assessed until [the board] went 'Oh my gosh, do you know how many people are on free and reduced lunches in this school?'".

6.2 Parental involvement/Community impacts

The decline in participation in school activities was not limited to Chauncey students; parents and community members also described becoming less active in the school system in the wake of Chauncey Elementary's closure, something commonly found in urban literature on school closure (Green 2017; Lee and Lubienski 2017). Prior to the consolidation, many residents described the community being very active in the school system. Alice, a former teacher at Chauncey who retired the year of the

consolidation decision, described the school community as deeply involved, stating "They had a really active PTO. Our… teaching aids lived in town, so as teaching assistants, they were all from the community. Parent teacher conferences, you know, we had really good turnout for that, or we [the teachers] could say 'Call us' or we could go to their house talk to them [the students]. So, I think it was a real love for this school and you know a lot of community involvement because it".

When surveyed, residents of Chauncey reported that the consolidation left them less likely to attend high school sporting events, while 29% said they were just as likely to attend. Approximately half said they are less likely to attend high school arts events, with 53% saying they are less likely and 47% saying they are equally likely to attend. This pattern of being less likely to attend or being unaffected held for middle school sports events (50% report they are less likely to attend and 42% report no changes in attendance), middle school arts events (46% are much less likely to attend and 46% saying they are just as likely) and elementary school events generally (where 62% report they are less likely to attend and 38% are just as likely to attend). Notably, very few, if any, respondents reported that this change increased their attendance in school activities.

Rachel, who was deeply involved in her three children's school while they were at Chauncey, described the impact of the consolidation as spilling over from her children's dwindling participation in extracurriculars, but also attributed this to perceptions of other parents. While she attended Parent Teacher Organization meetings early in her youngest child's transition to another elementary, she couldn't attend meetings regularly and found herself doing "grunt work" rather than having a more active planning role as she had in Chauncey. After this, her participation fell off when her children entered middle school.

Beyond this spillover effect, parents and teachers from Chauncey also described being othered by parents throughout the district following the consolidation. Rachel went on to describe the process of joining parent groups through the new school, where she perceived that other parents "looked down their nose at you sometimes. Not all of them, but just a few that you could tell were like 'why are you here in our school?'". This perception wasn't limited to the school or to Rachel. Dolores described having faced similar attitudes county-wide, recounting having been pushed out of school participation by a schoolmate from Athens:

> Dolores: Well, I had someone say to me, and I'll never forget this, someone that… I met that year [I went to Athens High School]. They were very dear friends to me, and he said to me "Oh do you still live out to Chauncey? Hahahaha [mock tittering laughter]". Just like, you know, it was kind of a joke or something. And I thought, "Well, my place is just as nice as your place that's in Athens".

Experiences like Rachel's and Dolores' highlight the extent to which class and place are intertwined in the minds of Athens County residents, but also that class privilege does not protect a person from the stigmatization of zip code. These findings are reflected in the literature on school consolidation, as parents and residents from the consolidated school become less involved (Green 2013, 2017; Vaughan and Gutierrez 2017). This exclusion and retreat compounds the impact of class on parental involvement, as working-class parents are less likely to intervene on behalf of their children and less likely to have political sway over the school by virtue of their class standing (Calarco 2020; Lareau 2000). As such, this exclusion of rural parents intersects with class disadvantage in Chauncey, where more parents are also working-class or lower income, demonstrating the extent to which rurality operates as a unique source of inequality related to, but not interchangeable with, social class.

6.2.1 Structural changes coinciding with consolidations in Athens County

While my analysis does not allow for a causal link to be established, I analyzed demographic and economic changes in Athens County, Athens City, and Chauncey Village in the years following the consolidation. These changes, whether caused by or simply coinciding with the consolidation, may influence the perceptions residents hold about how the decision has impacted Chauncey. Katherine Cramer argues in her work that perceptions of rural-urban inequality are a frequent component of resentment among rural people, with many of her respondents arguing that governments give more resources to urban places than rural (Cramer 2016). Here, I find that Chauncey did experience both population declines and declines in median family income in the years following the consolidation.

In the decade between the 2010 and 2020 Censuses, the state population in Ohio remained relatively stagnant, rising only 2.3%. Athens County lost population during this time, declining 3.6% over the decade, while Athens City remained nearly unchanged. Chauncey Village declined in population by 8.6%, dropping from a 2010 population of 1,049 to 959 in 2020. Based on the American Community Survey's 5-year estimates from 2010 and 2018, the percent of Ohio families below the poverty level remained steady from 2010 to 2018, when it was at 10.4% (+/-0.2%). Both Athens County and Athens City also remained steady with 2018 family poverty rates of 17.4% (+/-2.3%) and 17.5 (+/-4.5%) respectively. Chauncey Village's family poverty rate also stayed stable over the decade, remaining at 26.9% (+/-12.4%) in 2018, far above that of the rest of the state and of Athens City.

While large margins of error make the claim tenuous, Chauncey's median household income stagnated in the wake of the consolidation, declining from $36,250 (+/-$26,368) in 2010 to $35,170 (+/-$7,315) in 2018. This stagnation differed significantly from the state median family income, which rose from $59,680 (+/-$274) to $69,837 (+/- $323), the county which rose from $48,170 (+/-$2,276) to $58,308 (+/- $4,835), and Athens City, which rose from $63,370 (+/-$6,168) to $78,304 (+/- $8,741). This stagnation in income, while not tied causally to the consolidation here, is not anomalous in the literature on the economic impact of school closures (Heinz 2005).

These economic inequalities between locales in the district have disparate impacts when examined in relation to taxation. According to Jennifer, a local government official in the Village, the school district tax rate for Athens City School District has been significantly higher than those of neighboring districts. Being a statistical minority in the district, changes to the district tax rate are largely unchangeable by Chauncey residents. Jennifer pointed out the frustration of being asked to pay such a tax rate in a much lower-income part of a relatively wealthy district, stating:

> Jen: One of the things as mayor that I've really found is causing us a lot of lasting effects from the consolidation is the school district taxes that are imposed on us here in Chauncey… It's affected [Chauncey] Village in a lot of ways because we can't turn to taxation for solving some of our revenue issues here.

Jennifer points out that the Village of Chauncey does not typically vote to levy municipal taxes for infrastructure projects such as fixing potholes or replacing signage because of the disproportionate cost of school taxes on the Village. She connects these problems explicitly, stating that:

> I pretty openly contribute that [the refusal to pass municipal taxes] to the school district taxes that we're paying because they're incredibly high. Far higher than our neighboring school districts and Chauncey has the highest property tax rate in the county. But when you look at the break down, our municipal rate is very low and that's just because the school tax rate is so high in comparison.

Further, Chauncey's position as a space of concentrated poverty within a relatively wealthy school district means that they are less likely to benefit from progressive education funding policies, another point Jennifer highlights in her interview:

> Jennifer: I think if we still had our own school district, we would still get a lot of help from the state without needing to impose the type of taxes that Athens is imposing on us here. So, when we look at other school district rates, it's really hard to look at Trimble school district rates and be like… you know because we have one of the highest poverty rates in the county and yet we're not reaping those benefits that we could be getting from the state.

Jennifer's points highlight multiple issues at hand in Chauncey around the issue of taxation. First, Chauncey is a minority within the district and is unable to muster enough political power to refuse a levy for the district. This ineffectual position in the district coincides with post-consolidation feelings of detachment from the district and less willingness to support the school district, sentiments I will turn to next. However, multiple interviewees claimed that, whether Chauncey truly did refuse school levies, the perception that Chauncey was unsupportive financially was used to justify treating the community as a second-tier region of the district. This cycle of marginalization deepened political divides, as I will discuss next.

It is worth pointing out here that these impacts, both structural and interpersonal, within the school and outside it, are concentrated in Chauncey. As noted in Chapter 4, the decision to close Chauncey Elementary was the only cut proposed, with all other

possibilities mentioned for later consideration. The budget shortfall was born exclusively by Chauncey, despite being a problem faced by the whole district. The experiences of exclusion and othering, the population and income declines, and other negative outcomes that flowed from the sequential shuttering of Chauncey's schools were also concentrated among Chauncey's residents. As described in Chapter 5, this was justified using the logic that by concentrating the costs in a place with a smaller population, costs could be reduced for "the many". This concentration of negative impacts in order to save other places from experiencing them has been described as the creation of a sacrifice zone when in reference to environmental damage (Fox 1999). As I will discuss in the conclusion of this chapter, Chauncey has been constructed here as a sacrifice zone to save residents across Athens City School District from having to experience cuts themselves. The resulting negative impacts that stemmed from the closure of Chauncey's schools could have been mitigated had the costs been shared in a more equitable way.

6.3 Community Perceptions of Consolidation Impacts

To this point, I have focused on the impacts directly experienced by those involved in the schools as they consolidated and the structural changes that coincided with the closures in Chauncey. However, I argue that community perceptions of the consolidation process are their own type of impact, regardless of whether a causal link between consolidation and the changes can be established. As Cramer argues, feelings of resentment are not always rooted exclusively in measurable inequalities between rural and urban places, but also in the perception of injustices (Cramer 2016).

In the case of Chauncey, residents were keenly aware of inequalities produced by the consolidation and the role of social class and rural marginalization in their execution.

Upon being asked to reflect on the impact of Chauncey Elementary's closure, 94% of survey respondents reported that impacts stemming from the decision reverberate through Chauncey today, with a majority saying the impact is large. These perceived impacts include that the closure led to outmigration and more transient residents, described in multiple interviews and captured in Dolores' sentiment that "Well, the people are not going to move into a community where there's no school. If there was a school here, it would entice people to move here to go to school, but when they have to move here and then bus their children to another school, it has changed the people of the village". The majority of survey respondents believed that the decision to close Chauncey Elementary was a very bad decision (58%) or a somewhat bad decision (29%). This sentiment was the overwhelming majority, with only one person reporting that the impacts were neutral and one reported that it was a somewhat good choice. No respondents reported that they thought it was a very good choice upon reflection.

While the sentiments about the decision to close Chauncey Dover Local Schools was more divided, it is clear from my observations and interviews that feelings about the decision run just under the surface of Chauncey residents' perceptions of their place in Athens County. From my first Village Council meeting, residents referenced the decision to close the schools without prompting, often using the events as a stand in for the types of poor treatment that Chauncey should expect from Athens. Respondents reported that the decision to close Chauncey Dover Local Schools also continues to impact the community today, with all 11 respondents agreeing that the original closure impacts life in Chauncey. Respondents were more divided on the impact of this original consolidation, with 64% reporting that the decision to close Chauncey Dover was a bad

decision, two remaining neutral, and two reporting that the decision had a positive impact. Dolores described the feelings surrounding the decision to consolidate the district as negative, stating that "Well, there was a lot of hard feelings… They just felt like the state said 'Well, this is it, you have to do it'". The feeling that the state and other actors beyond Chauncey had decided the fate of Chauncey's schools became a common refrain over the course of my fieldwork. Such sentiments of resentment and skepticism of the state's interest in rural areas has been documented by other scholars of rural politics (Ashwood 2018b; Cramer 2016).

Many resisters to the closure shared feelings of confusion or skepticism about the plan's underlying rationale during the debate over whether to close Chauncey Elementary, feelings that were not assuaged after the final decision was made. After this decision was announced, this skepticism transformed into cynicism about the process. After the closure announcement, posters to the Save Chauncey Facebook group were generally unconvinced that all the alternatives to closing Chauncey were seriously considered. Near the time of the decision, one poster asserted that "The [claim] 'We didn't have any other options' is just a line… There are multiple options that are viable for our children and our budget", a framing that highlighted the nominal inclusion of Chauncey in "our" school district budget. This sentiment had not faded in the intervening years. When asked whether alternatives to consolidation of Chauncey were considered during the debate, 79% of survey respondents disagreed. Again, no one agreed that alternatives to closing the school were considered.

Resisters frequently speculated, both in posts at the time and later in surveys and interview, on whether anything could have impacted the decision, but the most common

refrain at the time of interviewing and surveys was that nothing they could have done or said would have impacted the debate. Chrissy, for example, noted that the speed and timing of the debate didn't allow for any alternatives to be discussed or implemented, recalling:

> Chrissy: We all knew that Chauncey was going to close. I don't think at any point did I feel optimistic that anything I could ever write or say to that board or to [Superintendent] Martin would in any way impact it. I felt like the decision had already been made and I'm not at all a conspiracy theorist. I don't feel like this was an evil plot.

Of course, it is impossible to know with certainty whether the Superintendent and school board of Athens City Schools weighed the alternatives to closing Chauncey. It is possible that the decision did nearly have a different result. However, it cannot be missed that, when asked to reflect on what impacted the debate, Chauncey residents, in both survey and interviews, reported that they felt the decision to close the school was predetermined.

Residents of Chauncey frequently described feeling that Chauncey's concerns were not considered during the debate, either because they did not have the ear of the administration or because of class and place marginalization directly. Reflecting upon the debate after the decision was made, a common source of influence residents reported having impacted the debate was how vocal the opposition groups were, with 94% of respondents stating that this impacted the decision. This attitude was reflected by a Chauncey teacher, who was quoted in the newspaper as saying, "I think the number of parents that would speak up about it is less here [than at other Athens elementary schools]".

Chauncey residents frequently tied this lack of consideration for alternative solutions to Chauncey's marginalized status as rural and low-income. For example, one Chauncey parent responded in the survey that "We felt that once again Chauncey and its residents' views and opinions did not matter. It reinforced residents' views that they are looked down on by others in the county. That they are less important because of where they live". Jennifer described Chauncey as "low hanging fruit" when budget woes came to the fore because "There probably weren't as many engaged parents financially that would use their voice to stop it from happening and any political clout". Chrissy was also explicit in this feeling, stating that it "really did feel like the low-income population in this district was being targeted. Not only Chauncey, but also The Plains as the community that Chauncey had to relocate to… I don't think that was the full intention of the process, to do that. But that is what happened." This sentiment that the community's financial marginalization was repeated in nearly every interview I conducted.

Some residents connected this marginalization to voting history on school district taxes, claiming that the administration did not value Chauncey because of the community's refusal to support levies. I have already noted that residents described becoming less willing to support the school district in the wake of the consolidation. These circumstances set off a cycle of deepening resentment among some residents. One resident, for example, described their frustration with the superintendent's treatment of the community:

> Julia: So, it sounds like you're saying that the parents here had the least money and they got swept under the rug?
>
> Interviewee: That's exactly what it was. Like I said, he goes back to [Supt.] Martin and saying he never relied on Chauncey to pass a levy because we didn't have the money to do it. It all came down to the parents and at West

> and Morrison Gordon and East have money and they're going to fight for the parents who will support them financially before they will for the parents of children who actually need to help.

Residents of Chauncey frequently described the decision to close the school and the impacts that stemmed from this not only as an unfavorable position or even an injustice, but a betrayal of their community by a political institution that was intended to represent them.

Despite being separated by decades, residents discussing the closure of Chauncey Elementary School connected this decision directly to the consolidation of Chauncey Dover into Athens City Schools. Few claims came up as frequently in my fieldwork as the collective memory that Athens City Schools had broken the promise made in 1967 to maintain an elementary school in Chauncey. Residents repeatedly described this promise in relation to the decision to close Chauncey Elementary, narratively connecting the two events and interpreting it as an example of urbanormativity by commission.

While I found no formal record of any such promise, its existence came up in 9 of 11 interviews, multiple instances in the Facebook page, in observation during Village Council meetings, and in survey open-ended responses. The closure was still a point of contention, as described by Chrissy when discussing her feelings following the announcement in 2012, stating, “A lot of the bad blood came up that said, ‘They’re doing it again’. That’s where a lot of the [Chauncey Dover] alumni came from. ‘They promised us back in the day that we’d always keep our elementary’”. Jennifer also connected this promise to feelings of resentment today, stating that “This was their promise and now they’re being betrayed again. They already had to give up Chauncey Dover school into

the bigger district, but they were promised their elementary would stay and then it was taken".

This combination of feeling that the debate process was not treated genuinely combined with the narrative connection of Chauncey Dover to Chauncey Elementary's closure not just as a hurtful decision but as an act of betrayal of the community led to deep feelings of resentment about the governance of the district and of the county at large. For example, Rachel reflected on this period after the decision and the sense of futility that she says accompanied the decision:

> "After the decision was made to close the school, you kind of felt like [the board] let us talk but the decision had already been made. It didn't matter what we said. There was nothing we could have said. They were going to close the school. At that point it got really frustrating"

She went on to state that if Chauncey residents already believed that Athens County looked down upon them, then the closure of their final school without their input being considered cemented that feeling. Jennifer also reported having heard this sentiment in her role as a government official, stating that "I think [the consolidation] has made an impact in terms of… the way people feel about it is they feel like Athens isn't accurately representing our… folks here in Chauncey". Again, the consolidation was not just seen as an undesirable decision, but as a failure of governance.

Reflecting upon the debate, several Chauncey resisters reported that it was more painful to have had a debate that appeared not to matter than it would be to have not had a debate at all. This matters for the legitimacy of democratic institutions in the eyes of the rural residents they purportedly serve. Katherine Cramer's research on rural political beliefs revealed that rural people often view themselves as existing outside the concern of

their governments, which they perceive as urban-serving institutions (Cramer 2014). Public opinion polling suggests that many perceive rural places as receiving too little government support, though my results indicate that this doesn't mean urbanites and suburbanites are willing to share cost burdens with rural people (Parker et al. 2018). Sixty-five percent of survey respondents report that they are less likely to support their local school system in the wake of the decision to close Chauncey Elementary School. Just over half say that they are equally likely to support the school system after the consolidation, and one respondent reports they are more likely to support the schools. Survey respondents also report that they are much less likely to attend school board meetings in the wake of the consolidation, running contrary to the sentiment shared immediately after the decision was announced. Despite a desire to "hold the board accountable" to Chauncey and its children, 69% of respondents report that they are less likely to actually attend the board meetings today. Taken together, these sentiments demonstrate a deepening disconnect from the school district not only as a community space, but also as a publicly supported institution. This resonates with the anti-state sentiments that Ashwood describes in her disambiguation of rural political attitudes about the role of government in addressing rural needs (Ashwood 2018b).

These feelings extend to governance beyond the school district as well. Survey respondents in Chauncey reflected this attitude and overall did not perceive that the implications of the closure for Chauncey were high priority to the school board, with 85% disagreeing that the implications were prioritized. A large majority of respondents report feeling that the residents of Chauncey are unimportant to decisionmakers in Athens County (92%), and to the decisionmakers of Athens City Schools (100%). This

skepticism of local governance is divided when it comes to the decisionmakers of Chauncey Village itself, where 38% report that the decisionmakers for Chauncey Village do not care about the residents of Chauncey, while 54% report that they believe Chauncey's own decisionmakers care about them. When asked what actually matters for how a person is treated in Athens County broadly, most reported that what part of the county a person resides in impacts how people are treated (85% agreeing), eclipsed only by how much money a person has (92% agreed). While I did not encounter explicit anti-state attitudes like those described by Cramer (Cramer 2016), Hochschild (Hochschild 2016) or Ashwood (Ashwood 2018a), it was clear that few residents of Chauncey believed that the state served them as rural people, and many residents reported being less likely to support the school system in the wake of the consolidation. I discuss my findings in relation to this literature on rural political identities in my Conclusion chapter.

6.4 Conclusion

Examining students' experiences within the schools post-consolidation, my respondents describe outcomes commonly found in prior literature. As has been found previously, students from the closed schools in Chauncey were reported to participate in fewer advanced academic offerings and extracurricular activities (Alsbury and Shaw 2005; Nitta et al. 2010; Sell and Leistritz 1997). Some residents of Chauncey cited known factors in depressing their students' participation, such as longer transportation times and less school accessibility (Killeen and Sipple 2000; Lee and Lubienski 2017; de la Torre and Gwynne 2009).

Here, I expand on prior work by examining not only the role of structural change in excluding rural students, but also the social processes by which students and teachers

re-drew the lines of inequality in the new school. As I noted in Chapter 2, the increased availability of school opportunities should not be confused with increased participation in those activities, as Chauncey students in the 1960s and 2010s were both reported to experience exclusion from these opportunities. Through processes of othering, these students and teachers marked rural and lower-income students as outsiders who didn't belong in the highest academic tier, as with their daughter, or on the larger division's football team, as with Mitch's cousin. Parents and community members who were previously involved due to their children's involvement suddenly found themselves with fewer reasons to join parent groups. Community members at large were less likely to attend high school sporting and arts events,

As with many circumstances documented in urban areas, the consolidation of Chauncey Elementary into The Plains did not result in students being moved into a higher quality school (Jack and Sludden 2013), a circumstance that may be associated with declines in academic performance (Engberg et al. 2012; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). Instead, the combination resulted in the two schools with the highest rate of free-and-reduced price lunch and lowest achievement being combined, coupled with an increase in average class size of over 200% for Chauncey students. Prior literature suggests that such increases in school and district size may more negatively impact students from lower-income families (Howley 1996; Howley et al. 2011).

Beyond the impacts that can be directly tied to the closure of Chauncey Elementary School, Chauncey also experienced a population decline and stagnation of median family income that was unique compared to the state, the county at large, and to Athens City. While I am not establishing a causal link with my study, these changes

would not be unprecedented in the literature (Heinz 2005; Lyson 2002; Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019), and, as I have argued, the perceptions of these changes are impactful in their own right, especially when these changes are so tightly concentrated in areas of the district already marginalized.

These outcomes and their sequestration in the rural, low-income parts of the school district mark Chauncey and other outlying regions of ACSD as the district's "sacrifice zone". Coined as a term to describe environmental injustice, the term "sacrifice zone" has been used to refer to the process of sacrificing the people and environment of a specific place in service of the public beyond it (see, for example: Fox 1999; Lerner 2012; Scott 2010). In Scott's assessment of mountaintop removal coal mining (MTR) practices, she examines the social processes by which such a destructive environmental practice became normalized, naming the roles of masculinity, whiteness, and economic dependence in constructing mining as part of a positive regional character in contrast with the mountain-dwelling "other" (Scott 2010). Other studies before and after have examined the creation and impact of sacrifice zones, but it is for this attention to the social production of sacrifice zones that I highlight Scott's work.

Much like the creation of environmental sacrifice zones, Chauncey and other rural regions of the Athens City School District have been structurally designated as the metaphorical low points where the problems of the district settle. The decision to consolidate Chauncey's school into The Plains Elementary School sequestered the impact of the district's budget woes to Chauncey and perhaps The Plains. Much as the harm of MTR is sequestered while the source of the demand for coal is ubiquitous, the burden of

the budget crisis in ACSD was ostensibly a district-wide problem whose solution was sequestered to the most spatially- and economically marginalized parts of the district.

It is important here to note that the creation of sacrifice zones is a process of producing spatial inequality. The negative outcomes outlined in this chapter have disproportionately impacted low-income people, but the policies and decisions play out in specific places. Being wealthy in Chauncey did not protect those residents from the closure of their school, though I have argued that the class standing of Chauncey residents was central to the decision to close the school. This is an example of the importance of recognizing the intersections of place and class as distinct axes of inequality. Several of the residents I interviewed were long-time homeowners with white-collar jobs whose identity as Chauncey residents still marked their children for exclusion from opportunities in the consolidated school system.

The concept of the sacrifice zone also provides a lens for seeing the multiple expressions of spatial inequality, both on the people in the place and on the place itself. This distinction was highlighted in the Rural Sociological Society 2022 keynote address by Carolyn Finney, who argued that conceptions of place often center the people in the place but neglect the ways that inequalities and injustice are expressed in the places themselves (Finney 2022). The creation of an environmental sacrifice zone through MTR negatively impacts the people living in the zone, but it also negatively impacts the place itself (Fox 1999; Scott 2010). The impacts of consolidating the schools in Chauncey included negative impacts for the children othered by their class and place identities, but negative impacts accrue also to Chauncey itself. The school buildings, for example, remained empty for much of the time between consolidation and the present. The loss of

the value of those buildings as schools decreased their property tax value, thus negatively impacting Chauncey and Dover Township's tax revenue and potentially decreasing the housing values of the surrounding homes (Duncombe et al. 2016; Green 2013).

Chauncey's annexation into the Athens City Schools District occurred in stark contrast to the equitable consolidation and creation of a new identity created in Federal Hocking. Chauncey students were largely excluded from full participation in the programs that their presence made possible, both curricular and extracurricular. Leveraging the argument that the needs of the many must outweigh the harms caused to the few, Chauncey was justified as an acceptable place to concentrate the impact of the district's budget woes.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

While walking through the East Side of Athens in late 2017, I saw yellow yard signs featuring a cartoon one-room schoolhouse interspersed with the signs supporting progressive political candidates and issues typical of the neighborhood. The signs begged readers to "Save Our Neighborhood Schools", and in each corner was listed a community within the Athens City School District. East. West. Morrison-Gordon. The Plains. And Chauncey. Upon digging, I found that the Athens City School District was reviewing plans to consolidate elementary schools, possibly in favor of one or two grade-level buildings, rather than the five elementaries located in the communities listed on the sign. It was possible, I learned, that East Elementary would not be used for one of these grade level buildings and the school may be closed. This consolidation proposal was my initial planned case study, as I sought to learn how communities in rural places like Chauncey and The Plains would frame the role of their school in their communities differently from those in the heart of Athens. I drove to visit these schools in The Plains and Chauncey only to find that Chauncey Elementary School had not been in operation for nearly 6 years, and the building sat in the shadow of Chauncey's middle and high schools on the hill, long since closed.

Chauncey had in fact already lost its "neighborhood schools" in a tense and emotional fight that still comes up without prompting in conversations in the Village. This revelation that Chauncey had already lost not only its elementary school, but an entire independent district led me to question how residents of the Village might feel about their community being listed on the signs that sought to save other schools from a fate they had already been subjected to. Further, how had Chauncey Elementary School

been closed in a district that appeared to value its community schools so deeply? With these questions in mind (and encouragement from one Julie Zimmerman), I delved more deeply into the history of Chauncey's schools, the process by which they became the repeated target for closure in a community that valued their schools so much, and the impacts of those consolidations on the Village as a rural community.

The question of how rural residents might construct these events in relation to their rurality and Athens' urbanity is and was of particular political importance in the wake of the election of Donald Trump. In the time following the election, news outlets flocked to rural and Appalachian communities in droves to understand "Trump Country" and "Trumpalachia", the mythic lands where dwelled the people charged with having won Trump his victory (Billings 2017; Kaplan 2016). These representations of rural America generally and Appalachia specifically relied on familiar tropes of the region as backwards in their cultural tolerance (Billings 2017). This period also saw an increase in academic attention to rural political sentiment, with attention paid to rural feelings of political resentment of urban people (Cramer 2016) and feelings of rage from rural people (Wuthnow 2018). Hochschild's work on the rise of the Tea Party movement and Ashwood's work on rural anti-state sentiment examine the relationship between rural people and the state in an era of rural deindustrialization and repeated failures of the state to address rural crises (Ashwood 2018a; Hochschild 2016).

Despite this renewed attention to rural political sentiments, rurality is rarely examined as its own axis of inequality in popular musings on the topic. According to Pew Research Center in 2018, 56% of rural people said that they believed people in urban and suburban places viewed rural people negatively, and 70% of rural people said that they

did not think urbanites and suburbanites understood the problems faced by rural people (Parker et al. 2018). Rarely, it seems, do rural people feel that inequalities they face are understood by others. Despite the "spatial turn" in social sciences, rurality and place are often treated as background variables in which identity-based inequalities play out, contributing to a lack of research on rurality as an axis of inequality separate from class or race (Finney 2022; Lobao et al. 2007). In this project, I set out to examine how rurality was reproduced as an axis of inequality through interweaving forces at the macro- and micro-levels, as well as to connect those processes to their impacts on rural people and communities.

This project led to important insights into the reproduction of rurality as an axis of inequality and the role of policy decision-making in that reproduction. The first conclusion I want to highlight is the development of urbanormativity by omission and urbanormativity by commission as concepts useful for understanding the reproduction of rural inequality. As I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5, urbanormativity by commission refers to actions and positions which actively construct or leverage anti-rural sentiments, resulting in the production and reproduction of rural disadvantage or marginalization. Urbanormativity by commission can be practiced interpersonally, as described in Chapter 6 when an Athens consolidated high school teacher implied to a gifted student from Chauncey that she did not belong in the advanced course based on where she was from. This can also be less explicit, as when people actively push for policy decisions that will target rural people under the guise of cost-benefit analysis or minimizing harm without acknowledging that such decisions will *always* target the same rural people. I explored examples of this in Chapter 5 when a parent from West Elementary argued for

Chauncey's closure by stating that "The issue of shared sacrifice sounds equitable, but if you are looking out for the best interest of students, why would you diminish the educational experience of thousands of students to save a school that has 153?... The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few". In both cases, rural people were targeted for negative treatment with reference to their rurality, making these examples of urbanormativity by commission.

Urbanormativity by omission, on the other hand, refers to practices and positions that implicitly treat urban norms, social structures, and ways of life as the default, excluding rural norms, structures, and ways of life from consideration. Other scholars of education policy have articulated such a tendency in federal education policy, such as Eppley's examination of the anti-rural biases of the highly-qualified teacher provision in the No Child Left Behind policy (Eppley 2009). I explored examples of urbanormativity by omission in Chapter 4, as when the Ohio Schools Facility Commission funded facilities projects at the district level and required a building enrollment minimum for all projects in the district. This oversight incentivized school districts to close their smallest schools in order to secure funding for their remaining districts. A major influx of dollars to the OFSC was followed closely by a reduction in the number of schools in Ohio, despite a steady increase in schools and population leading up to that point (Asbury et al. 2011). In a cruel twist of irony, the OSFC's funding scheme meant Chauncey's lower income population boosted Athens City Schools' priority in receiving funds but assured that they would never see a dollar spent on a building in their community. Here, the OSFC attempted to address class inequality without also attending to rurality as an independent axis of inequality, engaging in urbanormativity by omission in the process.

This is not to say that urbanormativity by commission is the domain of interpersonal interactions and urbanormativity by omission only resultant from institutions. As discussed in Chapter 4, the state engaged in urbanormativity by commission in their approach to the consolidation of rural districts across Southeast Ohio. The state, in its high modernist approach to rural education, dictated the closure of rural schools by revoking charters, treating Chauncey and rural schools like it as provincial, insufficient, and in need of the state's urbanizing influence. The state also allowed the City of Athens to annex a portion of Federal Hocking Local School District when it became financially advantageous to do so, a move justified by stating that the children living there would be better served by the urban district. Neither are individuals unable to engage in acts of urbanormativity by omission. In conversation, the newly elected mayor of Chauncey repeatedly lamented the fact that officials and administrators from Athens and the state of Ohio seemed to forget that elected positions, even the mayorship, were not full-time positions in rural places like Chauncey. They would regularly schedule meetings to discuss the fate of Chauncey during business hours when she worked, repeatedly working from an urban default where such positions were salaried.

A second conclusion from my research concerns the impacts of consolidation and the marginalizing processes that stemmed from consolidations. I have argued here that the continual pattern of sequestering costs to rural places like Chauncey and the barring of rural people from the benefits of educational policy constitute Chauncey as a political sacrifice zone. Coined as a term to describe environmental injustice, the term "sacrifice zone" has been used to refer to the process of sacrificing the people and environment of a

specific place in service of the public beyond it (see for example: Fox 1999; Kuletz 1998; Lerner 2012; Scott 2010). This term is particularly useful as it describes the concentration of negative outcomes over time and in a specific *place*, which differs from attending to the intersecting inequalities faced by individuals. As discussed in Chapter 6, the negative outcomes of consolidation disproportionately impacted the individual residents of Chauncey by virtue of their "othered" status as both rural and poor. For example, many interviewees and survey respondents reported that the children of Chauncey were excluded, explicitly or implicitly, from participation in the opportunities the new school offered. In this way, rurality functions similarly to class and other identity-based inequalities as individuals are targeted for worse treatment.

In addition to this identity-based inequality is the construction of Chauncey as a sacrifice zone, a place where negative outcomes become concentrated. For example, the budget shortfall that followed the neoliberal cutbacks from the state were ostensibly a district-wide problem. However, through structural processes that incentivized closing rural schools and the social processes of othering and managing the debate, residents and administrators justified the concentration of cuts to Chauncey alone. This production of spatial inequality was facilitated by and compounded the inequalities already faced by Chauncey. While being wealthy in Chauncey could not save one from experiencing the closure, it was never lost on resident of Chauncey that the Village's poverty marked them as less objectionable targets.

My final conclusion relates to the changing role of the state in rural institutions and the production of rural inequality. As examined in Chapter 4, the earlier period of consolidation in Chauncey was marked by heavy-handed state intervention, where rural

schools were identified as inadequate and provincial by state-sanctioned evaluators, forcibly closed through the revocation of charters, and tightly constrained in their ability to respond, with rural voters prevented from consolidating with other rural districts. The role of the state in this process was characterized by what Scott referred to as "high modernist", which I describe in Chapters 2 and 4.

The state's role in the closure of Chauncey Elementary was markedly different, as the state never marked Chauncey for closure. Instead, the state was far more neoliberal, retreating from intervention in public services like education in favor of free market solutions. As stated in Chapter 4, Ohio was on the forefront of neoliberal education policy, being among the first states to receive a Race to the Top grant and actively expanding school choice voucher funding (van Lier 2011; McGuinn 2012). Given that the state did not target Chauncey for closure, I was surprised to find that anti-rural sentiments recorded in opinion editorials were far more prevalent during the 2012 consolidation debate than during the 1960s, an era when rural schools were actively labeled as inadequate.

I argue here that this shifting role in the state towards neoliberalism systematically excludes rural schools from consideration. Athens City Schools, while more urban than Chauncey, would likely not have the students needed to host a marketplace of school choice options, excluding the district from employing the free-market solutions being offered. The district still faced the resulting budget cuts, and when the deficits wrought by state budget austerity came down the pike, the state offered no solution suitable for a rural district. Confronted with any number of possible cuts, the administration and residents of Athens City Schools had to justify actively choosing to continue treating

Chauncey as a sacrifice zone, rather than simply responding to state mandates. As described in Chapter 5, this involved emotion management and othering of Chauncey resisters, relying heavily on stereotypes of rural people as stuck in the past and unwilling to change (Fulkerson and Lowe 2016). The ideological underpinnings of neoliberalism, with its focus on schooling as a human capital creation machine and governed by utilitarian rationality (Springer 2012) further facilitated the targeting of Chauncey, as "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few", in the words of a consolidation supporter from Chapter 5. As such, I argue that the shift towards neoliberalism left Athens City School District with fewer resources and more choices than prior closures, and in order to justify continuing to treat Chauncey as a sacrifice zone when other options were available, more anti-rural positions and practices were leveraged with renewed vigor.

7.1 Contributions to the Discipline

My research contributes to literature in the sociology of education and rural sociology on the reproduction of rurality as an axis of inequality.

In their review on school closure and consolidation, Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles argue that while literature on urban closures have more closely attended to the role of class and race in school closure, rural consolidation literature has not examined how these axes of inequality intersect (2019). Here, I have attended to how class and rurality were both leveraged in the incentivization and justification of Chauncey's consolidations. At times, class and rurality were used interchangeably as markers of otherness, as described in Chapter 5. A poster to the Save Chauncey Elementary Facebook page articulated the extent to which class and rurality were interwoven when

they lamented “Of course the snobbish ones would want to close Chauncey as if scraping us off their Prada heels”. At other times, rurality operated as an independent, but intersecting, axis of inequality. Being wealthy in Chauncey, for example, did not mean that a parent wouldn’t be impacted by the closure of Chauncey Elementary. In other ways, rurality and class intersected to doubly disadvantage Chauncey in the decision-making process. In the 1960s state guidelines, for example, the tax duplicate required to justify an independent school district meant that places with lower property values, namely rural places, would have to consolidate far beyond the size needed to hit a minimum number of students or consolidate with urban districts, as happened with Chauncey Dover. Later, these low-income regions of the district would bolster Athens City School Districts’ ranking to receive Facilities Commission funding, but they would be incentivized to close the school in this rural part of the district to meet the requirements.

Sociologists of education with an eye towards policy have criticized neoliberal education policy for its tendency to reduce education to what can be measured with standardized tests in an effort to make education more efficient and ‘accountable’ (Aggarwal, Mayorga, and Nevel 2012; Ball 2012; Johnson 2013; de Saxe et al. 2020). With regard to urban education, the retreat of the state from regulating teacher education (as with Teach for America) and operating schools (as with turn-around measures) has been criticized for using urban places as testing grounds for a new world of privatized and marketized education (Akers 2012; de Saxe et al. 2020). However, less attention has been paid to the urbanormativity inherent to neoliberal education solutions and the role this approach to policymaking plays in reproducing rural inequality. As noted in Chapter

4, neoliberal policies and budgeting incentivize school districts to reduce inefficiencies and minimize costs. For example, the Ohio Schools Facility Commission relied on districts proving that the money would be used as efficiently as possible in order for their grant to be funded over their competitors. Despite attending to socioeconomic status in the awarding of funds, the OSFC still incentivized the closure of rural schools for districts to meet these efficiency demands. Because rural places are, by definition, smaller and less densely populated, incentive structures such as these will repeatedly disadvantage rural places. In the case of Chauncey, this repeated disadvantage has compounded for over 50 years.

With regard to rural sociology, this study adds to the body of work using the theoretical concept of urbanormativity (Friesen 2018; Fulkerson and Thomas 2019; Pruitt and Vanegas 2015; Thomas et al. 2011; Thomas and Fulkerson 2016). Many studies of urbanormative ideas about rurality have focused on images and cultural representations of rurality (see Fulkerson and Thomas 2016b for an edited collection on the topic), but I contribute to this literature by examining how such ideas are deployed interpersonally to justify the continued urbanization of Athens City Schools and sacrifice of Chauncey in the process. By attending to the microsocial processes by which rural inequality is reproduced, I shed light on how the cycle of urbanormativity from structural urbanization to cultural urbanormativity and back is perpetuated. I also attend to how rurality functions both as a spatial and identity based axis of inequality, as both material and idealized (Bell 2007; Lobao et al. 2007).

7.2 Limitations of This Study

As with all studies, this project has limitations. First, as with all qualitative studies, my findings cannot be generalized to learn about the impacts of school consolidation, nor can I establish that the changes to the community of Chauncey following consolidation were causally linked. Instead, I have leaned into the strengths of qualitative work, namely deep description of social interactions, social meaning making, and the context in which interactions take place. My results are supported by multiple forms of data, which lend credibility and validity to my findings (Patton 1999). By attending to recurring themes and refining themes as they arose (Charmaz 2006), I have uncovered many possible outcomes to consolidation that could be studied using methods more suited to generalizability and causal analysis.

The second limitation relates to data collection. The ethnographic period of this study was cut short by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and attendant travel limitations. I initially planned to conduct between 12 and 15 months of ethnographic work and interviews with adults who attended or fought for Chauncey's schools, administrators, and children currently in school who experienced the closure of Chauncey Elementary. When my fieldwork ended abruptly after only 7 months, I found it difficult to maintain rapport and contact new interviewees through public means. This also limited my ability to engage in member checking my results with participants, which I would have liked to be able to do (Birt et al. 2016). I discuss the ways rurality and class impacted the data collection methods in Chapter 3, and the impact of the pandemic and urbanormativity of established research protocols shows in my interview sample sizes. However, the changes to my methods, especially increased reliance on document

analysis, offered greater opportunity to triangulate my findings (Orth et al. 2020; Patton 1999). The addition of social media analysis was especially useful to gain insight into the state of discourse at the time of consolidation and provided a different, but useful, perspective than my original plan to rely more heavily on participants' retrospection (Orth et al. 2020).

7.3 Directions for Future Research

This project opens multiple possible avenues for future research in the sociology of rural education and in the production and impacts of rural inequality. One avenue for future research on school consolidation would be to examine the relationship between consolidation and anti-state attitudes and actions. Prior literature has established that school consolidation is associated with signs of civic apathy, such as declining voter turnout and participation, and decreased community capacity (Alsbury and Shaw 2005; Green 2013; Nitta et al. 2010). However, my results suggest not only apathy, but more active resentment and distrust of local government, as well as declining tax support, may result from bitter consolidation processes. These feelings of resentment that urban government does not serve rural people has been documented by Cramer (Cramer 2016). Given that schools are often one of the last remaining public institutions in rural communities (Bard et al. 2006), school politics may be a key driver of such anti-state attitudes. Ashwood's analysis of rural anti-state attitudes suggest that these sentiments are diverse and not uncommon (Ashwood 2018b), and future research could examine school consolidation, among other losses of local educational control, as drivers of such ideas.

Another avenue for future research would be to further examine the interplay between neoliberal policymaking and urbanormativity. Prior researchers have articulated

the extent to which rural schools are excluded from consideration under neoliberal education policy (Eppley 2009; Howley et al. 2014). Here, I have argued that rural places are victims of urbanormativity by omission under such neoliberal education reforms but also that neoliberalism also offers salient justifications for the negative treatment and sacrifice of rural places. Future research may expand on the extent to which urbanormativity is inherent to neoliberalism by examining the production of rural inequality through urbanormativity by omission in other policy domains. Can neoliberalism, with its focus on free market solutions and utilitarian rationality, ever 'see' rural?

7.4 In Closing

Near the middle of writing this dissertation, I wondered whether, by the time I was done, the frenzy to explain rural people and their political actions would have died down, with rural politics returning to the recesses of the popular imagination. Since then, however, people have rushed to label right-wing political uprisings and violence with titles such as "Y'all Qaeda", "Yeehawdists", and "Spreadnecks", the first two referring to the January 6th Capitol riots in Washington D.C., among other protests, and the last referring to anti-mask protests during the Covid-19 pandemic (Nihlean 2021). The explicit tie to rurality as a central part of the protesters' identity is, perhaps unsurprisingly at this point, not supported by evidence. January 6th protesters were not more likely to have been from rural areas (Slepyan et al. 2022), and rural places were disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 in terms of disease burden (Lakhani et al. 2020). Despite these facts, these terms still invoke rurality as a marker of political otherness, a cultural stand-in for backwards and intolerant people with limited attention paid to the causes of rural

resentment and continued inequality. It seems that my topic has not lost salience in recent years.

Though my case study here is on school consolidation, the processes of marginalization of rural people and places and the justification of sacrificing rural places for the benefit of many are not intrinsically education problems. Even in a community known for its progressive stances such as Athens, the failure to address rurality as an axis of inequality can allow for the reproduction of rural inequalities. Though I never saw the residents of Chauncey described in such loaded terms as I described above, the 'common sense' of neoliberalism makes anti-rural positions all the more easy to take, especially under the threat of state austerity. While the cover of rationality may mask the injustice of repeatedly targeting the same people and places, such treatment does not seem to be lost on rural people, as evidenced in the growing body of research on rural resentment, rage, despair, and anti-state attitudes. It is my hope that by continuing to illuminate the workings of urbanormative inequality, the common sense that labels inequitable treatment of rural people and communities as anything less than drastic can be replaced with a vision of justice that includes rurality.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 SURVEY INSTRUMENT DESCRIPTION

This first block of questions (Questions 1 through 9) asks residents to reflect on life in Chauncey during and following the 2012 consolidation of Chauncey Elementary School into The Plains Elementary School. Question 1 asks residents where in the county they currently live, which also serves as a screening question for inclusion in the dataset should someone live outside the area. Question 2 asks residents the extent of the impact of the 2012 consolidation on life in Chauncey today with an optional open-ended follow-up. Questions 3 through 5 ask residents how the consolidation has changed their own relationship to the district and their perceptions of Chauncey children's relationship to the district. I developed these questions based on interviews in which multiple participants described a sense of distance from the consolidated district. Question 4 asks participants to assess whether students from Chauncey can access new opportunities as members of Athens City School District. This question was developed based on a recurring sentiment that consolidation was driven by the promise of increased curricular and extra-curricular offerings for students. This justification for consolidation is common in the literature (Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles 2019). However, interview participants at times suggested that access to these new opportunities was not afforded to students from Chauncey. To further assess how residents' participation in the district has been impacted, Question 5 asks residents to report how their participation in school-based events has changed following the consolidation, ranging from more popular community events, such as high school sporting events, to events likely attended mostly by family

members, such as middle school arts events. It also includes school governance participation, assessed through school board meetings. These items begin to capture an aspect of "subordinate adaptation" in response to the consolidation (Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Questions 6 and 7 ask residents their personal opinions about the consolidation decision, both at the time of the decision (Q6) and today (Q7) with an open-ended follow up on Question 7. This transition to thinking about the decision-process leads to Question 8, which asks resident what factors they perceive as having impacted the decision to consolidate. Residents can select as many options as needed from a list generated from interviews, meeting minutes, and the literature on consolidation. An "other" option with space for participant entry is also included. This is central to the study, as the stated bureaucratic reason for consolidation was not necessarily the reason that residents perceived as driving the decision to consolidate. This difference in assessment may both stem from and drive marginalization in the local political sphere. What matters for my research questions is not only the underlying assumptions enshrined in policies, but also the ways that resident perceive those policies and their implementation.

Question 9 asks residents the degree to which they agree with statement about the debate and decision to consolidate, including how residents of Chauncey were treated, whether and how seriously alternatives were considered, and how different actors in the debates acted and were perceived. This section was driven by a combination of grounded findings and theoretical insights driven by Schwalbe and colleagues' generic processes of inequality (2000) Item 9a ("Chauncey/Dover Township residents were treated as equal members of the school district") concretizes the theoretical concept of "boundary

maintenance", as the boundaries of elementary school catchment zones were often given cultural salience. Items 9b ("Alternatives to closing Chauncey Elementary were considered") and 9c ("Chauncey/Dover Township residents' voices were seriously considered") were driven by interview data, as the sentiment that the school board had already decided by the time of public comment was common. Items 9d ("People on my side of the debate had to keep their feelings to themselves") and 9f ("People opposed to closing Chauncey Elementary were seen as overly emotional ") concretize the theoretical concept of "emotion management". Literature on school closure highlights that "rational" goals of efficiency and individual student achievement dominate the policy conversation on closure. In my pilot research, I found that these arguments were mobilized in public debates to frame alternative concerns about community and children's wellbeing as emotional and irrational, placing a burden of emotion management on Chauncey parents.

The second block, Questions 10 and 11, as about the 1967 consolidation decisions. Questions 10 and 11 repeat the content of Questions 2 and 7, respectively, but about the 1967 decision to consolidate the districts, middle schools, and high schools. While residents may not have lived through this period, these events come up regularly in discussion around town and are obviously still salient aspects of local history.

The third block, Questions 12 and 13, ask about the processes and sources of marginalization in Athens County more broadly. Question 12 asks residents to what extent they agree that the residents of Chauncey are important to different decision-making bodies that represent them in the County, including at the County level, the school district, and in the Village itself. Question 13 asks residents to select which, if any

personal and spatial characteristics influence how someone is treated in Athens County, with space to list other options.

The fourth and final block, Questions 14 through 20, are demographic and life history questions. Questions 14 through 17 ask residents about whether they or their family ever attended school in Athens City School District and when. Question 18 asks when they first moved to the Chauncey area. Question 19 asks their year of birth. Question 20 asks their gender.

APPENDIX 2 INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview protocol for community members, leaders, and school affiliates

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. How long have you lived in the Athens area?
2. What's your relationship to Athens City School District and/or Chauncey-Dover School District?
    a. *Note*: whichever is appropriate
3. So you were _____ around the closure of _____ school. What was that experience like?
    a. *Note:* Whatever relationship is appropriate
4. How were you involved in the debate about the consolidation?
5. In your estimation, how did the decision to consolidate the schools come about?
    a. Probe: What made it a good/bad idea (whichever side they favor)
    b. Probe: What did the people who disagree with you think about it?
    c. Probe: were some places more for/against than others?
6. What did people on "your side" think about the people who disagreed?
7. What did the other side of the argument think about you and people who agreed with you?
8. What was the transition period after the consolidation like as a _____?
    a. *Note*: Whatever role is appropriate
9. What did the decision to close Chauncey _____ School mean to you at the time?
    a. *Note*: Whichever school is appropriate for participant
    b. Follow up: What does the closure mean to you now?
10. How has that closure affected the area or district, in your estimation?

Interview protocol for adult former students

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. How long have you lived in the Chauncey area?
    a. Probe: have they moved into/out of the county
2. What's your relationship to Athens City School District and/or Chauncey-Dover School District?
    a. *Note*: whichever is appropriate
3. What was going to school in Chauncey like for you?
4. So, you were a student around the closure of _____ school. What was that experience like?
5. What was switching from Chauncey to Athens like for you?
    a. Probe: For your friends?
6. In your estimation, how did the decision to consolidate the schools come about?
    a. Probe: What made it a good/bad idea (whichever side they favor)
    b. Probe: What did the people who disagree with you think about it?
    c. Probe: were some places more for/against than others?
7. What did people on "your side" think about the people who disagreed?
8. What did the other side of the argument think about you and people who agreed with you?
9. What did the decision to close Chauncey _____ School mean to you at the time?
    a. *Note*: Whichever school is appropriate for participant
    b. Follow up: What does the closure mean to you now?
10. How has the closure affected Chauncey, in your estimation?

Interview protocol for current students aged 12-17

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. Have you always lived around here?
    a. Probe: What school do you go to now?
    b. Probe for what grade they were in when the closure happened
2. So you went to Chauncey Elementary from grade __ to grade__. What was going to school in Chauncey like for you?
    a. Probe for where they were moved to
    b. Probe for where they went on to go to school (in ACSD or other)
3. What was switching from Chauncey to ____ like for you?
    a. Probe: For your friends?
4. How do you think this has affected the other kids from Chauncey? What about kids from other elementary schools?
    a. Follow up: Do people who went to Chauncey together still hang out together, or do the people from the different elementary schools mix?
5. How did you feel about it when Chauncey was closed?
    a. Follow up: What do you think about it now that you've gone to a different school?
6. Has Chauncey changed at all since the school was closed? How so?

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VITA

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EDUCATION-

2017- University of Kentucky

M.A.- Sociology "First-generation College Students' Logics of Action Around Social Networking"

2015- Ohio University

B.A.- Sociology & Psychology- Magna cum laude; Certificate: Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS HELD-

2021-present- Fairmont State University

Assistant Professor of Sociology- Department of Behavioral Sciences, College of Liberal Arts

AWARDS, GRANTS, AND HONORS-

2020 Summer Dissertation Fellowship: University of Kentucky ($2,000)

Student Government Association Travel Grant ($500)

Sociology Department Student Travel Award: University of Kentucky ($350)

Graduate Student Congress Student Travel Award: University of Kentucky ($300)

Appalachian Center Student Travel Award: University of Kentucky ($145)

2019 Rural Sociological Society Dissertation Award "Let's not Do Anything Drastic: Processes of Reproducing Rural Marginalization in Education Policy Decision-making." ($3,000)

James S. Brown Graduate Student Award for Research on Appalachia: University of Kentucky "Let's not Do Anything Drastic: Processes of Reproducing Rural Marginalization in Education Policy Decision-making." ($1,000)

College of Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teaching Award: University of Kentucky ($500)

Sociology Graduate Student Teaching Award: University of Kentucky

Sociology Department Student Travel Award: University of Kentucky ($300)

2018 Eller and Billings Student Research Award: University of Kentucky "Spatializing Processes of Inequality: School Consolidation as a Case Study in Urbanormativity" ($1,000)

Social Action Initiatives Award: Sociologists for Women in Society ($950)
Sociology Department Student Travel Award: University of Kentucky ($250)

2017 Sociology Department Student Travel Award: University of Kentucky ($500)

Graduate Student Congress Student Travel Award: University of Kentucky ($400)

2014 Psychology Research/Teach Scholarship: Ohio University ($1,000)

2011 Department of Psychology Alumni Scholarship: Ohio University ($1,500)

Ohio State Good Sams Scholarship ($700)

2011-15 Gateway Excellence Scholarship: Ohio University (Full In-state Tuition)

Dean's List Scholar: Ohio University

PROFESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS-

Miller, Julia M., Julie N. Zimmerman, Kathryn Engle, and Cameron McAlister. (2022). "Meals in the Mountains: Examining Longitudinal Changes in Rural/Urban Food Prices." in *Journal of Appalachian Studies*. doi.org/10.5406/23288612.28.2.04

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