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The Social Maze: Navigating the Space Between Cultural Ideas and Social Action in an Urban World

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**The social maze: navigating the space between
cultural ideas and social action in an urban world**

by

Karen Quance Jeske

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Sociology

Program of Study Committee:
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Ames, Iowa

2010

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I worked as an urban planner before pursuing a graduate education in sociology and was privileged to have held a full-time lecturer position in Iowa State University's Community and Regional Planning Department for most of the time I spent as a graduate student. I was inspired by my colleagues in that department to pursue a career in academia that could also make a difference in communities. I want to especially thank Tara Clapp, Francis Owusu, Tim Borich and Tim Keller for their support and encouragement throughout my graduate education.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the paths individuals and organizations take to choose cultural ideas and transform those ideas into social actions. Each chapter is written as an article to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. Data for this set of articles comes from content analysis of the *Dear Abby* newspaper column, archival records from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the stories of professional city planners working in a particular planning context. These studies are not psychological examinations of why actors select certain cultural ideas over others. Rather, the studies examine the structural elements actors navigate in modern life such as the extent to which choices are voluntary; shifting cultural ideas and expectations; and the need for trusted sources for sanctions and rewards. The first chapter introduces the four chapters that follow and situates these within the context of social change. The second chapter uses content analysis to view the *Dear Abby* newspaper column from 1956-2005 as a modern reflection of Durkheim's concept of the *conscience collective*. The third chapter uses content analysis from twenty-one *Dear Abby* newspaper columns to examine the current relevance of neighboring. The fourth chapter uses archival information from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's collection at the University of Maryland to offer a case study of a social movement organization that has had and continues to have an influence on local development decisions. The fifth chapter uses the stories of professional planners to describe how conflicting institutional values are negotiated and used in a particular planning practice context. The sixth chapter is a general conclusion for the dissertation. It ties the preceding four chapters together and discusses the contributions and limitations of this study as well as areas for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SOCIAL MAZE: A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

At the level of the individual actor, we concentrate upon his path through a social maze. Social science is not concerned with the internal psychological field of the actor, but it is obsessed with the architecture of the maze, and the study of a random sample of urbanites may be an effective tracer of a society's organizational structure (Greer 1999 (1962):197).

The title for this collection of articles, *The Social Maze*, comes from the quote above from the 1962 book, *The Emerging City*. The title pays homage to author, Scott Greer, who often placed his writing about social organization in the “scene” of the city. More, importantly, the title signals the central theme of the research projects included in this collection, which make contributions to understanding how cultural values and ideas shift and how these shifts are communicated and adopted by individuals and organizations in a variety of settings.

From Planning to Sociology

The author of this collection came to study sociology during a fifteen-year career as an urban planner. That period featured significant urban changes that reflected many recent trends in urban development—increasing reliance on public/private partnerships, a broadening role for community development corporations, the rediscovery of city centers by upper middle income residents and the rapid adoption of a whole set of practices labeled “sustainable” that have aimed to change the way society views the economic and environmental potential of the city. Since the early 1990s., urban development, historically characterized as the huge, unstoppable juggernaut, “the growth machine (Logan and Molotch 1987)” has adopted a number of practices that once challenged the growth machine.

This milieu of urban change met the analytical tools and concepts of the sociologist, including, social organization and, especially, the interactions among cultural ideas, organizations and the social actions of urban citizens as well as actors empowered to shape urban change. A key lesson is the reflexivity that occurs between the structure of the larger society and the social organization of cities (Bourdieu 1984; Castells 1977; Giddens and Pierson 1998; Gieryn 2002; Gouldner 1980 (1971); Greer 1972; Harvey 1985; Lefebvre 1995 [1974]; Logan and Molotch 1987). Implicit in this reflexive relationship is change. Also implicit in this reflexivity is a great deal of multi-layered complexity.

Ultimately, the shape of the city is a result of many decisions and decision-makers, much of which is voluntary in nature. In this context cultural ideas have great power. In voluntary decision-making, there has to be a benefit in selecting one choice over another and, increasingly in cities and other realms of social life, cultural benefits are factored into decision-making along with monetary benefits (Bourdieu 1984). The goal of this collection of articles is to pick apart such complexity and begin an exploration of a variety of settings for understanding the links between cultural ideas and social action with the hope of better understanding the power of culture to shape social organization and social action.

Greer believed that understanding organizational structure “leads to a concern with the structure of norms, with the flow of communication that diffuses them, and with the sanctions that produce predictable behavior and effective coordination (Greer 1999 (1962):196).” In other words, organizational structure is understood through a society’s cultural values and how these values are formed, communicated and used to shape human behavior (Merton 1957). Greer believed these concerns could be observed in and among the everyday actions of individuals interacting with the mass media, industries, neighbors, local

organizations, ethnic groups, and social classes (Greer 1999 (1962)). This collection of articles takes each of these concerns and explores them in a variety of ways and at a variety of scales all rooted in the context of social change.

The subjects of these articles include urban newspaper readers and neighbors, as well as an organization with an urban agenda and urban planners. Although all of these subjects are not explicitly urban actors, they are all responding in some way to larger social changes, especially urbanization, and contribute to a better understanding of the “organization image of the city [which] requires information about interdependence, communication flow, norms and sanctions...that create a complex and relatively stable social structure (Greer 1999 (1962):197).”

The remainder of this introduction will offer a theoretical and methodological orientation to the articles that follow and will conclude with an overview of the articles themselves.

Social Change and the Individual

Beginning with Spencer (2009 (1884)) and Marx (1845; 1847) in the 19th Century, many sociologists have concerned themselves with the nature of large-scale societal changes and the resulting adaptations of individuals. Industrialization, urbanization and globalization are social forces observed in several levels of social organization including a greater division of labor; new and more specialization of social roles; greater bureaucratization and complexity of organizations; and new and more differentiated subcultures in society. These phenomena serve to make social life more complex, raising questions about the nature of social roles and correspondingly appropriate behavior in new situations or contexts.

Ferdinand Tonnies in *Community and Society* brought a cultural perspective to what he saw as the changing organizing principles of society from status to contract, from sacred to secular and from custom to law—and wondered whether or not society could survive such shifts (Tonnies 1963 (1957)). A social psychological perspective was offered by Georg Simmel, who viewed urbanization as changing every aspect of human life including human consciousness, such that the individual would become highly conscious of self and differences from others, separating the private self from the public self (Simmel 1950 (1903)). Simmel's social psychological perspective was updated for the American phenomena of urbanization by Louis Wirth who continued to argue that the urban consciousness is completely different in character from folk, i.e., traditional consciousness (Wirth 1938). Wirth suggests that large populations, increased density and heterogeneity make it less likely that individuals can orient themselves to urban life without the aid of formal organizations (Wirth 1938).

The concerns raised by these two perspectives are largely united in the work of Emile Durkheim who did not specifically focus on the city (1972 (1893)). Durkheim saw the transformation of the mechanical society, in which solidarity is based on the similarity of beliefs and norms, into organic society, in which solidarity is based on the division of labor, as having both positives and negatives (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). He appreciated the great expansion of human energy and capacity this change would bring about, but also worried about how to maintain social order in a world where shared beliefs and values would necessarily decline (Durkheim 1972 (1893)).

Since the early 20th Century, sociologists have continued to theorize about social change in general and American sociologists have worked specifically to apply these ideas to

the American experience. Their findings can be combined with the work of Simmel, Wirth, Tonnies and Durkheim and summarized as three cultural shifts that have altered the beliefs and behaviors of individuals.

1. *Society is becoming increasingly competitive for individuals.* As more emphasis is placed on upward mobility in American society and more opportunities are presented to individuals to differentiate themselves in some way, the conception of what constitutes success and the increasingly competitive means to achieving success become a normal fact of life for individuals (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1986; Durkheim 1972 (1893); Giddens 1990; Simmel 1950 (1903); Smelser 1968).
2. *Shifting cultural values and greater global communication of problems cause anxiety for people who are comfortable with existing value systems.* The comfort or familiarity people have had in parochial, homogenous communities has disappeared and given way to an urbanized, interconnected world in which people are forced to acknowledge and accept competing value systems, and they assimilate knowledge about more risks in their environment (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1986; Durkheim 1951 (1897); Giddens 1990; Merton 1938; Smelser 1968).
3. *Individuals increasingly rely on abstract systems for guidance and protection.* As urbanization and globalization have increased, the need for formal institutions and systems that provide individuals with information and examples of how to conduct their lives has also increased, replacing informal and more personal methods of accessing such information (Durkheim 1972 (1893); Giddens 1990; Simmel 1950 (1903); Weber 1978 (1922)).

Increasing competition, shifting values with messages coming from a greater variety of sources, and increasing influence of abstract systems in daily life, make life more complex for individuals. With the social changes individuals have shifted from lives led mostly in small villages and enclaves with extended families and largely homogenous populations to lives lived in larger and larger metropolitan areas. In addition, in the past century these changes seem to have happened quickly. Today, an American citizen is likely to live in the suburbs of a metropolitan area and work in a specialized field that did not exist forty to sixty years ago when their grandparents—living in the U.S. or elsewhere—were much more likely to have lived in smaller communities where they farmed, or were merchants or tradespeople.

People living two or three generations in the past had a much better understanding of the forces working within their lives. If they were not self-employed, they likely knew their boss outside the work environment and had a tangible grasp on business conditions and decision-making within their place of work and their community. They understood where their food came from, who their neighbors were, what their neighbors valued and what was expected of them. In short, they had a clearer understanding about the norms of everyday life.

Today, people's livelihoods are often controlled by people making decisions far away who are, in turn, controlled by large forces such as the financial markets, shareholders, foreign trade and government regulations. If an individual loses his or her job or a particular specialization falls out of favor in the marketplace, then it may require a new job or perhaps additional training. The food available in supermarkets is often shipped from long distances and with new concerns about safety and ethics of industrialized food production. Individuals may or may not know their neighbors and even if they do, they may have competing values

with them such that it is difficult to rely on one another or feel a sense of community. If people need help of any kind—from building a house to filing an insurance claim—they have to negotiate the complex bureaucracies of large corporations or the government.

In this environment, there are many competing beliefs and values to adopt along with various influences for undertaking social action. In short, everyone has choices to make and it can be difficult for social scientists to sort out patterns of cultural ideas and social practices from among all of the ideas, groups, and multiple levels of analysis.

This collection of articles examines the links between cultural ideas and social actions by studying the social processes and mechanisms used to translate cultural ideas into actions in a variety of settings. The key elements of social organization that are reflected in these pieces are the normative order and social structure. The normative order is comprised of values, norms and roles, which are influenced by culture (Scott 1970). The normative order then interacts with the social structure at various levels in order to comprise the social order (Scott 1970). The articles included in this collection view different parts of the social order at different levels of analysis. Using the *Dear Abby* newspaper column, archival records from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and narratives about urban planning practice, these articles also examine the micro/macro linkages within the social order. In different ways, each article helps to illustrate how macro-levels of organization are composed of daily interactions in the mass media, the work of one social movement organization, conflicts with neighbors and workplace inter-role conflicts, as well as how these micro-level structures adapt to the structure of macro-levels of social organization (Collins 1988).

Qualitative Orientation

Qualitative approaches offer significant benefits for understanding the questions of interest in this set of articles. First, in trying to understand how cultural ideas and social actions are formed, maintained and reformed, it is important to get information that is rooted in its natural settings and close enough in time to actual occurrences in order to see how real life is experienced and lived. Second, the data need to have enough depth and richness in order to discern sense-making processes. Finally, given the rootedness of this collection in social change, archival records available over sustained periods of time are the most valid data available for examining such changes.

This set of articles relies largely on historical, archival records, but also makes use of personal storytelling. Archival records were retrieved from newspapers to provide data for Chapter Two and Chapter Three in this collection, while archival records from the University of Maryland were used to provide data for Chapter Four. Chapter Five uses program records and archives along with the stories of six individuals. Archival records are particularly important for offering data that are grounded in real experiences at specific times and for specific uses. In each chapter, the data are used to tell the story of how cultural ideas and social actions are linked.

Dissertation Organization

In contrast to a traditional dissertation with conventional chapters, this one joins four stand-alone articles written for submission to peer-reviewed journals. The first article,

presented in Chapter Two, is titled, “*Dear Abby* and the Modern *Conscience Collective*¹.” Using fifty years of *Dear Abby* data, this article presents the *Dear Abby* newspaper column as a modern reflection of Durkheim’s concept of the *conscience collective* (1972(1893)). The findings offer a rich description of the state of the normative order and how it has changed over the past fifty years. Of particular interest is the degree to which the column has developed into a public forum for debating social values as well as the use of sanctions and rewards.

Chapter Three is an article titled, “Proximity Matters: Learning from Neighbor Strain in the Age of *Dear Abby*.” This article examines cases of neighbor strain presented in the *Dear Abby* newspaper column. The analysis reveals a tension between how letter writers and *Dear Abby* view neighbor relations, with *Dear Abby* viewing them as completely voluntary and letter writers feeling more obligatory about these relationships, generating anxiety when these relationships are strained. The article concludes that proximity acts as a type of constraint on the extent to which individuals perceive relationships to be voluntary. Further, this article also suggests that shared values and beliefs are particularly important in voluntary relationships.

Chapter Four is an article titled, “The Role Of Social Movement Organizations In Shaping Local Development Agendas: The Case Of The National Trust For Historic Preservation.” Using archival records to build a history of the National Trust for Historical Preservation, it contends that social movement organizations are critically important in

¹ The French term, *conscience collective*, is attributed to Emile Durkheim in his work, “The Division of Labour and Social Differentiation.” The English translation is collective conscience. Because the work in this collection builds upon Durkheim’s work in particular, *conscience collective* will be used throughout the collection.

carrying social movements through times of change and that adoption of cultural messages and values are particularly important in voluntary decision-making at the level of both individuals and organizations.

The last article is included as Chapter Five and is titled, “Advocacy and Professionalism: Negotiating Role Conflicts in Neighborhood Planning Practice.” This article views the author’s past experience as a neighborhood planner through the lens of a sociologist. The article uses an organizational history and the insights gathered from the “guided narratives” of neighborhood planners in order to understand how neighborhood planning roles emerge through professional and organizational expectations and are negotiated when roles conflict. The article illustrates how agency is navigated in highly bureaucratic environments and suggests neighborhood planning practice could be improved by additional support for planners’ roles as neighborhood advocates.

Chapter Six is a general conclusion to the collection that links together the relationships among key ideas from each of the articles as they relate to the navigation of cultural ideas and social actions.

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CHAPTER TWO

DEAR ABBY AND THE MODERN CONSCIENCE COLLECTIVE²

An article to be submitted in modified format to a sociological journal

By Karen Quance Jeske

Abstract

This article views the Dear Abby newspaper column for the contributions it makes toward understanding the normative order. Durkheim and other theorists posited that as we move from traditional societies to modern societies, the normative order would no longer be maintained by a collective moral conscience, but would rely mostly on judicial and administrative authority. This article views the Dear Abby column as a reflection of the modern conscience collective. Using fifty years of Dear Abby data, this article reveals that unlike the conscience collective of traditional societies, the modern conscience collective is voluntary in nature, dynamic and democratic. Further, because of its large audience and longevity, the Dear Abby column plays a role in society as a trusted source for information about expected beliefs and behaviors. In addition, the column can also be viewed as one example of how sanctions and rewards are issued through the mass media to influence beliefs and behaviors.

² The French term, *conscience collective*, is attributed to Emile Durkheim in his work, "The Division of Labour and Social Differentiation." The English translation is collective conscience. Because the work in this chapter builds upon Durkheim's work in particular, *conscience collective* will be used throughout.

Introduction³

DEAR ABBY: We live in one of the best neighborhoods in town. There is not one house on our block worth less than \$75,000. Some new neighbors moved in next door, and I understand they bought the house for the asking price and paid CASH.

They seem very nice, but they are weird. The first thing we noticed was that they didn't have a television antenna, so my little boy asked their little boy about it, and he was told they didn't have a television set!

They have only one automobile (and a two-car garage!) and the father drives the car to work every day. The children and the mother all use the bus. They rarely go anywhere, except to church. The wife doesn't have any fancy clothes or jewelry or furs. The children aren't permitted to have any toys dealing with war or violence. Could they belong to some offbeat religious cult? What do you make of them?

CURIOUS

DEAR CURIOUS: Maybe they've just got cash, conservative standards, high moral principles and pacifistic ideals.

They sound like ideal neighbors to me.

(Los Angeles Times April 4, 1977)

This letter featured in the Dear Abby newspaper column in 1977 is an everyday expression of the anxieties felt in modern society. When we size ourselves up against our neighbors, co-workers, other family members and so on, and we cannot discern a shared understanding of appropriate behavior or attitudes, we feel uneasy.

Writing in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, early sociologists could have predicted such a letter in 1977. This was a period during which the pace of social change was accelerating and there was concern about the transition of the social world to one that is more urban, dense, and heterogeneous; placing increasing emphasis on formal relationships,

³ Excerpts from the *Dear Abby* newspaper column appear in this dissertation as seen in DEAR ABBY by Abigail Van Buren a.k.a. Jeanne Phillips and founded by her mother Pauline Phillips. © Universal Uclick. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

bureaucracy, schedules, goal-orientation and efficiency (Durkheim 1972 (1893); Simmel 1950 (1903); Tonnies 1963 (1957); Weber 1978 (1922); Wirth 1938). Such large cultural and organizational shifts create questions for individuals about appropriate behavior or norms in new situations or contexts, and sociologists wondered how individuals would adapt to these increasing complexities in the social order. They predicted that the answers to questions for individuals would increasingly be found beyond the tight social circle, religious organization or small community of the past which provided a collective moral conscience, in favor of institutions, formalized bureaucracies and the mass media (Durkheim 1972 (1893); Weber 1978 (1922)). It is not surprising, then, that as the mass media grew during the 20th Century, individuals and the newspapers they read would conspire to create a new form of edutainment—the advice column.

Since 1956, the *Dear Abby* newspaper column has captured the everyday anxieties of Americans and published them in urban newspapers across the United States. Today the readership of the column is estimated at 110 million people published in approximately 1400 newspapers. In the letter above, the letter writer exhibits anxiety about the new neighbors, raising questions about expected beliefs and behaviors in the process. The letter writer is not sure if the new neighbor's approach to life is better or worse than the letter writer's own and is asking Abby⁴ for her interpretation of the situation. This letter was published in 1977.

Clearly, twenty-one years after starting her column, letter writers and presumably readers had come to value Abby as an arbiter in unclear situations. Abby is very clear in her response to

⁴ This chapter examines the normative order through the content of the published newspaper column, including the content of letters written to the column and the responses given by the author of the column. To distinguish between the column and the author of the column's responses, *Dear Abby* will reference the column and the author of the responses will be referred to as, Abby, as it appears in the column title and as she is referred to by the readership.

this situation—*if the neighbor's behavior is not doing any harm, don't worry about it!* The letter writer obviously receives this message as a type of minor sanction, but so does the readership and the message can be translated as—*we should all worry a little less about our neighbors and comparing ourselves with them, especially if they are doing no harm!* In this way, Abby's advice goes out to the public potentially shaping the normative order and offering guidance for negotiating the urbanizing world.

This letter also illustrates the connection between culture and norms and how they interact everyday in our lives. The author expresses a belief that everyone in her upper middle class neighborhood shares the same values and, therefore, should exhibit the same behaviors. The author of the letter does not see similar behaviors between the author's own family and the new neighbors and immediately wonders if they have a completely different belief system. The author goes further and distinguishes the neighbor's belief system as the one that is out of sync with the norm, wondering in the letter if the neighbors might belong to an "offbeat religious cult," not a flattering label.

This article will examine the *Dear Abby* newspaper column, specifically, the 50-year span of the column from its inception in 1956 through 2005. The goal of this analysis is to discover what sociological contributions these letters can offer, especially to better understanding of the changing normative order in modern American life.

The concept of an advice column seems straightforward enough. At face value, it is an accepted public forum, offering a service for individuals who need answers to questions. For everyday readers, it is edutainment. But from a sociological perspective, it is much more. It is, in fact, a cultural artifact, published daily in urban newspapers across the country since 1956. As such, it constitutes a multi-year treasure trove of social problems provided by

those who write letters to *Dear Abby*. More importantly, it is a source within the mass media for sorting out the normative order for everyday readers of the column, most of whom, do not actively participate by writing letters to *Dear Abby*. In this way, the column offers a unique type of reflexivity—or rather, both cause and effect. Letters written to *Dear Abby* are social acts that shape the content of this particular cultural artifact that, in turn, has potential to shape the beliefs and actions of the readership (Bourdieu 1993; Giddens 1984; Gieryn 2002; Gouldner 1980 (1971); Gudelunas 2008). The column also offers a unique connection between micro (normative behavior) and macro (cultural values) levels of social analysis. At the micro level, individual letters offer glimpses into the questions and problems of real people while the collection of all the letters over time offers potential macro level insights about areas of friction in the normative order. Analysis at these two levels allows for an assessment of the state of the normative order and the role advice columns may play in influencing the normative order.

The Conscience Collective, Anomie and Social Change

Anomie is the guiding concept for understanding the place the *Dear Abby* newspaper column occupies in the social structure. Anomie refers to the absence of norms. Since norms derive from culture, anomie can be viewed as either a lack of knowledge about appropriate goals or behavior or a lack of means for accomplishing appropriate goals or partaking in appropriate behaviors (Merton 1938; Merton 2000 (1968)). This study views each case of a letter written to *Dear Abby* as a type of anomie, positing that individuals write to *Dear Abby* when they are unsure of the norms in a particular situation and, in turn, their specific roles and prescriptions.

Anomie is a concept that has been in the public discourse at least since ancient Greek civilization when the term *anomos* was used to describe a breakdown in law. In classical social theory, Marx explored the realm of anomie with his concern about alienation (1845). He was concerned with changes being wrought by capitalism on the social structure during the English Industrial Revolution. He believed that as productive outputs were increasingly the property of owners, not individual workers, people would become disassociated from one another, their humanity, from the products they produced and the act of production itself (Marx 1845). For individuals, such a distancing or alienation would lead to powerlessness, normlessness, isolation, and meaninglessness (Marx 1845; Seeman 1959).

The concept of anomie has been developed most significantly in the field of sociology by Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1951 (1897); Durkheim 1961 (1925); Durkheim 1972 (1893)) and fifty years later by Robert K. Merton (Merton 2000 (1968)-a) both of whom, like Marx, rooted their interest in anomie in the context of social transformation. It is useful here to review both Durkheim's and Merton's conceptions of anomie. While Durkheim's ideas are fully developed on this topic, Merton elaborates them in useful ways and also reflects the specifically American setting within which the *Dear Abby* column is published.

Durkheim posited that as society increased in complexity, individuals would ultimately suffer from a surplus of choices in goals to strive for, causing restlessness and anomie as individuals divide their attentions and intentions (Durkheim 1951 (1897); Durkheim 1961 (1925)). For Durkheim his concept of the *conscience collective* describes the moral consensus of society (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). He uses this concept to describe the connection between social change and anomie. The *conscience collective* has four

components—volume, intensity, rigidity and content (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). It is considered to be strongest in traditional, mechanical or tight-knit communities with low density where values—the content of which was generated largely by religion—are shared, clearly defined and place a significant emotional and intellectual hold on the beliefs of individuals (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). In organic societies with greater population density, the *conscience collective* is weak, does not have such a strong hold over individuals, and the content can come from a diverse range of sources, any of which is not necessarily known or accessible to every person (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). Moving from a mechanical to an organic society, then, increases the instances of anomie as well as the range of potential sources or content of that anomie (Durkheim 1972 (1893)).

Merton elaborated on Durkheim's understanding of anomie, suggesting it is “a breakdown in the cultural structure, occurring particularly when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them” (Merton 1957:162). In other words, Durkheim viewed anomie as a type of goal displacement within society as individuals faced increasing choices or confusion caused by an increased division of labor (Durkheim 1893). Merton, also recognized goal displacement as a source of anomie, added that individuals lacking access to or understanding of legitimate means for accomplishing goals also constitutes a potential source of anomie (Merton 1938).

In addition to examining causes for anomie, both Durkheim and Merton looked at responses to anomie. Durkheim kept his view here at the societal level and posited that as anomie increased, not only would suicide increase, but so would behaviors that violated norms, including crime (Durkheim 1951 (1897); Durkheim 1972 (1893)). Further, as the

strength of the *conscience collective* decreases, individuality also increases and the old forms of punishment no longer work to let the individual know they have violated a norm (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). The movement, then, from mechanical to organic societies requires a shift from punishments meted by one's social circle or community designed to include emotional distress or suffering to restitutive punishments made by the courts and other mechanisms of administrative rule designed to make a victim or society whole (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). Punitive punishments were those offered by the *conscience collective* and served as a useful way to maintain social order (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). He predicted that as social organization evolved into more organic patterns, societies would have to continually balance anarchy with tyranny, for as individuals lose their shared values and beliefs the possibility of anarchy grows alongside the potential of tyranny developing in response (Durkheim 1972 (1893)).

Merton extended his development of anomie to include potential adaptations for individuals experiencing anomie (1938). He described five alternatives for how individuals might respond to anomie (Merton 1938):

- conformance to both cultural goals and institutional means
- innovating institutional means to accomplish personal goals
- ritualizing institutional means while sacrificing personal goals
- retreating from both personal goals and institutional means
- rebelling from both cultural goals and institutional means

Merton's adaptations (1938) elaborate upon Durkheim's conception of the *conscience collective* (1972 (1893)), showing how the *conscience collective* may function in modern life. Short of the anarchy or tyranny, Durkheim suggests that the *conscience collective* under

organic solidarity would be weaker than the *conscience collective* under mechanical solidarity, but would still be a source for beliefs and behaviors for individuals to adopt (1972 (1893)). Merton's adaptations, then, offer a description of the individual's relationship to the *conscience collective* in modern life, suggesting a variety of individual choices in adopting or innovating beliefs and behaviors in response to anomie (1938).

This study, viewing each case of a letter written to *Dear Abby* as a case of anomie, also views the responses from Abby as indicating a potential adaptation to anomic conditions. Given the large readership of the column, these responses have the potential to influence cultural values or the *conscience collective*. In addition, previous studies of advice column readers (Gudelunas 2008) as well as evidence from this analysis of the *Dear Abby* column indicate that advice columns are valued as public forums for debating values and norms. The reading public, then, can view the column as a modern mediator of the *conscience collective*, indicating shared values, expected behaviors and potential sanctions for not complying with the former.

This study of the *Dear Abby* newspaper column is inductive, drawing its inspiration from the early work of Durkheim and Merton, and takes the theoretical view that advice column letters may reveal much about the direction of social change and the current state of the normative order. The analysis presented here is interested in what Merton calls "simple anomie,"⁵ which "refers to the state of confusion in a group or society which is subject to

⁵ Since the 1950's the concept of anomie has been used extensively in the field of criminology. This type of anomie is what Merton would call "acute anomie" and represents a much stronger conception of anomie than what is revealed in the *Dear Abby* column (Merton 1957). Further, while Durkheim and Merton mainly endeavored to understand the larger social forces leading to feelings of anomie, researchers in the field of criminology have mainly been interested in studies of anomie at the micro level as leading, deductively, to a better understanding of the causes for criminal activity and other deviant behaviors, rarely focusing on the links

conflict among value-systems, resulting in some degree of uneasiness and a sense of separation from the group” (Merton 1957:163). *Dear Abby* letters are selected for publication because they reflect the general concerns received in all letters (Van Buren 1958; Van Buren 1981), signifying general areas of anomie—or confusions/ambiguities about social norms. Therefore, the letters written to *Dear Abby* reveal the changing nature of the types of conflicts that Durkheim and Merton suggest lead to states of anomie and add to insights about the relationship between large-scale social forces and uncertainty for individuals. But of course, *Dear Abby*, is more than a collection of letters (signifying anomie) written to a person with the pen name of Abigail Van Buren. It is a collection of questions as well as responses and this article will explore the role such an advice column plays in reflecting and influencing the content of the *conscience collective* in the modern era.

Researching *Dear Abby*

Dear Abby is a newspaper column that originated in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1956 by Pauline Phillips who had adopted the pen name, Abigail Van Buren. Generally speaking, the letters that are published seek advice, information, or mediation. The column quickly became a nationwide syndicated hit and continues to appear in approximately 1,400 newspapers, with an estimated daily readership of more than 110 million people. Since 1987, Phillips’ daughter, Jeanne Phillips, has written the column. The *Dear Abby* column was chosen because of its large daily readership in urban newspapers and its longevity, which allows for the study of social changes over time.

between anomie and social change (Agnew 1997; Agnew and Passas 1997; Cohen 1997; Messerschmidt 1993; Messner and Rosenfeld 1994).

Little is known about the specific procedures by which letters are selected for publication other than remarks found in Van Buren's two published books of collected letters. These books indicate that letters are selected in order to appeal to reader interest (Van Buren 1958; Van Buren 1981). In addition, a previous study on *Dear Abby* included correspondence with Abigail Van Buren. This correspondence does not include statistical support, but states that letters are chosen to reflect the interests of all who write to ask for advice (Taki 1985). There is clearly an element of entertainment to a newspaper advice column and not knowing the specific circumstances under which the selection of letters takes place, the generalizability of research findings may well be limited.

Others Who Have Studied *Dear Abby*—

In the world of advice columns, Pauline Phillips' success with *Dear Abby* was matched only by her twin sister, Eppie Lederer's success with the *Ann Landers* column. Neither pioneered the idea of the advice column, but both columns were established at a time of rapid growth in the syndication of newspaper columns during the late 1950s and 1960s. Many newspapers nationwide carried one column or the other and a few carried both columns for many decades. Since Eppie's death in 2002 and the announcement of Pauline's failing health in 1987, their advice-column empire has been carried on by Jeanne Phillips, Pauline's daughter, who is now the author of the *Dear Abby* column. Due to their immense popularity, both columns have, from time to time, been the subjects of scholarly research. Two books have looked at the role of Ann Landers in American society and Abigail Van Buren has authored two retrospectives of her own work in 1958 and again in 1981. In addition, the *Dear Abby* column has been the subject of three previous graduate studies in a variety of disciplines (Allen 1981; Keller, Walsh, and Zuraw 1975; Taki 1985).

One of the previous academic studies, for a journalism and mass communications master's degree at the University of Florida, examined the treatment of children reflected in all of the letters in the years 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, and 1980 (Allen 1981). Another graduate study, for the master's of social work at the University of Connecticut, included an examination of all letters between June 1, 1974 and December 31, 1974 and assessed the quality of advice given in the newspaper column as opposed to that which might be expected of professionals (Keller, Walsh, and Zuraw 1975). The third study was a comparative examination of *Dear Abby* with the Japanese advice columnist, Jinsei Annai (Taki 1985). Examining all of the letters published in 1983, the purpose was to compare social problems in Japan and the United States in the categories of Family Problems, Mental and Emotional Problems, Personal Problems, Love Affairs, Thinking of Marriage and Human Relations (Taki 1985). This particular study had a well-considered coding scheme that provided an initial framework from which to develop a coding scheme for this study.

More recently, David Gudelunas published, *Confidential to America: Newspaper Advice Columns and Sexual Education* (2008). In addition to exploring the role of advice columns in offering sexual education to the American public, this work also presents a full history of advice columns in American newspapers and includes an analysis of the Ann Landers column from 1955-2002. Gudelunas' work also includes analysis of twenty-five interviews with regular advice column readers and focus group participation of fifty-four individuals that includes both advice column readers as well as regular newspaper readers who do not read advice columns (2008). He concluded that people read advice columns both to view the problems of others as entertainment, but also to relate the problems of others to

their own lives, using the advice column as a form of analysis or affirmation for their own beliefs and behaviors (2008).

Data Collection—

The centerpiece of this research project is a time-series analysis of fifty years of the *Dear Abby* column.

Sampling Rationale

The sampling frame for this study is made up of every Dear Abby advice column from 1956 when the column began through December 31st, 2005. The source for letters from 1956-1974 is the *San Francisco Chronicle*; for letters from 1975-1995, half of 1996, 1998, and half of 1999, the source is the *Los Angeles Times*; and for half of 1996, 1997, half of 1999 and 2000-2006, the source is an online database. The use of different publication sources for the letters was based on availability. Recent years were readily available online. The letters published from 1975 through 1995 were available at the Parks Library only on microfilm in the *Los Angeles Times*. The Iowa State University Parks Library's collection of the *Los Angeles Times* only extended back to 1975. Prior to that date, the information was found in past issues of *The San Francisco Chronicle*, first at the University of Iowa's library and then at the University of Oregon's library on microfilm.

The fifty-year time span is stratified by each year—a total of 50 strata. For each year (or strata), twenty dates were randomly selected. Each month was assigned a corresponding number (1-12 where one was January, two was February, and so-on through twelve which was December). The month for each year was randomly chosen from a table of randomly selected numbers. The number chosen represented that specific year's starting month. The day of the month was also chosen randomly (numbers ranging from 1-31 for the total

possible numbers in a month). Following the random selection of a month and day for each year, every eighteenth day (based on 365 day per year divided by 20 dates selected per year) was selected as part of the sample until reaching the total number of twenty dates per year. In cases where a date that does not exist (April 31st) was selected, the next actual date was selected instead (May 1st or the next date with a current *Dear Abby* letter).

The typical format for a *Dear Abby* column has a question, concern, problem, statement, or testimonial from the general public followed by a response. Letters from the general public and Abby's responses were analyzed. If a date chosen during any given year did not carry the *Dear Abby* advice column letters, this day was also excluded, and the next day was selected as part of the study. For instance, if January 17th, 1978, was randomly selected but did not have a column or typical format, the next day, January 18th, 1978, was selected. If this day also did not have a column, then January 19th, 1978, was selected and so on. This pattern was continued until the date selected met the guidelines for the advice column format (question-answer letter). The total number of dates selected was 1000. The first letter from each column was analyzed providing a potential n=1000 letters from individuals and n=1000 responses from Abby. However, letters from particular dates that diverged from the standard column format (*i.e.*—"Dear Readers" or letters from Abby or special editions such as Mother's Day) were excluded from the quantitative analysis yielding a final n=960 for the quantitative portion of the analysis.

This study is both qualitative and quantitative and as Gouldner suggested (1980 (1971)), it is reflexive, in that it swings back and forth between the two approaches in hopes of greater accuracy. The analysis of the letters is qualitative in nature, but because each letter is short, a coding scheme was developed (see Appendix) that captures significant information

from each letter allowing generalization about the content of *Dear Abby* and changes over time through descriptive statistics. Still, the study is largely qualitative and inductive, offering detailed description of individual uncertainties and illustrating the role of advice columns in influencing the normative order.

The *Conscience Collective* Reflected in *Dear Abby*

The remainder of this article will consider the *Dear Abby* column as a reflection of the modern *conscience collective*. Unlike Durkheim's *conscience collective* of mechanical societies, the *Dear Abby* column reflects a *conscience collective* that is an innovation of the modern, organic society (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). The key to viewing the column as a reflection of the *conscience collective* is the column's longevity—in continuous publication since 1956; its widespread audience—publication in 1400 newspapers across the country with daily readership estimated at 110 million; and the format of the column—letters written by individuals posing questions about a variety of concerns along with Abby's responses which offer sanctions or rewards along with relief or suggestions for reconsidering or resetting expectations. The modern innovation to this *conscience collective* is its voluntary nature, offering further elaboration upon Merton's adaptation scheme (1938). Clearly, not everyone reads the daily newspaper and not every daily newspaper reader reads the *Dear Abby* column. Further, those who do read it or even choose to write to the column can independently decide whether they agree with or will follow the advice offered. As Durkheim predicted, it is not as strong a *conscience collective* as that under mechanical solidarity. Yet, its far-reaching scope and its format suggest that it does serve a role in society in sorting out competing values, shaping expectations, and suggesting appropriate behaviors (Gudelunas 2008). Although the methods in this study do not measure the

influence of the column specifically, its longevity, level of daily readership, the extent to which *Dear Abby* letter writers use the column as a public forum and Gudelunas' findings about the value readers place on advice columns in general (2008), suggests that the column has the potential to shape as well as reflect the *conscience collective*.

The results shared here provide a description of the content and functioning of the modern *conscience collective* of America, circa 1956—2005. Each section will include summaries of the content of the *Dear Abby* column and most will also include excerpts from the column that represent the content or concepts that are highlighted by the descriptive statistics.

Who Writes to *Dear Abby*?—

The majority of people who write letters to *Dear Abby* are women—61%; 17% are men and 22% are unknown. This ratio has stayed remarkably consistent throughout the history of the column and may reflect the fact that the concerns expressed in the letters are often highly personal.

What do the letter writers want?—

The majority of letter writers are writing to the *Dear Abby* column in order to receive advice. As reflected in Table 2.1, if the categories of asking for advice, information and mediation are combined, 67% of letters are written in order to have Abby solve a personal problem, leaving 31% of letter writers who are writing to give advice, information or a testimonial of some kind.

To Ask for Advice or Opinion	56%	(538)
To Ask for Information (factual)	5%	(49)
To Ask for Mediation	6%	(58)
To Give Advice or Opinion	15%	(144)
To Give Information (factual)	6%	(59)
To Give a Testimonial	10%	(96)
To Affirm or Thank	2%	(16)
TOTAL	(960)	

This ratio of two to one advice seeking versus giving, however, does not give an accurate picture of how the column has evolved. Table 2.2 reveals that this ratio has shifted significantly since the inception of the column. Since 1975, in fact, the ratio between advice seeking and advice giving is relatively even, reflecting the idea that the *Dear Abby* column has become more than just a place for Abby to dispense advice to individuals and that the column also functions as a public forum for sorting out personal problems and concerns. The large numbers of people writing to the column to give advice, opinion and testimonials indicates that these individuals believe the *Dear Abby* column provides a large audience to influence. This finding is similarly supported in Gudelunas' recent analysis of the Ann Landers column as well (2008).

Decade (N)	To Ask for Advice, Opinion, Information or Mediation		To Give Advice, Opinion, Information or a Testimonial	
1956-1965 (199)	86%	(172)	14%	(27)
1966-1975 (198)	85%	(169)	14%	(27)
1976-1985 (186)	60%	(111)	39%	(72)
1986-1995 (184)	46%	(84)	49%	(91)
1996-2005 (193)	56%	(109)	42%	(82)

⁶ The category, "To Affirm or Thank" was left out of this analysis due to negligible numbers.

The letter below is an example that illustrates the letter writing public's comfort with offering advice and opinions to other *Dear Abby* letter writers. Such letters are clearly intended to influence the *conscience collective*. In this particular case, the letter writer is resisting the ideas evolving from the sexual revolution. Interestingly, Abby does not respond here, but lets the letter stand on its own. So even though Abby may disagree with this letter, it was published. This shows that the author of the column also views the column as a venue for sorting out moral issues, allowing the reading public to see where there is currently agreement or dissent about particular issues.

DEAR ABBY: Please tell "Waiting"—the 41-year-old virgin—to keep waiting. A woman's virginity is still the greatest gift she can offer a man in marriage. Even though a man makes excuses for himself, he still prefers a virgin for a wife. Please don't conclude from my signature that I know nothing about life. I was in the business world for over 30 years before I became a priest.

SAN DIEGO PRIEST (Los Angeles Times March 31, 1969)

What and who do people write about?—

The majority of the letters written to *Dear Abby* are written about something or someone else. Table 2.3 describes the primary relationship or object written about in the letter. Only 11% of the letters are directly written with questions about the letter writer while 54% are written about other people⁷. The largest numbers of letters are written about members of the letter writer's nuclear family—31%.

⁷ Includes the categories Nuclear Family, Extended Family, Friends, Community, Co-Worker, Romantic Friend, Inlaws, and Customer, Client, Tenant

Nuclear Family	31%	(295)
Readership	21%	(200)
Self	11%	(107)
Romantic Interest	9%	(84)
Society	7%	(65)
Event/Situation	6%	(54)
Friends	4%	(42)
Community Members or Neighbors	2%	(39)
In-Laws	2%	(23)
Co-Workers	2%	(16)
Extended Family	1%	(12)
Animals	1%	(11)
Ex-Family	1%	(8)
Customers, Clients, Tenants	0%	(1)
Not Applicable	0%	(3)
TOTAL		(960)

Letters written about family members are often seeking advice because they are worried about a family member or mediation because there is a dispute with a family member. The following letter is a typical example of the latter and is a clear example of a letter writer debating changing values with himself or herself, asking Abby for clarification. The letter also illustrates an example of a letter writer confronting anomie directly and wondering whether to conform to a new cultural value or not (Merton 1938).

DEAR ABBY: We have a daughter who is 34 years old. She graduated from the state university so you know she is no dummy. She has been going with a divorced man for the past five years. According to her they have no plans for marriage. This man told our daughter that the best check he writes out every month is the one for his alimony, and he doesn't care to get married again. Our daughter is satisfied just to "go" with him. She has her own apartment and is self-supporting, but we think someone ought to tell her that "going" with a man with no marriage in sight is not respectable. Or do you think it is?

CHARLESTON

DEAR CHARLESTON: It is your daughter's privilege to "go with a man" if she chooses. Whether it is "respectable" or not depends on where she goes with him...and how far. (*San Francisco Chronicle* September 21, 1962)

Beyond Nuclear Family, the next largest category in Table 2.3 is Readership at 21%. The Readership code was applied to letters in which the letter writer stated outright that the letter was being written in response to a previous letter or was directly aimed at *Dear Abby* readers. The fact that one fifth of all the letters were written in such a fashion, again indicates the extent to which *Dear Abby* readers consider the column to be a public forum for airing and discussion of people's problems and concerns. Additionally, the Society category is also somewhat significant at 7% of all letters. Like Readership, this category relates to letters written to give advice or opinion to the reading public about a variety of topics with the clear intent of influencing the *conscience collective*. Combining Readership with Society creates a category of 28% of letter writers who view the column as a place to influence values and behaviors. This phenomenon suggests a concern on the part of some readers for perceived areas of collective, rather than just individual anomie (Gudelunas 2008). Letter writers perceive collective areas of anomie from reading the column or in their social environments that they then respond to with opinions and testimonials of their own for how others should adapt their beliefs and behaviors (Merton 1938). The following is an example in which the letter writer is challenging the cultural values of society in a public forum. Abby responds with alternate values—*do not assume you understand all of the facts about a situation through second-hand information, mind your own business, and do not judge others.*

DEAR ABBY: I am a Vietnamese refugee and have lived in Cleveland for two years. From my window I see a man about 75 come to see this lady friend often. I heard

from the neighbors that this friendship is over 20 years old. My girlfriend lives in another apartment, and visiting her I saw the same old guy visiting an older woman, every day of the month. I heard that this woman, now in her 80s, was in show business many years ago and has been married five times. I know we have a lot to learn in our new country about customs, habits, etc., but how can parents complain their children's morals are bad if the senior citizens act this way? I feel very sorry to see my neighbor fooled by this old wolf. In our country, we respect old people, and they are very respectable. I cannot understand the behavior of your senior citizens. I think this is rather unusual. Please reply.

FROM VIETNAM

DEAR FROM: It is not possible to know all the facts merely by what you see from your window or hear from your friends. Besides, in this country people of all ages are entitled to privacy. I don't know what religious beliefs you hold, but the New Testament says: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Think about it.

(*Los Angeles Times* May 10, 1977)

The problems that writers address in the *Dear Abby* column are varied. Table 2.4 offers a summary of the primary problem or concern expressed by the letter writer while Table 2.5 shows the changes by decade in the letters written about the top five overall topics. The most significant concerns deal with social etiquette, marriage, health and dating. The remaining categories are fairly insignificant in terms of numbers, but the variety and types of concerns and troubles and the changes over time in the prominence of the top categories do reflect changing social values. The fact that the most significant categories are social etiquette, marriage, health and dating indicates a need by many for advice regarding highly personal and intimate concerns. It also offers an indication of what people value. Social Etiquette has remained a consistently high concern for readers, indicating a continuing desire for a shared set of social rules. Marital Relationships and Dating have declined as primary concerns over the years as other issues have been introduced to the column, again indicating an expansion of the function of the column. Health and Sexuality issues, not surprisingly,

parallel interest in these topics in the general public with Health increasing over time and Sexuality peaking during the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s.

Problem	Percentage	Count
Social Etiquette, Manners, Traditions	24%	(233)
Marital Relationships	11%	(109)
Health	9%	(90)
Dating/Romantic Interests	8%	(77)
Sexuality	8%	(75)
Caring for Others	7%	(66)
Teen Problems	5%	(50)
Money	5%	(43)
General Relationships/Friendships	4%	(36)
Law/Criminal Activity	3%	(28)
Personal Attractiveness	3%	(28)
Death	2%	(23)
Animals	2%	(19)
Religion or Spirituality	2%	(16)
Work, Purpose, Balance	1%	(13)
Race, Gender, Ethnic Issues	1%	(11)
Abuse	1%	(9)
Stranger Danger	0%	(3)
Unmarried, Independent	0%	(3)
Other	3%	(26)
Not Applicable	0%	(2)
TOTAL		(960)

Decade (N)	Etiquette		Marital		Health		Dating		Sexuality	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
1956-1965 (199)	23%	(45)	18%	(35)	4%	(7)	14%	(27)	8%	(16)
1966-1975 (198)	22%	(44)	17%	(33)	9%	(17)	8%	(16)	12%	(23)
1976-1985 (186)	24%	(45)	7%	(13)	11%	(20)	5%	(10)	12%	(23)
1986-1995 (184)	30%	(55)	7%	(13)	13%	(24)	5%	(9)	3%	(6)
1996-2005 (193)	23%	(44)	8%	(15)	11%	(22)	8%	(15)	4%	(7)

The breadth of topics provides the reading public with opportunities to check their problems, beliefs, values, actions, and reactions against those of others with input from Abby at the same time (Gudelunas 2008). The following letter is an example of a letter writer

responding with a differing opinion about advice Abby had given in a previous column. The letter writer challenges the idea of loving your spouse no matter how attractive he or she remains after marriage. Abby clarifies her position, but stands firm in her response and wonders about the state of “loving and caring” in marital relationships. For the reading public, this exchange reflects there is no clarity in the *conscience collective* about this issue, but the exchange does offer dimensions for an individual to sort out based on his or her own values—fat or thin, sloppy or neat, healthy or not healthy, committed to love and caring or not committed. Such debates within the column illustrate a key way that the modern *conscience collective* differs from the *conscience collective* from societies based on mechanical solidarity which would not have provided opportunities for debate about beliefs and behaviors (Durkheim 1972 (1893)).

DEAR ABBY: I just read the letter from the man whose wife had gained 45 pounds and refused even to try to lose weight. You advised: “Quit nagging her. A loving husband will accept his wife the way she is.” Then you added, “I’ve yet to hear from a woman who would tell her overweight husband to either shape up or ship out.” Well, you’re hearing from one now.

My first husband was somewhat overweight when we married. He quickly added extra pounds. After experiencing high blood pressure, kidney stones and a heart problem, his physician told him to lose weight or prepare for surgery. The last time I saw him, he had gone up six suit sizes. I said goodbye.

I made my second husband model for me in his underwear before we were married. He was 6-2, 175 pounds, handsome, and a doctor to boot. Immediately after our marriage he started putting on weight. By our 10th Anniversary he had gained 90 pounds. (His breasts were larger than mine and he absolutely crushed me when we made love.) Meanwhile, I stayed within five pounds of what I weighed when I married him. He was shocked when I left him.

I realize that not everyone can stay slim and trim, but when a person quits worrying about his health and appearance, how can he expect his mate to find him desirable?

ANTI-FAT

DEAR ANTI-FAT: “Fat,” believe it or not, lies in the eye of the beholder. Fat and sloppy is not acceptable. Neither is thin and sloppy. Some overweight people are meticulously groomed and stunningly dressed.

We own it to those we love—and those who love us—to do whatever it takes to maintain our health. When obesity becomes a health problem, it’s time to bite the bullet instead of the blintz. But to leave a person because he or she has become fat? What ever happened to love and caring? (*The Los Angeles Times* October 30, 1988)

With Whom Do People Talk About Their Problems?—

As society has grown more complex, individuals have a wider variety of groups with which they come into contact within their lives (Durkheim 1972 (1893); Giddens 1984; Merton 1938; Simmel 1950 (1903); Tonnies 1963 (1957)). They have families, friends, co-workers, support groups, other professional consultants/confidants as well as members of other groups to which they may be affiliated with to interact. Individuals facing problems may turn to any number of such groups for advice or information. Table 2.6 looks at the role that Other Advisors play in the *Dear Abby* column.

No Reference Group Mentioned	42%	(403)
Response to a Previous Letter	20%	(189)
Family Member Other Than Spouse	9%	(84)
Spouse	8%	(74)
Friends	7%	(66)
Society/Media	5%	(52)
Significant Other	3%	(25)
Doctor/Therapist	1%	(13)
Co-Workers	1%	(13)
Community Members	1%	(12)
Neighbors	1%	(10)
Government/Law/Legal Authority	1%	(8)
School Official	0%	(4)
Church Official	0%	(3)
Business Associate	0%	(3)
Support Group	0%	(1)
TOTAL		(960)

Other Advisors are people the letter writer mentions discussing a problem/concern with prior to writing to *Dear Abby*. After combining the categories Not Mentioned and Previous Letter, only 38% of the letter writers reveal that they have consulted someone else. Although, many letter writers who do not reveal so, may consult with other advisors before writing a letter to *Dear Abby*, the fact that they write anyway suggests the need for a forum like an advice column.

The following letter is not only a testimonial to the kindness of others, but it is also a testimonial to the need for a forum like *Dear Abby* to reward and sanction advisors who are or are not supportive. This letter also suggests that the content of the *conscience collective* shifts as reflected by changing beliefs and behaviors described in the *Dear Abby* column. The letter, written in 1991, reflects a shift in general societal values from 1962 when unmarried, pregnant women may not have found much support in their families or communities. Both Abby and the letter writer are indicating to the reading public that values have changed since then and are suggesting that readers should evaluate their own beliefs and behaviors in comparison to this testimonial (Gudelunas 2008).

DEAR ABBY: The letter you published from the office women in conflict over whether a baby shower should be given for an unwed mother-to-be revived a long-forgotten memory.

In 1962, I was 17 and had just graduated from high school. I had to give up two college scholarships and take a job because I was pregnant and unmarried.

In those days, most unwed mothers were sent away to have their babies, then gave them up for adoption so no one in the family would be embarrassed. I chose to stay home and keep my baby.

I'm sure my parents were embarrassed and disappointed in me. The baby's father and I were immature, and a silly quarrel had caused our breakup. I was so depressed that I often considered suicide.

In my seventh month of pregnancy, 30 women from my office gave me a baby shower. I can't begin to tell you how much it meant to me to have those wonderful

women shower me with their good wishes and much-needed gifts. They literally saved my life and my baby's life.

That shower turned my life around. After that, I was able to hold my head up. When my son was a year old, his father and I got together and were married. Five years later, we had another son. I worked while my husband finished colleges, and after he graduated, I went to college and graduated in 1977. Today, our firstborn is married and has a son of his own.

Abby, when I think of how close I came to ending my life, I shudder. I also thank God for those wonderful women who didn't ponder whether it was proper to give a baby shower for an unmarried girl. That shower brought me out of the worst depression of my life.

Your advice was right on, Abby. Keep up the good work.

KAREN IN ROCHESTER

(*Los Angeles Times* March 15, 1991)

Abby's Responses—

Dear Abby could not reflect the *conscience collective* if it was just a collection of letters from people about their problems and concerns. The *conscience collective* also provides feedback about appropriate values and adaptations to anomie (Durkheim 1972 (1893); Merton 1938). The *Dear Abby* column reflects the *conscience collective* in that it also provides feedback. Therefore, the responses written by Abby have also been coded in order to reveal the potential role of Abby and other mass media advisors as public facilitators of the *conscience collective* and to look at suggested adaptations individuals may make to their problems.

Table 2.7 shows the five possible reward/sanction responses Abby could apply to any particular letter. These were coded based on Abby's wording in the response. For example, in a response to a letter that asked Abby to mediate between the letter writer and the object of the letter, Abby may have taken either side in the argument. If Abby's first point in the response is to tell the letter writer she agrees with their point of view the letter is coded as such even though such a response tacitly sanctions the object of the letter at the same time.

If, on the other hand, Abby's first point is to condemn the view or actions of the letter's object, it is coded that way instead. About 15% of the time, Abby did not reward or sanction any particular actor in the situation. What is interesting here is that 65% of the time, Abby targets her advice toward the letter writer either rewarding or supporting the letter writer or sanctioning the letter writer when Abby believes they are wrong about something. It is rare for Abby to target her advice at the object of the letter despite the fact that most letters are written about others and not the letter writer.

Reward/Support Letter Writer	46%	(438)
Reward/Support Object of Letter	7%	(64)
Sanction Letter Writer	19%	(181)
Sanction Object	13%	(130)
No Reward or Sanction Given	15%	(147)
TOTAL		(960)

The following letter is an example of a request for mediation between a husband and wife. The letter writer comments that his trust in his wife has been violated. They have argued this point together without resolution and are asking an impartial or trusted party to settle the dispute. Abby's response is to sanction the wife with an implicit reward for the husband for more accurately grasping the expected and appropriate behaviors within a marriage.

DEAR ABBY: I have worn a hairpiece for about 15 years and have been at my present job for the past five. My toupee was expensive and it's not obvious. I have never told anyone at work that my full head of hair isn't natural.

Last weekend at a work-related social function, my wife astonished me by mentioning to a group of my co-workers over cocktails that I wear a hairpiece. After we left the party, I became angry with her for making this revelation, but she refused to accept why I was so upset.

Then my wife had the nerve to say, “Don’t you think they already know you wear a toupee?” I told her I didn’t think they had any idea, but that was beside the point. The important thing was that I felt she betrayed a confidence.

Now she wants to ask someone impartial whether or not she goofed—so I’m asking you, Abby. Do you think she should have told my work associates about my toupee, and do you think I was wrong for getting upset with her?

BLOWING MY TOP IN OHIO

DEAR BLOWING MY TOP: Your reaction was understandable. Some “secrets” are supposed to remain in the family. Your wife’s indiscretion was cruel and uncalled for. It’s as out of line as it would be for you to tell her friends she wears dentures and falsies—she’d hit the roof. (www.uexpress.com March 15, 2002).

Of equal interest are Abby’s proposed solutions. In Table 2.8, it can be seen that by collapsing the data for changing expectations, goals, peers, or behavior, 30% of the time Abby is recommending that the onus is on the letter writer to make some sort of adjustment to improve their situation. In 23% of her responses, Abby suggests that the letter writer or the object of the letter needs some sort of intervention in order to improve a situation. Such an intervention may be a direct confrontation or it may be a referral to an authority figure of some type such as an attorney, the police, a therapist, a doctor or school official. Approximately 10% of the time, Abby does not give direct advice. Another 10% of the time she tells the letter writer to continue with their current actions, perhaps by offering some encouragement. Finally, approximately 26% of the time Abby just agrees or reiterates what the letter writer has said. This category is strongly correlated with those letters written to give advice or testimonials and serves as another type of public reward for people that support or reiterate the beliefs and behaviors reflected in the column.

Table 2.8 Solutions Proposed by Abby		
Letter Writer Should Change Expectations	11%	(107)
Letter Writer Should Change Goal	4%	(39)
Letter Writer Should Change Peers/Advisor	2%	(20)
Letter Writer Should Change Behavior	13%	(123)
Letter Writer Should Seek Intervention	23%	(216)
Letter Writer Should Stay the Course	11%	(105)
Letter Writer Should Rebel	0%	(4)
Abby Reiterates/Supports/Clarifys	26%	(246)
No Solution Offered	10%	(100)
TOTAL		(960)

The letter below offers an example of how Abby helps to solve the problems presented by the letter writer. In a time of shifting cultural values about the appropriateness of cohabitation versus marriage, a letter writer, objecting to this cultural shift, asks Abby for advice about how to handle the daughter's choice to "live with a man" while still maintaining a relationship with their grandchildren. Abby uses nuance and practicality here and suggests that the letter writer change his or her behavior in order to see the grandchildren, yet clarifying for the letter writer that staying with the daughter during a visit is not the same as giving the daughter their approval for her to cohabit. For the reading public, the message is the same and is an example of a coping strategy for individuals to adapt to and manage cultural shifts happening during the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. The message is that some changing values and beliefs will need to be tolerated to some degree in order to maintain important relationships, but that tolerance is not exactly the same thing as full acceptance of these changing values and beliefs.

DEAR ABBY: Please help us solve a problem that I know many grandparents are having now.

Our daughter lives about a thousand miles from us. She left her husband, took their son and daughter, and is now living with another man.

We are planning a trip to see her and our grandchildren, so I wrote and told her that because we do not approve of her living with a man she is not married to, we refuse to stay with her, but will stay at a nearby motel instead. She responded by saying that she had plenty of room in her home, and if we didn't stay with her, the children would start asking questions, so if we wanted to see our grandchildren, we would have to stay with her.

We love our grandchildren very much and want to see them, but we don't know what to do or how to answer our daughter. Please help.

SHATTERED

DEAR SHATTERED: Your daughter is holding the trump card, so if you want to see you grandchildren you had better stay with her. Staying with your daughter doesn't necessarily mean that you approve of her life-style.

You don't say how old the grandchildren are, but if they're old enough to "start asking questions," it's time your daughter started giving them some truthful answers. (*Los Angeles Times* September 17, 1978)

The State of the Modern *Conscience Collective*

This overview of the *Dear Abby* column is presented as a reflection of the modern *conscience collective*. The tables describe the general characteristics of the column as published between 1956 and 2005, while the letters republished here illustrate examples of how the column functions to potentially influence the normative order.

Again, in traditional, mechanical societies, the *conscience collective* had a strong hold over the beliefs and behaviors of individuals and was an essential part of maintaining social order (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). In modern, organic societies, the *conscience collective* is weak and much more of the responsibility for maintaining social order falls to laws and administrative rules (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). Viewed as abstract systems, they are often not fully comprehended by individuals, and therefore, methods for adapting such systems are not always well understood (Giddens 1990; Weber 1978 (1922)).

The overall level of readership of the *Dear Abby* column, the significant percentage of letters written to offer advice, and the findings from previous studies of advice column

readers (Gudelunas 2008) indicates the need in society to retain a functioning *conscience collective* outside of the law and other abstract systems for maintaining normative order. Social life is increasingly complex and during the period of time studied here, 1956—2005, many changes, especially cultural shifts, took place that affected individuals on a more personal level than the law or administrative rules could handle. The newspaper column may be viewed by many as edutainment, but it also serves a purpose for many people as a place to confront anomie by sorting out beliefs, values, and behaviors in a public arena that people not only understand, but can interact with as letter writers or as readers.

The overview of the *Dear Abby* column presented above suggests several characteristics of the modern *conscience collective*. First, it covers a breadth of concerns. The content of the modern *conscience collective* as reflected in the *Dear Abby* column includes issues about relationships of all kinds, health, safety, markers of social success, sexuality, personal finance and child rearing among others.

Second, the content of the *conscience collective* is dynamic. As revealed in Tables 2.2 and 2.5, the purpose for writing letters to *Dear Abby* and the content of those letters has shifted over time and, in this case, shows a broadening of the subject matter to be considered in such a forum as well as increasing use of the column across time as a public forum for debate, disagreement and advice-giving as much as a forum for simply receiving advice. In addition, some of the letters themselves, especially the examples written by “San Diego Priest,” “Charleston,” “Karen in Rochester,” and “Shattered” demonstrate how people respond to shifting values, including how they debate these shifts and how the advice column functions to communicate new agreement about values.

Finally, the modern *conscience collective* requires a trusted facilitator who can take on many roles. In mechanical societies these were often religious authorities. In organic societies there are several potential advisors. What is clearly revealed in this analysis of the *Dear Abby* column is that trust is placed in Abby as a facilitator, as evidenced in the widespread popularity and readership of the column. In the data presented above, Abby fills many roles that are critical in facilitating the modern *conscience collective*. When advice or mediation of problems is sought, Abby does not hesitate to offer advice or make a judgment about who is right or wrong, sometimes offering practical advice and sometimes offering rewards or sanctions to the letter writers or the objects of the letters. The reading public is able to read these questions and answers and judge their own situations, beliefs and behaviors accordingly. More interesting is the *role Dear Abby* has played in matters of public uncertainty especially revolving around shifting cultural values. Again, looking at the samples from “San Diego Priest,” “Charleston,” “Karen in Rochester,” and “Shattered,” *Dear Abby*’s role as a facilitator is evident as she does allow debate and dissent to happen within the space of the column; Abby offers interim coping strategies for dealing with cultural shifts with which an individual may not agree; and she also clarifies for the public when a shift has occurred and the public should accept it. Perhaps it is the mix of Abby’s certainty at times and careful handling of uncertainty that has made her into a trusted public facilitator of the modern *conscience collective*.

Of course, there are limitations to the modern *conscience collective* and these are evident in the *Dear Abby* column as well. As Durkheim predicted, the modern *conscience collective* does not have a strong hold over the beliefs and behaviors of individuals (Durkheim 1972 (1893)). Although it has a large readership, the *Dear Abby* column is a

completely voluntary forum for viewing the *conscience collective*. Not everyone reads daily newspapers and those who do read the newspaper do not necessarily read the advice columns. Further, no one is obligated to accept the advice, beliefs or prescribed behaviors offered by Abby in the column. The *Dear Abby* column also reflects a limited portion of the modern *conscience collective*, reflecting issues that are more personal in nature and interpersonal to address.

Finally, the era of *Dear Abby* may be coming to an end. The column originated during a time of high newspaper readership and rapid syndication of newspaper content across the country. It has played a role in reflecting and facilitating the modern *conscience collective* during a period of significant cultural transformation in the United States—rapid urbanization/suburbanization, shifting gender politics, the sexual revolution, and the civil rights movement. Although its readership is still high at 110 million daily readers, fewer people are reading daily newspapers today than they once did and the number of alternate outlets for discerning the modern *conscience collective* or eschewing the modern *conscience collective* are rapidly increasing in the age of the internet. The internet age offers the benefit of infinitely expanding the breadth of information and advice that can be accessed by the general public, but it may also serve to further weaken the *conscience collective* by increasing the number of places people can go to ask questions and find answers. Given this reality, people may have trouble in the future discerning whom to trust and/or whose advice to follow.

Conclusion: Anomie and the Modern *Conscience Collective*

Durkheim feared modern society would be experienced in an anomic state and that it would be difficult to balance anarchy with tyranny in trying to maintain the social order

(Durkheim 1972 (1893)). Although the *conscience collective* has grown weaker than it was in traditional societies, it has evolved to meet the needs of modern individuals, especially in the areas of social life not governed by laws, regulations and rules. The popularity and interactive nature of the *Dear Abby* column demonstrates the need for a modern *conscience collective*, especially to help individuals recognize shared values and learn about expected behaviors. The column covers a wide range of topics; is democratic in encouraging readers to participate and air their views; helps people recognize, explore and debate cultural shifts; and is trusted by the reading public. As such, it functions as a device to translate culture into norms and challenge the prevailing culture when norms no longer make sense to individuals. In addition, the column also functions as a mass media translator of Merton's adaptations to anomie into useable practices for individuals (Merton 1938). Therefore, in its own small way, the *Dear Abby* column can be viewed as playing a role in forestalling the anomic state that Durkheim feared. In the future, as sources for mediating the modern *conscience collective* increase, it will be interesting to examine the extent to which such mediations continue to shape the normative order. Moving forward from the age of *Dear Abby*, it will be useful to document the nature of and characteristics of these new mediating sources. It would also be useful to study individuals who read and use advice columns and other advice mediums to learn more about the level of sway these sources have over beliefs and behaviors as well as how individuals manage adaptation to new ideas and adopt new behaviors.

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Appendix

Dear Abby Research Code Book

Year Letter was Published (Single Response) Column 1

Month/Day Letter was Published (Single Response) Column 2

Gender of Letter Writer (Single Response) Column 3

- 1=Male
- 2=Female
- 3=Unknown

Relationship of Letter's Object to Letter Writer (Possible Multi-response) Columns 4, 5 and 6

- 1=Self
- 2=Nuclear Family
- 3=Extended Family
- 4=Ex-Family (Former Family)
- 5=Friends
- 6=Community
- 7=Co-Worker (Boss, Peers, or Subordinate)
- 8=Society
- 9=Animal
- 10=Romantic Friend
- 11=Readership
- 12=Event/Situation
- 13=InLaws
- 14=Other Business Relationship (Customer, Client, Tenant, Landlord)
- 99=N/A

Relationship Sub-categories—

Nuclear Family Relationship to Letter Writer (Possible Multi-response) Columns 7, 8 and 9

- 1=Husband
- 2=Wife
- 3=Mother
- 4=Father
- 5=Child
- 6=Brother
- 7=Sister
- 8=Step Mother
- 9=Step Father
- 10=Step Child
- 11=Step Sister
- 12=Step Brother

Extended Family Relationship to Letter Writer (Single Response) Column 10

- 1=Grandmother
- 2=Grandfather
- 3=Aunt
- 4=Uncle
- 5=Cousin

6=Grandchild
7=Niece
8=Nephew

Gender of Friend to Letter Writer (Single Response) Column 11

1=Male
2=Female

Community Member Type (Single Response) Column 12

1=Neighbor
2=Community Member
3=Community Leader
4=Organization

Gender of Romantic Friend to Letter Writer (Single Response) Column 13

1=Male
2=Female

Purpose of the Letter (Possible Multi-response) Columns 14, 15 and 16

1=to ask for advice/opinion
2=to ask for information
3=to ask for mediation
4=to give advice/opinion
5=to give information
6=to give testimonial
7=to affirm
8=to thank
99=N/A

Problem Addressed in the Letter (Possible Multi-response) Columns 17, 18 and 19

1=Relationship Marital
2=Sexuality
3=Abuse
4=Health
5=Caring for Others
6=Money
7=Social Etiquette/Manners/Traditions/Social Behavior
8=Death
9=Religion/Spirituality/Superstitions/Beliefs
10=Personal Attractiveness/Hygiene/Style/Fashion
11=Teen Problems/Young Adults who are still dependents
12=Dating/Significant Others
13=Stranger Danger
14=Relationships
15=Race/Gender/Ethnic Issues
16=Animals
17=Law/Criminal Activity
18=Work/Life Purpose/Balance
19=Unmarried/Independence
98=Other
99=N/A

Problem Sub-Categories—

Types of Marital Problems (Possible Multi-response) Columns 20 and 21

- 1=Divorce
- 2=Bothered by Behavior
- 3=Unhappy
- 4=Abuse
- 5=Control
- 6=Misc.
- 7=Decision to have children

Types of Sexual Problems (Possible Multi-response) Columns 22 and 23

- 1=Extra Marital Affair
- 2=Pre-marital Affair
- 3=Homosexuality
- 4=Sex in Marriage
- 5=Venereal Disease
- 6=Misc.
- 7=Pregnancy
- 8=Contraception
- 9=Incest

Types of Abuse Problems (Possible Multi-response) Columns 24 and 25

- 1=Sexual
- 2=Physical
- 3=Verbal

Types of Health Problems (Possible Multi-response) Columns 26 and 27

- 1=Alcoholism
- 2=Drugs
- 3=Weight
- 4=Smoking
- 5=Health or Sickness
- 6=Disability
- 7=Aging/Growing Old
- 8=Mental Health/Well=Being
- 9=Safety
- 10=Misc
- 11=Pregnancy

Types of Caring for Others Problems (Single Response) Column 28

- 1=Child Rearing
- 2=Elderly
- 3=Disabled

Types of Teen-specific Problems (Possible Multi-response) Columns 29 and 30

- 1=School Problems
- 2=Drugs/Alcohol
- 3=Pregnancy
- 4=Sexuality
- 5=Interests/Pursuits
- 6=Misc.
- 7=Dating
- 8=Generally Troubled

Types of Dating Problems (Possible Multi-response) Columns 31 and 32

- 1=Sexual Relations
- 2=Compatibility
- 3=Ending Relationships
- 4=Misc.
- 5=Start a Relationship
- 6=Considering Marriage

Types of Relationship Problems (Possible Multi-response) Columns 33 and 34

- 1=Ex-Spouse/Significant Other
- 2=Nuclear Family
- 3=Extended Family
- 4=InLaws
- 5=Friends
- 6=Others

Letter Writer's Reference Groups Consulted Prior to Writing Dear Abby (Possible Multi-response) Columns 35 and 36

- 1=Spouse
- 2=Co-Workers
- 3=Neighbors
- 4=Friends/Peers
- 5=Society/Media
- 6=Dates/Significant Others
- 7=Other family
- 8=Church/Clergy
- 9=Government/Law
- 10=School
- 11=Workplace Supervisor
- 12=Community
- 13=Doctor/Therapist
- 14=Previous Letter
- 15=Business/Business Leader
- 16=Support Group
- 98=Not Mentioned

Letter Writer's Aspiration as Revealed in the Letter (Possible Multi-response) Columns 37 and 38

- 1=Success Focused
- 2=Risk Focused
- 3=Not able to discern

Type of Success of Interest to Letter Writer (Possible Multi-response) Columns 39 and 40

- 1=Economic
- 2=Social
- 3=Cultural
- 4=Time
- 5=Attractiveness
- 6=Not Able to Discern
- 7=Career/Work
- 8=Health

Type of Risks of Concern to Letter Writer (Possible Multi-response) Columns 41 and 42

- 1=Comfort
- 2=Security/Safety
- 3=Health/Well-being
- 4=Reputation/Image
- 5=Not Able to Discern

Letter Writer's Interest in Understanding/Refining Goals or Process (Single Response) Column 43

- 1=Goal
- 2=Process
- 3=Writer's Goals/Actions Misunderstood by Others
- 4=Not Able to Discern

Type of Process Letter Writer Needs/Wants to Address (Possible Multi-response) Columns 44 and 45

- 1=Lack of Awareness
- 2=Lack of Means
- 3=Not determined
- 4=Questioning of Process by Others
- 5=Coping with a Situation

“Abby’s” Reward or Sanction Offered to Letter Writer or Object (Possible Multi-response) Columns 46 and 47

- 1=Reward/Support Letter Writer
- 2=Reward/Support Object of Letter Writer's Inquiry
- 3=Sanction Letter Writer
- 4=Sanction Object
- 5=None

“Abby’s” Proposed Solution for the Letter Writer (Single Response) Column 48

- 1=Change/Adjust Expectations, Beliefs, Attitude
- 2=Change Goals
- 3=Change or Consult with Different Reference Group
- 4=Change Behavior/Follow Prescribed Behavior
- 5=Seek Intervention
- 6=Stay the Course
- 7=Rebellion
- 8=None
- 9=Abby Reiterates/Clarifies/Supports/Answers Question

Solution Sub-categories—

Type of Intervention Abby Proposes (Single Response) Column 49

- 1=Authority Figures
- 2=Formal Groups
- 3=Confrontation/Encouragement to Object

Intervention Sub-category—

Type of Authority Abby Recommends for Intervention Proposed (Single Response) Column 50

- 1=Doctor/Therapist
- 2=Police/Law Enforcement/Legal Counsel
- 3=Teachers/School Officials
- 4=Ministers/Clergy

5=Parent

Type of Assistance Abby Offers to Those She Recommends “Stay the Course” (Possible Multi-response) Columns 51 and 52

1=Professional Therapy

2=Other Support

3=Encouragement

4=Clarification

5=Temporary

CHAPTER THREE

PROXIMITY MATTERS: LEARNING FROM NEIGHBOR STRAIN IN THE AGE OF DEAR ABBY

An article to be submitted in modified format to a sociological journal

By Karen Quance Jeske

Abstract

Research about changing social ties suggests that neighbor relationships have decreasing value for individuals in favor of voluntary relationships found outside the neighborhood unit. This supposition does not consider the changing role of neighborhoods in the past few decades. While cities have become more heterogeneous, neighborhoods have become more homogeneous. Further, neighborhoods have become voluntary locations in which to build personal identity as well as to make a financial investment. Unlike most other research on social ties, this article views neighbor relationships as voluntary and uses instances of neighbor strain in order to draw conclusions about the role that proximity plays in voluntary relationships. The instances of neighbor strain are taken from the Dear Abby newspaper column and they reveal that proximity acts as a type of constraint on voluntary relationships, shifting neighbor relations from voluntary to non-voluntary when conflicting beliefs and values are revealed.

Introduction

As the social organization of society has increased in scale, social relationships have also undergone significant changes. Indeed, since Tonnies first wrote about *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in 1887 (1963 (1957)) and Durkheim on the consequences of increasing

divisions of labor in 1893 (1972 (1893)), social scientists have found the changing dynamics of social ties in response to large scale social changes to be a fruitful area of investigation.

Many studies have focused on the effects of social change on the social relationships that constitute communities especially on the ability of communities to mobilize and act on behalf of the community in light of shifting social relationships (Byrum 1992; Freire 2004; Gaventa 1980; Gittell and Vidal 1998; Guest, Cover, Matsueda, and Kubrin 2006; Usher 2007). Others have sought to understand the broader changes to all social relationships (Granovetter 1973; Sampson 1988; Wellman 1979). Such studies have offered answers to questions raised by Tonnies (1963 (1957)) and Durkheim (1972 (1893)) as to whether individuals would have the social support they would need in order to deal with anxieties and uncertainties caused by large scale changes such as industrialization, democratization, urbanization and globalization. These fears arose from a shared concern that large social forces not only make modern life more complicated, they reduce the number and/or strength of social relationships, leaving individuals without the social support that is essential in adapting to such complications. In light of this transformation, this article will review current thinking about the concept of neighboring and consider its relevance in today's society.

Theories about changing social relationships would suggest that as urbanization has increased, neighbor relationships (once perceived as obligatory relationships—like family or small community relationships) have become less essential to individuals, thereby weakening this relationship in favor of voluntary relationships more likely to be found outside the local neighborhood (Finke, Guest, and Stark 1996; Fischer 1975). This perspective assumes that neighbor relationships are non-voluntary, akin to close-knit village type relationships of the

past. Not considered in many studies predicting this shifting importance of neighbor ties, is the fact that neighborhoods have also been transformed, becoming important, voluntary sites for building personal identities (Centner 2008; Fischer 2002; Florida 2008; Hipp and Perrin 2009; Putnam 2000). In order to determine the current relevance of neighbor relations, this article will consider the extent to which neighbor relationships can be viewed as voluntary relationships.

One characteristic that voluntary relationships share is a high degree of fragility (Granovetter 1973; Simmel 1950 (1908)). The *Dear Abby* newspaper column is one source for viewing the fragility of neighbor relations, specifically cases of neighbor strain. The *Dear Abby* column has been in continuous publication since 1956 and currently has a daily readership of more than 110 million people in approximately 1400 newspapers. The column can be viewed as a mediating device between individual concerns expressed by individual letter writers and Abby's responses which direct individual advice-seekers as well as the reading public toward answers, which, in this case, offer guidelines for dealing with neighbor concerns. In other words, the *Dear Abby* column, with its longevity and large readership, can be viewed as a link between cultural expectations about neighboring and the actual social practice of neighboring. A clearer understanding of this link may illuminate the importance of neighbor ties in modern life.

Perspectives on Neighboring

As indicated above, perspectives on neighboring can be found within three linked sets of concepts in the sociological literature. First is an overview of the concept of social ties and its accepted mechanisms of scholarly study. Second is the relationship between place and social ties. Third is the significance of neighborhoods and neighbor relationships in modern

life. This section will summarize each of these concepts, shaping the questions that will be examined in cases of neighbor strain found in the *Dear Abby* column.

Social Ties—

Recent research about the relevance of social ties has been developed largely in the area of urban sociology (Wellman and Leighton 1979; White and Guest 2003). Some of the most useful concepts for understanding social ties, however, have come from scholarship looking at personal network analysis (Wellman and Leighton 1979). In particular, such research has yielded useful frameworks for understanding and measuring social relationships (Granovetter 1973; Sampson 1988; Wellman and Leighton 1979; White and Guest 2003). Viewed as social ties, such relationships can be measured as strong or weak depending on the amount of time invested in the relationship, the emotional connection, the level of mutual confiding and the level of reciprocal activities (Granovetter 1973). Social ties are found to be stronger between individuals whose personal networks overlap the most (Granovetter 1973).

Also useful for understanding social relationships or social ties are the concepts of voluntary and non-voluntary relationships. Voluntary relationships are viewed as relationships of choice while non-voluntary relationships which are viewed as obligatory such as kinship groups and local community members often portrayed nostalgically as in traditional villages or close-knit ethnic neighborhoods (Fischer 1975; White and Guest 2003). Although the terms voluntary and non-voluntary are often used in the literature to describe social ties, they are rarely clearly defined. One characteristic that is understood about voluntary as opposed to non-voluntary relationships is fragility, with voluntary relationships viewed as more fragile, i.e. easier to dispose of or weaken (Granovetter 1973; Simmel 1950 (1908)).

Urbanization, Urban Places and Social Ties—

Beginning with Spencer (2009 (1884)) and Marx (1845; 1847) in the 19th Century, many social scientists concerned themselves with large-scale societal changes— industrialization, democratization, urbanization and globalization—and the effects significant changes would have on individuals and on the organization of social ties. Ferdinand Tonnies offers a broad cultural perspective in viewing how the shift from community level to societal level organization patterns would shift social ties from those based on ascribed status to contractually based relationships with conflicts solved increasingly through law rather than custom (1963 (1957)). Georg Simmel and Louis Wirth offered a social psychological perspective to their understanding of the changing nature of social ties, expressing concern for the inability of individuals to trust strangers and form meaningful attachments in increasingly urban places (Simmel 1950 (1903); Wirth 1938). Emile Durkheim included both cultural and social psychological concerns in his assessment of changing social ties from those that are mechanical or obligatory based on similar beliefs and norms, to those that are organic or voluntary based on increasing division of labor and greater specialization in work and all aspects of life (Durkheim 1972 (1893)).

The worries of these theorists have come to be known as the community lost perspective which contends that local community ties are weakened as society increases in scale—population and density—with individuals relying more often on bureaucratic structures and voluntary relationships that are less likely to be based on shared beliefs than the “mechanical” or non-voluntary (kinship and local village) relationships of the past for sustenance (Wellman and Leighton 1979; White and Guest 2003). This concern has been the basis for a large body of work in recent decades looking at the relationship between social

ties and urbanization. There is widespread agreement that social ties have not been lost, but rather transformed in response to urbanization (Finke, Guest, and Stark 1996; Fischer 1975; Wellman 1985; Wellman and Leighton 1979; White and Guest 2003).

A number of sociologists have argued that social ties are strongly related to urbanization in that as urbanization increases, there will be a corresponding increase in the numbers of voluntary ties as well (Finke, Guest, and Stark 1996; Fischer 1975; Wellman and Leighton 1979; White and Guest 2003). The explanation for this relationship is that as cities grow in size, the number of opportunities for voluntary ties also increases because urban places spawn a greater variety of subcultures, voluntary organizations, clubs and other places for individuals to pursue specialized interests outside their immediate neighborhoods (Fischer 1975). Therefore, the urban environment can be viewed as encouraging voluntary ties (particularly non-neighborhood) over non-voluntary (kinship and neighborhood) ties (White and Guest 2003). Such findings have stimulated interest about the relevance of the neighborhood and neighboring in modern life versus voluntary relationships outside the neighborhood and an individual's broader network within a metropolitan area (Greer 1999 (1962); Guest, Cover, Matsueda, and Kubrin 2006; Wellman and Leighton 1979). While these findings generally agree that voluntary ties outside of those within close proximity or the neighborhood have increased in relation to increased urbanization, the findings have failed to prove a subsequent decrease in the strength of ties of neighbors. Further, it has also been shown that voluntary ties are often based in shared beliefs and values as much as shared material interests (Fischer 1975).

Significance of Neighborhoods and Neighbor Ties—

A number of studies have been conducted trying to ascertain the strength of neighbor relationships and/or whether or not certain contextual factors such as income, race, education, stability and others influence the strength of neighbor relationships from one neighborhood to another (Guest, Cover, Matsueda, and Kubrin 2006). The Chicago School of theorists posited that as residential tenure in neighborhoods increased, neighbor relations strengthened (Park 1936). Others have suggested that shared interests in neighborhoods such as protecting local schools and programs for children, increase the social ties of neighbors (Greer 1999 (1962)). The most recent work in this area, however, suggests that there is little connection between such contextual factors and the strength of neighbor relations, leaving open questions about the relevance of neighbor relations today (Guest, Cover, Matsueda, and Kubrin 2006).

Another fruitful area of research related to neighboring is the study of the relevance of neighborhoods to individuals. Research shows that Americans are more likely to develop roots in their communities, undertaking fewer local moves from one location to another (Fischer 2002). At the same time, as tenure in one neighborhood increases, individuals also feel more attached to that place (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974). In addition, there is a wide body of literature pointing to the importance of places—both communities and neighborhoods—for contributing to an individual's identity, suggesting an increase in the relevance of neighborhood choice to individual lives and greater homogeneity among neighborhood residents (Bourdieu 1984; Centner 2008; Florida 2008; Greif 2009; Kotkin 2001; Lloyd 2004; Putnam 2000).

It seems then that there is a tension in what is known about neighbor relations. While voluntary ties outside of neighborhoods have increased as urbanization has increased, individuals are also increasingly attached to the neighborhoods in which they choose to live. Yet, very little is understood about the quality of neighbor ties—are they stronger or weaker than they once were, are they voluntary or obligatory and, generally, to what extent does proximity matter in relation to strength and level of voluntarism for neighbor ties? Given the voluntary nature of neighborhood selection, this study will view neighbor relations as voluntary. Considering the fragile nature of voluntary relationships, this study will look at instances of neighbor strain as presented in the *Dear Abby* newspaper column in order to better understand the strength of neighbor ties and the role of proximity in these voluntary relationships.

Method

Much of the research that has been conducted about social ties relies on existing data sets or survey methods aimed at getting a high number of respondents to measure their number of social ties and/or level of social ties. While these methods have been very useful for measuring the increase in voluntary social ties as urbanization has also increase, they have not been as useful for understanding the nature, quality and locations of these voluntary ties. This study uses content analysis in order to gain insights about specific situations individuals experience with their neighbors. Content analysis of the *Dear Abby* newspaper column provides information that is rooted in real instances of neighbor strain as perceived by the letter writer at the time the strain was occurring. These instances reveal the sense-making processes of individuals trying to reconcile neighbor strain. They also highlight many of the elements of Granovetter's schema for understanding ties—time spent, emotional

intensity, mutual confiding and reciprocal servicing (Granovetter 1973). Viewing neighbor relations as voluntary, with the corresponding attribute of fragility, strained situations tend to force individuals to assess the overall importance of the relationship and may more accurately reveal the value of the relationship as expressed by letter writers to *Dear Abby* than situations that are not strained.

This article examines the content of twenty-one, randomly selected, *Dear Abby* newspaper columns that feature questions or concerns about neighbors. These columns range from 1957 until 2003, but were selected from a sampling frame that included every *Dear Abby* column published between 1956 and 2005⁸. The source for letters from 1956-1974 is the *San Francisco Chronicle*; for letters from 1975-1995, half of 1996, 1998, and half of 1999, the source is the *Los Angeles Times*; and for half of 1996, 1997, half of 1999 and 2000-2006, the source is an online database. The use of different publication sources for the letters was based on availability. Recent years were readily available online. The letters published from 1975 through 1995 were available at Iowa State University's Parks Library on microfilm in the *Los Angeles Times*. Iowa State University Parks Library's collection of the *Los Angeles Times* only extended back to 1975. Prior to that date, the information was found in past issues of *The San Francisco Chronicle*, first at the University of Iowa's library and then at the University of Oregon's library, all on microfilm.

The columns that were selected for this study feature neighbor problems as a central issue or concern. The letters written to Abby, as well as Abby's responses, were coded for

⁸ The columns selected for this study are a subset of 960 randomly selected columns from this same sampling frame. The original 960 columns were analyzed and coded for broader study of the *Dear Abby* newspaper column (see Chapter One of this collection). Of these, twenty-one were identified as "neighbor" problems and were selected for this study. The complete span of letters in the sampling frame is fifty years.

common themes using open coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998) with concepts elaborated from the framework of ideas presented above about the importance of proximity, voluntary versus non-voluntary qualities and overall strength of neighbor ties (Vaughan 1992).

Dear Abby Neighboring Data⁹

In general the letters written to *Dear Abby* about neighbors express some level of uncertainty about either confronting a neighbor or interfering with a neighbor. This letter from 1958 is an example of a letter written to ask Abby¹⁰ whether or not the letter writer's interference should continue.

DEAR ABBY: My neighbor across the hall has a baby who is 8 months old. She hires a sitter who is only 13 to come in and look after the baby for maybe three or four hours at once. The sitter is a nice girl, but I can tell the way she handles that baby that she doesn't know much about babies, so I run in about every half hour to see if the baby is wet. If he is, I change him because I am always so afraid that child will pin the diaper on him. The little sitter resents this, but I can't help it. I can't be across the hall and not worry about that baby. Would you call this meddling?

GOOD NEIGHBOR (*San Francisco Chronicle* April 13, 1958)

While the following letter from 1984 offers a typical illustration of a letter in which the letter writer is unsure as to whether to confront a neighbor.

DEAR ABBY: I need your help. The woman across the hall from me asked (a couple of years ago) if she could have my daily newspaper when I was finished with it. I've always obliged. The Sunday paper is too enormous to read in one day, so I've often kept it until Monday or sometimes Tuesday. Every Monday morning my neighbor asks me if I've finished the Sunday paper yet, which gives me the feeling that I am being rushed. Also, occasionally I will come across an article or an ad that I want to

⁹ Excerpts from the *Dear Abby* newspaper column appear in this dissertation as seen in DEAR ABBY by Abigail Van Buren a.k.a. Jeanne Phillips and founded by her mother Pauline Phillips. © Universal Uclick. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹⁰ This chapter examines the content of letters written to the column and the responses given by the author of the column. To distinguish between the two, *Dear Abby* will reference the column while analysis of the responses will refer to the author as, Abby, as it appears in the column title and as she is referred to by the readership.

save, so I clip it out. Yesterday this lady asked if I would give her the newspaper intact, and after she reads it she will return it to me—and then I can clip out whatever I want. How is that for nerve? It's much more convenient to clip something when I first come across it; it would be too time-consuming to go through the newspaper a second time. If you were in my place, how would you handle this? I don't want her for an enemy. Oh, another thing, she doesn't subscribe to any newspaper and she's in better shape financially than I am.

IRRITATED APARTMENT DWELLER (*Los Angeles Times*
February 5, 1984)

These two letters and all of the letters written to *Dear Abby* about neighbor concerns express some level of conflicting values or beliefs with neighbors. In the letter above from “Good Neighbor,” the letter writer is expressing different beliefs than her neighbor about child-rearing while in the letter from “Irritated Apartment Dweller,” the letter writer and neighbor have different values concerning reciprocity and manners. Abby mediates these situations by helping letter writers size up the potential risks and offering her opinion about how the letter writer should act. Her answers to the two letters presented above are typical and err on the side of not interfering with or confronting neighbors unless there is a real risk to someone's safety or a financial/material reason for doing so.

DEAR NEIGHBOR: Your heart is in the right place, but you are out of order. Most 13-year-old sitters know how to keep their powder dry (*San Francisco Chronicle* April 13, 1958).

DEAR DWELLER: Tell her it's too time-consuming to go through the newspaper twice, so if she wants it, she will have to put up with an occasional gap. And when she asks you for the Sunday newspaper, tell her you will give it to her after you've read it, and you'd appreciate it if she wouldn't ask for it because you feel guilty keeping it an extra day or two (*Los Angeles Times* February 5, 1984).

Time and again, Abby's answers remind the letter writers and the reading public that neighbor relationships are voluntary. The following example from 1957 is typical of Abby's

responses favoring direct confrontation if it is a matter of money with little concern shown for the overall quality of the relationship.

DEAR ABBY: About a month ago, a neighbor lady I hardly knew asked me if she could borrow \$5 for groceries. She said she was short and would pay me right back. I felt sorry for her because she had little children, so I gave her the money. She didn't make any effort to pay me back, but I found a bowl of cooked-up bones for my dog standing on my porch with a note from her and she said she made these bones especially for my dog, but no mention was made of the \$5 she owed me. Should I consider the bones worth \$5 or should I ask her for the cash?

MAD NEIGHBOR

DEAR MAD: Ask her for the cash—and make no bones about it! (*San Francisco Chronicle* July 7, 1957)

Abby also favors “self preservation” as a worthwhile reason to confront a neighbor about objectionable behavior as in her responses to a letter writer named, “Going Crazy,” also from 1957, who complains about a neighbors overly long visits to her house everyday and a letter writer named, “Dog Tired,” from 1977, tired of the neighbor’s dog barking all night long.

DEAR GOING: Self preservation is the first law of nature. Tell her as diplomatically as possible that YOU get nervous with someone around when you do your work. Sorry, but you'll have to be firm or YOU'LL be having the depression. (*San Francisco Chronicle* November 10, 1957)

DEAR DOG-TIRED: Tell these “lovely people” that since your previous requests have been ignored, you must now protest to the authorities. Your rest is more important than their friendship. (*Los Angeles Times* September 18, 1977)

Abby does not favor confronting neighbors with problems if they are relatively minor nuisances to the letter writer as in both the following examples.

DEAR ABBY: There is a 10 year old boy living next door to us who has just started taking violin lessons. Now that summer is here, we all keep our windows open, and we can hear this kid practicing night and day. I have heard “Santa Lucia” for two weeks now, and there hasn't been any improvement. I saw his father in the yard and

said, “Your Joey sure practices a lot. I hear him night and day.” Joey’s father said, “Don’t complain. You are getting a concert for free. One day you will have to pay for a ticket to hear him.” I don’t want to hurt anybody’s feelings, but this Joey is making me crazy with his violin. Any suggestions?

MAN NEXT DOOR

DEAR MAN: If “mother love is blind,” father love is deaf, so buy an air conditioner and keep your windows closed during the summer until it’s time to “buy that ticket.” (*Los Angeles Times* July 7, 1968)

DEAR ABBY: A number of years ago, we bought a home in a nice, quiet, high-class neighborhood. Now one of our neighbors has made it look like a cheap flea market! She has one yard sale after another, which brings a lot of people in front of my house as well as hers. Believe me, she doesn’t need the money. The traffic is annoying, and so is the noise. And it looks terrible. Last summer she started selling vegetables from their small backyard garden, with signs all over the yard. Now I think this is really tacky! I am annoyed! What can I do outside of filing a complaint with the city? I am told by other neighbors that this enterprising neighbor manages to stay just within the law.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

DEAR NEIGHBOR: If your enterprising neighbor manages to stay within the law, there is nothing you can do. Ask a lawyer if a yard sale qualifies as “an attractive nuisance.” (*Los Angeles Times* June 7, 1985)

The letter from, “Man Next Door,” expresses a problem similar to that of, “Dog Tired,” but presumably the neighbor boy is not practicing his violin all night and keeping the letter writer awake so it is more of an annoyance to be tolerated versus a serious problem like a lack of sleep to be confronted. Similarly, in the letter from, “Love Thy Neighbor,” Abby does not recommend confrontation for the nuisance of a neighbor’s yard sales especially given the fact there are no laws being broken.

As with the case of, “Good Neighbor”, above, Abby generally favors non-interference with neighbors. However, if the letter writer or the object of the letter’s health, safety or

welfare is at stake, Abby does not hesitate in recommending that the letter writer confront or contact the police as in this example from 1981.

DEAR ABBY: I move into this apartment six months ago. I like it very much. The only problem is that shortly after I moved in, I noticed that a man in the building directly across from me kept looking into my apartment. At first I ignored it, then he set up a telescope, which he has had permanently trained on my window! It's not just my imagination; my boyfriend has also noticed it. This has made me feel very nervous and uncomfortable. Would you consider this to be normal, harmless behavior on the man's part? Or should some action be taken on my part to put a stop to it?

UNCOMFORTABLE

DEAR UNCOMFORTABLE: Being observed constantly (and through a telescope yet) could be considered harassment. Behavior that makes you nervous and uncomfortable is not "harmless." Notify the police. (*Los Angeles Times* December 27, 1981)

Abby never recommends interfering or investigating neighbors when just plain nosiness is involved as in these two examples.

DEAR ABBY: We live in one of the best neighborhoods in town. There is not one house on our block worth less than \$75,000. Some new neighbors moved in next door, and I understand they bought the house for the asking price and paid CASH. They seem very nice, but they are weird. The first thing we noticed was that they didn't have a television antenna, so my little boy asked their little boy about it, and he was told they didn't have a television set! They have only one automobile (and a two-car garage!) and the father drives the car to work every day. The children and the mother all use the bus. They rarely go anywhere, except to church. The wife doesn't have any fancy clothes or jewelry or furs. The children aren't permitted to have any toys dealing with war or violence. Could they belong to some offbeat religious cult? What do you make of them?

CURIOUS

DEAR CURIOUS: Maybe they've just got cash, conservative standards, high moral principles and pacifistic ideals.

They sound like ideal neighbors to me. (*Los Angeles Times* April 4, 1977)

DEAR ABBY: My neighbor has seven kids, and they say that no two of her kids have the same father. She is not married now, and they say she never has been married. They say she is not on welfare, and nobody can figure out how she manages. The

mailman says she gets no bills, which means she pays cash for everything. She and her kids have good clothes, good furniture and three TVs. I would sure like to know how she does it.

NOT NOSY

DEAR NOT NOSY: If you think it's your business, why don't you ask her? And as for the "they" you refer to, exactly who are "they"? (*Los Angeles Times* September 16, 1990)

Generally, Abby looks at neighbor relationships as voluntary rather than obligatory and suggests protecting one's general health, safety, welfare and material possessions; putting up with small nuisances; calling on the authorities or police if a real danger to anyone is perceived; and minding one's own business.

Abby's responses are contrasted with the concerns of the letter writers. The letter from, "Irritated Apartment Dweller," above specifically states that the letter writer does not want the neighbor, "for an enemy," despite being justified in being annoyed at the neighbor's behavior. This is not the only letter that expresses this sentiment. The letter from, "Dog Tired," uses the same phrase about not wanted to make an enemy of the neighbor, even when a confrontation is justified.

DEAR ABBY: Our neighbors across the street are lovely people, but they have one fault. They tie their dog outside in summer, and he barks continually, night and day, for no reason at all. I love dogs, so I can't bring myself to do anything that might hurt him, such as poison him, shoot him or turn him loose at night, although I confess I have thought of it during a sleepless night while the barking was at its peak. I hate to make enemies of these lovely people by reporting them to the police or humane society. And earplugs are out because if an emergency phone call or knock on the door came, I could not hear it. I have spoken to these neighbors several times about it, but they do nothing. Any suggestions?

DOG TIRED (*Los Angeles Times* September 18, 1977)

Beyond not wanting to make enemies of neighbors or make neighbors angry, the letters written to *Dear Abby* express in many different ways that the pressure to deal with neighbor problems is unwelcome as revealed in the following examples.

DEAR ABBY: My neighbor lady was having some sort of depression, so her doctor told her to get out amongst people, so she started to come over here at 8 o'clock every morning. She'd bring her lunch and lie on my davenport and tell me, "Go ahead and do your work, I won't bother you." My husband and kids would refuse to come to the breakfast table so I to bring them trays in their rooms. When the kids came home from school she'd still be here. I can't get rid of her, but I tell you, Abby, I am going to beat her to the nuthouse if she doesn't leave me alone. How can I get her out of my house?

GOING CRAZY (*San Francisco Chronicle* November 10, 1957)

DEAR ABBY: Today while doing my dishes I just happened to glance out my kitchen window in time to see my next door neighbor take two pairs of my husband's brand new shorts off my clothesline. Now Abby, I know she couldn't have mistaken them for her own laundry as she had absolutely nothing on her clothesline at the time. Should I talk to her about this? Or should I ask my husband to speak to her husband about it?

EYE WITNESS (*Los Angeles Times* August 12, 1968)

DEAR ABBY: My next-door neighbors are nice people, but I'm faced with a problem I don't know how to solve. Their bathroom faces my driveway. They have a coating on their bathroom windowpanes, but it isn't as opaque as they think. There is no other window covering.

Abby, I am greeted nearly every morning with the sight of the man of the house stepping in and out of the shower, sitting on his "throne," etc. I can even tell if he's reading the newspaper.

This morning I went out to my car and could see him through the glass as clear as day. It was hardly a vision of loveliness. Even my friends have witnessed this unforgettable sight. It is embarrassing.

Please print this. I hope my neighbors see this letter and finally put an end to the "show." SEEN IT ALL IN MINNEAPOLIS (www.uexpress.com from February 12, 2003)

These letters reveal a reluctance to confront neighbors and yet an understanding that such problems cannot be ignored. This obviously places a strain on these letter writers such that they seek answers from *Dear Abby*.

Conclusions

The letters written to *Dear Abby* and the responses from Abby, reveal a tension in discerning the voluntary character of neighbor relationships. Generally, the letters indicate that letter writers do not view neighbor relationships as voluntary. First, every letter written to *Dear Abby* in this sample reveals some level of conflict between the beliefs and values of the letter writer and his or her neighbors. Second, the fact that the letters are written, indicates the letter writers feel the need to deal with these neighbor problems despite their lack of shared beliefs or values and probable disinterest in building a friendship with the neighbor (only one of the twenty-one letters mentions that the neighbor is also a friend). In fact, logic suggests these letters would not be written to *Dear Abby* at all if the letter writers really believed that the relationship was voluntarily important such that the letter writer could either ignore neighbor problems or just use other intervening authorities such as the police to deal with neighbor concerns. In other words, these relationships do not seem to have the fragile quality to them found in voluntary relationships, such that either party can just end the relationship (Simmel 1950 (1908)). Rather, most letters writers indicate feeling pressure to deal with neighbor problems that they would rather not have to deal with as they would in relationships categorized as more obligatory than voluntary.

The views about neighbors suggested by the letter writers stand in contrast with the views of neighbors offered by Abby. Abby reminds the letter writers and the reading public

repeatedly that neighbor relationships are voluntary and that confrontations and interference should take place only when health, safety, welfare or material property are at stake.

To summarize this tension, then, the letter writers express a disconnect between their own values and beliefs and those of their neighbors; there is little indication of desiring friendship with neighbors; there are several mentions of not wanting enemies or angry neighbors; Abby offers consistent advice for when to interfere and confront and when not to, erring on the side of less interaction; and yet the letters indicate that the letter writers feel obliged to deal with neighbor problems anyway. Given that friendship and shared values and beliefs are not evident in these relationships, proximity must play a role.

It is useful here to reexamine the role of neighborhoods to individuals. Neighborhood selection is made voluntarily for most individuals and such selections represent often-significant investments of money,¹¹ time, and increasingly personal identity (Bourdieu 1984; Centner 2008; Florida 2008; Greif 2009; Lloyd 2004; Zukin 1982). As such, neighborhoods once selected, represent a large commitment for individuals. Perhaps interest in protecting property values and local resources such as parks and schools begins to seem less like a voluntary activity and one that is instead necessary to protect one's investment. Neighbors can be viewed as potential helpers and friends; are likely to be from a similar socio-economic class; and are increasingly likely to value the neighborhood for the same or similar reasons. Such shared values and beliefs may strengthen voluntary neighbor relations (Bourdieu 1984; Fischer 1975). Conflicts with neighbors who have different values and beliefs may create a perceived threat based on potential risks to self or property values. In these situations of

¹¹ Either for rent or house payment.

neighbor strain, the voluntary potential of the neighbor relationship turns into an obligation to deal with a problem that may have the potential to change the value of the neighborhood for individuals. Instances of neighbor strain revealed in the *Dear Abby* column support this idea of a shift in the perception of neighbor relationships from those that are voluntary, presumably where there is no conflict, to relationships that have a more obligatory quality to them when a risk is perceived from a neighbor or to a neighbor.

Proximity, then, acts as a type of constraint on voluntary relationships, limiting the level of perceived voluntarism. While neighbor relationships can be viewed as potentially rewarding voluntary relationships there is also greater perceived risk involved in neighbor or proximate relationships if there is a conflict or if beliefs and values are highly divergent.

This study has looked at instances of neighbor strain in order to better understand neighbor ties and the role of proximity in voluntary relationships. The findings suggest that neighbor relations are probably most accurately viewed as voluntary relationships in modern society. However, proximity does matter in these relationships and may act as a type of constraint on the voluntary character of the relationships. It would be interesting to view relationships in other areas, such as work places, where voluntarism and proximity play strong roles in order to start defining continuums of voluntarism and proximity to determine the strength of this relationship.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN SHAPING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS: THE CASE OF THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

An article to be submitted in modified form to an urban affairs or urban studies journal

By Karen Quance Jeske

Abstract

Current interest in the influence of “smart growth” and “new urban” movements on local development suggests the need for broader understanding of the role of social movements and their associated organizations on local development practices. Of particular interest are the tactics used by social movement organizations to challenge the prevailing practices and beliefs of local growth coalitions. The historic preservation movement has a long track record of influencing local development. Since 1949, historic preservation movements have been led in the United States by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Throughout the history of the Trust, the goals and practices of the organization and of the historic preservation movement have challenged local growth coalitions. This case study uses archival records from the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Library at the University of Maryland to present an organizational history of the Trust and its role in influencing local development decisions. The article pays particular attention to the changing political contexts of cities from the industrial era to the post-industrial era to show how the historic preservation movement and the work of the Trust have shifted tactics in response to prevailing political opportunities. The shifting tactics of

the National Trust for Historic Preservation include, at varying times, the quiet influencing of local development processes through lobbying, the ongoing cultivation of solidarity among its ever-expanding constituent base and the Trust's provision of leadership toward protest activities. The article concludes with a discussion of the relevance of understanding shifting political contexts and the various tactics that accompany these contexts to newer movements and their organizations attempting to influence the practices of local growth coalitions. The article also suggests future research to expand knowledge about the influence of social movements on local development.

Introduction

The historic preservation movement in America began early in the history of the nation as individuals sought the designation and preservation of landmarks that included the sites of significant national events, homes of significant national figures and the commemoration of those who fought in wars. Though it began as an effort to honor national events and individuals, such landmarks are obviously emplaced in various local contexts and it is within these local contexts that historic preservation emerged as local social movements. With the U.S. War Department and the National Park Service adopting the movement in the early 20th Century with the goal to save, preserve and memorialize national sites, the establishment of national landmarks became routine. Historic preservation then began to be reconstructed at the local level with attention turning toward local historic sites and districts designated because of either historic significance or architectural significance. During this period, the national movement was reconstructed as well to support local preservation efforts. The middle of the 20th Century was a fruitful time for the movement as a number of national, state and local laws were passed to support preservation in local places that desired it and a

vast network of interrelated organizations—some public and some private—were created to support all of these efforts. Since the 1980's, the movement has continued to work primarily within the parameters of this established network of organizations and available set of resources for historic preservation practice. However, the movement continues to innovate, especially in how it frames the role of preservation for place-based decision-makers. The result is that new historic preservation movements are continually being constructed in new localities and the organizations that support these efforts, especially the National Trust for Historic Preservation, must continually reconstruct the movement by developing new justifications and mobilizing new resources toward local historic preservation efforts.

Using archival information available from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Library at the University of Maryland to create a case history, this article examines the contours of the changes that have occurred and are occurring within the historic preservation movement in the context of the changing nature of cities from the industrial to the post-industrial era. Of particular interest are the changing dynamics and interactions between national and local actors in the movement as well as the tension between historic preservation as a movement promoting change and as an institutional set of professional practices. After a brief history of the movement is sketched out, the following themes are explored:

- The challenge historic preservation poses to the power dynamic in cities
- The nature of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and other organizations in the movement and their roles in shaping national and local historic preservation activism

- The structure of the movement and how stability and change are managed through the construction and reconstruction of collective identity and issues framing

The article concludes with ideas about how the historic preservation movement informs our understanding of other local social movements, such as the smart growth movement which are embedded within a larger, national movement and set of organizations. For scholars and practitioners working toward urban change it is important to understand the contexts which foment local social movements, the ingredients of local social movements and the power of nationally or globally based social movements to be continually reconstructed or reinvented at the local level.

Historic Preservation: A History

As a national social movement embedded within various locales, the presentation of a concise history of the preservation movement in the United States is challenging. To view the movement as other national movements with generalized periods of construction, demise and reconstruction would not paint an accurate picture of the movement's various activities rooted in specific communities. Rather, historic preservation at the national level, and especially its central organization in the United States, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, can be more accurately viewed as an abeyance structure that maintains and links the movement through periods of activism across different times and among different locations by recruiting new activists, sustaining the goals of the movement, mobilizing new resources, exploring new arenas for engagement and the continuous promotion of the movement's collective identity (Taylor 1989). Still, on a national scale the movement can be viewed as evolving and reconstructing itself to address the broad-scale changes happening in American cities as they have experienced deindustrialization with greater global

competition at the city level (Zukin 1995). But just as some scholars would caution us to understand that the ushering in of a post-industrial era does not mean that the structures of the industrial era disappear (Bell 1999 (1973)), neither do the different practices and concerns of the historic preservation movement disappear from one phase to another and from one place to another, for old disputes can flare up again in places that have routine historic preservation practices. On a national scale, then, the population of U.S. cities can be seen as a mosaic of historic preservation in all phases of construction or reconstruction.

Pre-1950—

As early as 1777, the U.S. government became involved in providing funding for Revolutionary War memorials (Mulloy 1976). This was followed in the mid-1800s with preservation movements to save Mount Vernon and other sites associated with George Washington (Mulloy 1976). In short order, there were demands from historically-interested activists around the country to preserve sites associated with the nation's early (Revolutionary Era) and recent (Civil War Era) historic figures and events (Mulloy 1976).

This first wave of preservation in the United States seized on the social and political opportunity to establish a historically-based cultural narrative for a country without the social or political history of an established monarchy (Barthel 1996). These early preservation activists were the cultural elites of the time—ministers, educated women, teachers, and artists—who found a receptive audience for their efforts as federal lawmakers quickly adopted laws and administrative structures in the War Department and, later, the National Park Service, to oversee the preservation of significant national historic sites and commemoration of significant figures and events with appropriate memorials (Barthel 1996).

By the 1930s, cities such as Charleston, New Orleans and San Antonio, became sites of successful local movements to preserve their architecturally unique historic districts and several other cities pursued various efforts to preserve unique historic buildings and districts (Mulloy 1976). During the 1930s, the federal government even expanded its pursuit of historic preservation as part of the New Deal and put people to work to conserve and improve scenic areas, national parks and historic sites (Mulloy 1976). In 1935, the Historic Sites Act lent additional support for preservation. However, like many other domestic initiatives, the preservation activities of the federal government were curtailed with entry into World War II. At this time, movement activists identified a need to create an organization to focus exclusively on historic preservation and to operate independently from the government (Barthel 1996, Mulloy 1976). Thus, the National Trust for Historic Preservation was created by congressional charter in 1949 to save buildings with historic and cultural value as well as “instill in the American people full appreciation of their legacy (Mulloy 1976).” Interestingly, passage of the Housing Act of 1949 would usher in an era of large scale urban renewal projects in U.S. cities that would become the object of significant conflict for the historic preservation movement.

1950s—

Beginning in the 1950s, architecture in American cities became highly contested between preservation and modernism (Boyer 1983). These conflicts erupted in some cities around the country and signaled the heightening of the second wave of historic preservation in the U.S. which can be characterized as a reaction against the impacts of modernism, bureaucratic rationalization and industrialization on the American city especially as large scale urban renewal projects were pursued, multi-lane highways constructed and large tracts

of rural land were converted into subdivisions containing thousands of units of similarly-styled houses (Barthel 1996). These sentiments were shared and expressed by the National Trust as it worked to convince the public of the value of conserving existing buildings during a period of significant change in the built environment of cities as blocks and blocks of buildings were demolished to make room these large-scale urban projects. David E. Finley, Chairman of the National Trust's Board of Trustees during the 1950s, captured the sentiments of the growing historic preservation movement at the organization's annual meeting in 1954:

For we have now reached a point in our history as a nation when our strength, both moral and physical, has placed the leadership of the free world in our hands. To inspire confidence in that leadership, we must prove that we have the capacity, not only for mass production and distribution on the material level, but also that we possess an understanding of moral and cultural values that justify the great and unprecedented trust which has been placed in us by free men everywhere (Finley 1954).

The strategies of the movement during this decade involved significant attempts to educate the public about the value of preservation through seminars, books, and traveling exhibits; activities to “save” significant properties around the country; and the formation around the country of new preservation organizations to tackle local projects and issues (Finley 1954, Finley 1958, Mulloy 1976). The National Trust was the leader and initiator of many of these activities, including the creation of *Historic Preservation* magazine for Trust members beginning in 1952 (Mulloy 1976). In 1958, there were 2,535 members of the Trust (Finley 1958).

1960s—

Beginning in the early 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, the efforts of the movement to maintain its mission and build new support for its goals during the 1950s would

pay off with a period of intense activism and renewed period of federal government involvement in historic preservation. By now, the bureaucratic, highly rationalized efforts to rebuild cities, known as urban renewal, had affected most cities in significant ways with the demolition of significant places within cities—residential neighborhoods and other historic sites—to make room for high-rise public housing complexes, multi-lane freeways and public amenities such as cultural centers and sports arenas (Boyer 1983, Jacobs 1961). The effect of these projects became sources of conflict between historic preservation activists and the local growth coalitions that had formed in support of urban renewal (Logan & Molotch 1987). Seeing and experiencing the effects of urban renewal projects aided the historic preservation movement on two fronts—the grassroots activism of displaced low-income people and the activism of middle and upper-middle income educated groups that were becoming increasingly interested in the quality of the natural and built environment (Altshuler & Luberoff 2003, Reichl 1997).

A touchstone for preservation activism during this time was the demolition of Penn Station in New York in 1963 to make way for Madison Square Garden. This event brought national attention to the movement and motivated local activists to work to establish more effective protections for buildings at the local level and encouraged federal lawmakers to do more to protect historic buildings as well. In 1965, the New York City was the first city in the U.S. to create an official public agency for historic preservation. Charged with designating local landmarks that would forever be protected from significant change or demolition, the New York Landmarks Commission became a model that was soon followed in major cities across the country (Barthel 1996, Zukin 1995). Provided with a new historic preservation tool, preservation activism became a political, often contested activity within

cities as preservation activists and redevelopment interests argued over the designation of landmarks on a building by building or district basis (Zukin 1995). So, although the process of assuring preservation at the local level gained some institutional authority, it could hardly be described as routine with contests over buildings being highly contextualized depending on the value of the building, the proposed redevelopment plan, the architecture and the symbolic value of the building in question (Barthel 1996, Zukin 1995).

National concern for historic preservation expanded during the 1960s. For example, membership in the National Trust increased from approximately 3,000 in 1962 to 12,000 by 1967 (NTHP 1966/67). To advance historic preservation on a national scale, the U.S. Congress passed the National Preservation Act of 1966. This law encouraged an increase in historic preservation activities around the country and established the National Register for Historic Places which was and continues to be run by the National Park Service, a division of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Unlike designations of the local landmarks, designation on the National Register does not prevent changes or demolition of historic properties. Rather, the listing and especially the effort required by local communities to achieve the listing¹² serve to educate and create support for local efforts to preserve these properties. These efforts may also be viewed as solidifying the collective identity of local preservation activists, making them more likely to engage in future preservation activism in their locales (Buechler 2000, Clemens 1996, Crossley 2003). The Act also encouraged new local preservation organizations to form by requiring each state to identify a State Historic

¹² Communities who wish to have individual properties or districts listed on the National Register have to prove the historic or architectural significance of the property by hiring certified preservation consultants to study the property or districts.

Preservation Officer who would facilitate coordination between the Secretary of the Interior and local preservation organizations.

At the national level, the National Trust continued to expand its leadership over the historic preservation movement. Part of the 1966 Act solidified the role of the Trust as a national leader with political influence as the Trust was designated to serve as the only official statutory representative of private preservation efforts to the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (Mulloy 1976). This put the Trust in the position to share in the formation of federal policies regarding historic preservation. In addition, with local activism in the movement on the rise, the Trust became the primary source of information about best practices for local movement organizations as well as a clearinghouse for the necessary technical information about preserving and reusing historic structures (Mulloy 1976).

1970s—

During the 1970s, the movement was in transition from the highly active period of the 1960s into a period of further expanding the role of historic preservation in American cities. The policy victories during the 1960s at the federal, local and state levels continued with a presidential order in 1971 that required all federal agencies to inventory the historically significant properties under their control and to clear any changes to these buildings with the Secretary of the Interior. In addition, Congress authorized the creation of Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG) and tax credits for restoring historic structures in the mid-1970s (Barthel 1996, Mulloy 1976). This completed a new set of institutionalized practices in the movement, yet each building in question raised the potential for activism and each community with newly formed local preservation activists faced the challenges of a new

movement, albeit, one with organizational, symbolic, and some limited financial resources for it to tap into from state and national organizations (Barthel 1996).

During this time, the National Trust, with a membership of 121,000 in 1976/77 (NTHP 1976/77), continued its leadership role by expanding its presence to regional offices around the country, institutionalizing its role as a clearinghouse for technical information and provider of support to new local preservation organizations (Mulloy 1976). In addition, the Trust led a process of expanding the arenas in which historic preservation could play a role in American cities, ushering in the third wave of movement activities. The Trust identified and led the movement to embrace a variety of social, cultural, political, and economic opportunities that existed in various locales around the country as cities reinvented themselves in a post-industrial, highly competitive global environment (Guidry et al 2000, Meyer & Staggenborg 1996, Zukin 1995). Specifically, under the leadership of the Trust, the movement began to offer programs and assistance to communities which framed preservation as cultural pluralism, good environmental practice and economic development (Barthel 1996, Mulloy 1976, Zukin 1995). These new historic preservation frames served to bridge and extend the movement from one era to another and have dominated movement debates and activities since the 1970s (Barthel 1996, Snow et al 1986, Taylor 1989). Significant among these new movement activities would be the work of the National Main Street Center™ which was created in 1977 as a subunit of the National Trust following a series of demonstration projects initiated by the Trust's Midwest Office in 1975 to address the economic development needs of small, declining rural cities and towns as well as urban neighborhood commercial districts (Mulloy 1976, NTHP 1976/77). The purpose of the program was to merge building renovation efforts with local economic development goals.

1980s—

During the 1980s, the movement continued to work both within its professionalized institutional structure as well as outside of these structures as the movement continued to search for and identify new localities in which to activate historic preservation movements (Barthel 1996). In addition, with the elimination during the 1980s of the UDAG program and tax credits for historic restoration efforts, the movement also sought new financial resources to sustain itself (Barthel 1996). The key movement frames that were activated during this time were preservation as economic development and as cultural pluralism (Barthel 1996).

The Main Street Program proved to be very popular with communities in rural states which were facing declines in population. During the 1980s, the National Main Street Program solicited state governments across the U.S. to adopt the program, manage the program for interested communities in those states and provide additional economic resources to assist these communities.

Combining the concepts of cultural pluralism and economic development, the movement developed an interest as well in preserving places of importance for minority and underrepresented groups, especially in urban neighborhoods. Building on the growing neighborhood movements of the 1980s (Peterman 2000, Stoecker 1995), the historic preservation movement took root in these places as well by promoting the preservation of historic buildings in Harlem and other minority neighborhoods (Zukin 1995). Capitalizing on cultural pluralism further and recognizing the increasing importance of heritage and tourism in American cities, the movement, led by the National Trust, developed programs to

encourage and promote heritage tourism at a variety of culturally significant locations around the U.S. (Barthel 1996, Zukin 1995).

These efforts were aided by increased professionalization of the movement through a variety of training and leadership development programs (Barthel 1996) as well as increased partnerships with local governments engaged in neighborhood revitalization (Peterman 2000) and the private development community, some of which became advocates and supporters of historic preservation once they realized that historically distinct districts could garner higher rents (Reichl 1997).

1990s—

Interest in preservation as cultural pluralism and economic development continued into the 1990s with the expansion of the Main Street Program into additional communities. Originally, the program had been designated for communities with 5,000-50,000 residents, but many states now proposed expanding these parameters to include cities and towns that were both larger and smaller than the original thresholds (Barthel 1996). In addition, as tourism became the largest industry in the U.S., the historic preservation movement continued to support heritage tourism efforts by touting the financial benefits of these strategies for community revitalization as well as building the knowledge to pursue heritage tourism through professional training (Barthel 1996).

Moreover, the movement, under the leadership of the National Trust, began to more aggressively pursue preservation as good environmental practice by aligning the work of the movement with that of companion movements such as the smart growth movement, the new urbanism movement and the environmental sustainability movement all of whose members argued against the prevailing pattern of sprawling development and in support of compact

development; reinvestment in urban neighborhoods; additional funding and consideration for transit, walking and biking; and better design of public places (Dehart 1991, Rypkema 2001, Rypkema 2005). These efforts have brought new members to the movement and have strengthened the perception of the movement as one concerned generally with good stewardship of both the built and natural environment (Williams 1995, Zukin 1995).

Preservation Today—

Nationally, preservation today is a mature movement with a multi-faceted set of practices and well-considered arguments and organizational resources at the ready to assist newly emerging local historic preservation movements. Routine preservation work takes place primarily at the local level within historic district or landmark commissions and their staffs, at the state level within State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and at the national level within the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation which as of 2006, has 270,000 members (NTHP 2006). The National Trust as an abeyance structure is an apt descriptor because it maintains the movement and provides oversight as the public conscience for the preservation of historic buildings while always anticipating new battlegrounds in a future time or in new places (Barthel 1996, Taylor 1989).

A quick skimming of the programs offered by the National Trust supports this idea as the programs include: *Preservation* magazine, several newsletters, *Forum Journal*, an annual national conference, the Center for Preservation Leadership, the National Main Street Center™, regional offices, awards, training programs, scholarships, grants for preservation studies, the publication of books through Preservation Press, the Statewide and Local Partnerships Program, Heritage Tourism, Diversity Scholarship Program, the maintenance of 25 of its own historic sites, the Save America's Treasures advocacy program, legal

department, policy department, community revitalization department, ongoing fundraising, Preservation Development Initiatives and study tours (NTHP 2006).

As stated earlier, despite this high degree of routinization and institutionalization, historic preservation can still face a high degree of conflict in communities without institutional support for preservation or as plans are made by local growth elites to alter or demolish particular buildings or districts with historic or architectural value. Here, within these local contexts, social movement tactics are employed to achieve preservation goals.

The history and structure of the preservation movement in American cities illustrates the importance of the interrelatedness of the national movement, led by the National Trust, and local movements, which are the sites of historic preservation contests. The following two sections will make sense of the changing historic context of the movement within the American city and explore the contributions this particular movement can add to understanding of stability and change within social movement structures and ultimately within communities.

Discussion

The discussion sections that follow will explore the relationship between historic preservation and two sets of structures and process. The first section will explore the relationship between historic preservation and the city and will examine how historic preservation has responded to the exogenous forces of deindustrialization and globalization before shifting to an examination of the challenges that historic preservation has presented to the growth coalition power structures within cities. The second section will further detail the structural characteristics of historic preservation movement as it interacts within changing political and cultural environments. Of interest in both sections is an expanded conception of

the resources used in the preservation movement, which include social and cultural resources as well as economic resources (Bourdieu 1986)

Historic Preservation: Grounded in the City

Structurally, communities are undergoing a process of change as urbanization increases. This change can be seen as expanding the vertical pattern of cities, meaning that units (individuals, groups and organizations) within cities have increasing ties to units and interests outside of the city. This vertical pattern results in more intensive¹³ global competition between places for economic success and, along with a current pattern of deindustrialization in American cities,¹⁴ directs the nature of change strategies that are pursued by local level decision-makers in order for cities to compete for economic success (Paulsen 2004, Sassen 1996, Zukin 1995). Today, it is widely accepted that the material success of the city is dependent not only on how the elements of land, labor and financial capital are combined, but also on how a city combines cultural and social elements as order and design to maintain or create an image of a place (Molotch 2002, Zukin 1991, Zukin 1995). In this way, American cities are viewed as a product with an image to be sold at both the national and, increasingly, a global scale (Molotch 2002, Zukin 1995).

Global, Post-Industrial Opportunity Structures for Historic Preservation—

At the global scale of competition, cities, rather than nation-states have become the central actors and conflicts do occur over projects to improve the product of the city (Kohler

¹³ Global competition is not a new phenomenon, but communications, other technologies and global markets sought by large corporations have intensified this level of competition in recent decades.

¹⁴ Industrialization has not ceased, and, in fact, continues to grow as the world's consumers grow. However, high-wage, highly regulatory nations have been impacted by the movement of industrial processes to lower cost production sites in other nations, while financial services and other service functions have continued to grow in high-wage, high knowledge places.

& Wissen 2003, Mayer 2003). In light of this, globalization and deindustrialization can be viewed as new opportunity structures in which local social movements can take root (Guidry et al 2000). In addition, forces such as greater global connectivity can increase the ability of national or global movements to take root and mobilize in several local places at the same time (Guidry et al 2000).

The key to understanding the environment in which historic preservation may take root within a locality is collective identity, especially place identity (Bernstein 1997, Gotham 1999, Gusfield 1970). Collective identity is a concept of great interest to both community scholars and social movement scholars as it can be seen as a structural characteristic of places that can provide either a distinctive, competitive edge or the opposite (Molotch 2002, Molotch et al 2000, Paulsen 2004, Zukin 1995), as well as a strategically deployed resource of social movements (Bernstein 1997, Gotham 1999, Gusfield 1970). This section of the article will look at collective identity as an increasingly desirable structural characteristic of places facing deindustrialization and increasing global competition and will show how historic preservation has benefited as this opportunity (Tarrow 1998) has evolved in American cities.

Since the 1930s, historic preservation has contributed to the creation of place identity formation in American cities such as Charleston, New Orleans and San Antonio (Mulloy 1976). While these early examples demonstrate the opportunity for historic preservation to shape locales that were widely recognized for their distinct architecture, it has been much more recent that historic preservation has benefited more widely from the post-industrial opportunity presented by the desire of city leaders and boosters to shape the image of their cities as products with more to recommend particular places than just an efficient and

productive arrangement of land, labor and capital. In order to create a collective image or identity of a place, cities need to pursue strategies to revise their histories and to construct symbols that reinforce the desired image (Gusfield 1970, Zukin 1995). The preservation of symbolically important buildings or districts is an effective practice, then, for cities to accomplish the creation of a unique place identity (Barthel 1996). The confluence in the 1970s of new institutionalized practices with which to pursue historic preservation along with increasing interest in creating place distinctiveness, has served to bring the movement to many new locales continuously since that time (Barthel 1996, Zukin 1982, Zukin 1995).

Although there is criticism about the co-optation of the movement by growth coalitions (Reichl 1997, Zukin 1995) and the lack of distinction that actually occurs when so many places pursue the same historic preservation strategies (Barthel 1996, Zukin 1995), the movement's impact upon American cities varies widely as there are many examples of places that have pursued historic preservation as a place identity building strategy wholeheartedly, only partially, or not at all. Perhaps the most interesting revelation about historic preservation practices in relation to cities is that strong levels of local support for preservation may signify, along with the presence of a highly-educated workforce, creative industries and cultural amenities such as museums and libraries, the global winners and losers in the competition among places, for the most successful cities have demonstrated their ability to create a product that individuals and corporations want to buy out of both economic and symbolic resources (Florida 2002, Sassen 1996). Not surprisingly then, the national historic preservation movement today can be viewed as two movements—one that has become successfully institutionalized in a number of places and one that is working to convince new locales of its value. At the local level, however, even in places where the

movement has general institutional support, preservation activism can still erupt between activists and growth coalitions over specific contested buildings or districts. Further, at the local level, large scale societal forces other than deindustrialization and globalization are still evident that resist historic preservation.

Historic Preservation Challenging the Growth Machine—

Historic preservation is a movement that attempts to counter the notion that the new is always preferable to the old. Specifically, the movement seeks to preserve and protect old buildings from being destroyed due to neglect or redevelopment. As such, it is a movement entangled in local growth politics, the results of which are materially visible in the cityscape.

Like many other private investment interests, the forces driving local growth decisions have increasingly become highly rationalized focusing on efficient construction and design at the expense of uniqueness and quality in the built environment. These characteristics can be seen in the corporate world of real estate investment and construction as well as the local government functions of land development and zoning. The firms, professionals, and politicians with a stake in local development practices often coalesce around an ideology that favors growth above all other scenarios for a city's future development (Logan & Molotch 1987). The result is that local development practices and beliefs form a local ideological structure referred to as the growth machine, the effect of which is the existence in most American cities of a powerful, inexorable and pervasive system of local development decisions with a preference for new over old, quantity over quality and speed over deliberation (Gotham 2000, Logan & Molotch 1987).

Generally, social movements pursue two different types of strategies—those that challenge (or defend) cultural ideas or prevailing ideologies and those that challenge (or

defend) institutional power or control over resources (Snow et al 2004). In regards to combating the growth machine, the historic preservation movement has pursued both of these strategies as different opportunities or challenges presented themselves. Nationally, the movement grew increasingly strong in the early 1960s as activists responded to the highly bureaucratized, rational, and industrial approach of urban renewal. As collective interest in more progressive approaches to urban revitalization took root, the movement benefited from this political opportunity and was successful in persuading lawmakers nationally and in localities across the country to place greater restrictions on the ability of growth coalitions to implement their urban renewal projects.

With this public, mandatory curtailing of the practices of the growth machines put into place during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the historic preservation movement has reconstructed its challenge to the growth machine. Since the late 1970s, the contemporary movement has focused on contesting the beliefs or ideologies of the growth machine by working to change the cultural environment in which private, voluntary local development goals are formed. It is in this pursuit that historic preservation can be seen to employ identity formation as a strategy (Barthel 1996, Gotham 1999).

Identity formation around cultural ideas can be viewed as a powerful resource for social movements. Much of the recent social movement literature is focused on examining cultural values and how these are changed into movement identities and activism (Edwards & McCarthy 2004, Williams 2004). It is important to note that affecting a change in the cultural environment in which a system operates is different than merely transmitting new messages to the general public, although that is a part of what happens (Eyerman & Jamison 2003). Rather, the cultural environment is changed through a set of processes that have

emotional appeal, a logical core and an aspect of identity formation for many different types of people (Eyerman & Jamison 2003). In this way, successful social movements do change the cultural environment in which systems operate (Bernstein 1997, Buechler 1993, Scott 1970, Williams 1995).

In the contemporary historic preservation movement, the central movement organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation have pursued frame extension strategies (Snow et al 1986) to reconstruct the movement as a challenge to growth machine practices by recruiting new movement participants who identify with the values of environmental sustainability, smart growth and new urbanism, all of which promote urban conservation and preservation strategies (Barthel 1996). Such framing strategies have been successful in changing the prevailing cultural attitudes about the costs and benefits of unmitigated growth and some members of local growth coalitions have begun to embrace development goals which incorporate these values rather than continuing to work against them (Barthel 1996). Likewise, as described in the previous section, the movement has also been successful in framing historic preservation as a tool for creating place distinction and, as such, it has been adopted by many city growth coalitions as a key economic development strategy (Barthel 1996, Zukin 1995).

The relationship between historic preservation and the city serves to illustrate several ways in which social movements are constructed and reconstructed within the city. First, opportunities for movements to form occur as exogenous forces act upon cities and serve to alter the goals pursued by cities. This is illustrated by the idea that some cities have pursued historic preservation as a way of improving the “city product” so that it will be more marketable in a globally competitive world. Second, a movement’s tactics may change as

new opportunities or needs arise. For example, the historic preservation movement that pursued legal and policy changes during the 1960s has now been reinvented in pursuit of strategies to build a cultural environment that is more open and hospitable to voluntary historic preservation practices by reframing historic preservation in the public. The next section will look more closely at the structural organization of this movement and its inherent tensions between the promotion of stability and the promotion of change.

Historic Preservation: A Dynamic Social Movement

Historic preservation, like other urban social movements, highlights the relationship between local movements and social movement organizations by grounding the study of the movement in the particular social, political and cultural environment of the city. The previous section explored the environment of the city and how the historic preservation movement has responded within that environment. One of the interesting aspects of historic preservation is that its long term affiliation with the National Trust and ongoing interplay among the Trust, the National Park Service and local communities allows it to claim a unique position within the population of urban social movements as a centrally organized urban social movement that has existed long enough to respond to the large-scale societal forces discussed in the previous section of this article. The movement and its lead organization, the National Trust can be viewed, then, as an exemplar of a social movement organization that has constructed and reconstructed itself in response to the structural changes occurring within American cities. This section will focus on the organizational character of the movement and the central role played by the National Trust as the movement shifted from the industrial era to the post-industrial era and the consequential shift from the pursuit of mandatory preservation laws to the promotion of voluntary preservation practices. Additionally, this

section will show that this reconstruction of the movement supports much of the current scholarship that has pursued expanded conceptions of resource mobilization theories and the importance of collective identity-building within social movements (Buechler 1993, Buechler 2000, Gotham 1999, Stoecker 1995, Williams 1995).

Organization and Practices—

A unique aspect of the historic preservation movement is that it reconstructs itself over both time and place. Across time, the movement has successfully lobbied for a minimal level of mandatory institutional support through federal laws which require that historic surveys be completed for every federally-funded project in the U.S. in order to prove that no harm is being done to the historic environment of the particular community (Mulloy 1976). In addition, the movement has been successful in advocating for federal laws that help to support the voluntary preservation practices of local governments that wish to identify and protect properties owned by private parties and state or local governments (Mulloy 1976). Across place, communities can choose their level of institutional support for historic preservation. Yet, despite such variations, the organizational structure of the movement results in fairly uniform professional practices from place to place. This section will describe the current organizational roles within the movement and how these interact to move historic preservation toward its goal of institutionalized historic preservation practice in all localities.

As mentioned throughout this article, the National Trust for Historic Preservation is the private arm of the movement. It provides national leadership in calling attention to the need for preservation and promoting particular practices within the movement. The National Park Service is the public arm of the movement and serves as the official administrator of the National Register of Historic Places which confers listing status to properties and districts

that are proven to be historically or architecturally significant at the local or state level.

These two organizations with their respective functions serve to organize and centralize the movement's key initiatives and activities at the national level.

Public sector voluntary activities of historic preservation are highly bureaucratized with all levels of government activity ultimately acting in accord with the U.S Department of the Interior (Mulloy 1976). At the local level, a community that has decided to institutionalize historic preservation practices must follow specific processes if it desires the status of National Register designation for its buildings or districts. First, the community must be designated as a "Certified Local Government" to practice historic preservation. This designation is awarded through the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), which exist in every state and which serve to coordinate activities among state and local governments and the U.S. Department of the Interior. Once a community is certified, it must prove that the buildings or districts of interest will meet the test of historic or architectural significance for listing on the National Register. Interestingly, the documentation required to prove significance must be prepared by a professional consultant, also certified by the SHPO.

While National Register listings draw attention to preservation within communities, this status does not protect buildings from alteration or demolition. If a community wishes to establish further safeguards, it must also establish a local historic preservation commission which can prevent the alteration or demolition of properties designated as local landmarks or historic districts. There are many local variations in the legal processes followed to establish local landmarks or historic districts. Each requires some type of super-majority of support from city councils, district residents or both. Local commission activities are, however, still

supervised by SHPOs which have the power, in some cases, to veto or change the actions approved by local commissions and city councils.

Voluntary historic preservation activities that are privately supported are not as prescribed as the public; however, there is a fair amount of uniformity in these practices as well. At the most voluntary level of participation in the movement, the individual property owner who wishes to renovate a historic structure, both the National Park Service, the National Trust, and many other preservation organizations publish technical reports and information to advise these projects. Individuals interested in historic preservation can choose to join the National Trust or any number of local or state alliance groups. These voluntary expressions of interest will likely introduce that individual to a network of other organizations, preservation activities, and calls to action in the local area of residence.

Moving up to the neighborhood or community level of historic preservation interest, the most typical organizational activities are to seek historic district listings for special places and/or to develop local economic development strategies around historic preservation (Barthel 1996). The most typical organizational format in which to pursue economic development is to earn technical and financial assistance through the National Main Street Center™ which is administered through state level Main Street programs (NTHP 2006). Each of the 1,200 official Main Street Program in the U.S. follows an established, proprietary, four-point strategy developed by the National Trust, making these efforts remarkably similar from place to place (NTHP 2006). Other local efforts to promote historic preservation, such as heritage tourism, do not have proprietary programs to follow, but the National Trust and its national network of affiliated organizations do lead the historic

preservation field in producing information and training opportunities to assist communities interested in these activities.

Finally, all of the organizations and places that practice historic preservation have become highly professionalized as colleges and universities have created special programs in recent decades to train historic preservation professionals and the National Trust provides extensive, ongoing training for preservation professionals. In addition, related professions such as community planning and architecture, provide opportunities within those fields for individuals to specialize in historic preservation work.

The organization of historic preservation indicates a tension among movement activities promoting change in local development practices and historic preservation practices which promote institutional stability once preservation is pursued at the local level. This dynamic is informed by adoption and diffusion theory which would characterize historic preservation movement activities as diffusion processes and historic preservation practices as local development innovations which are adopted in some places, but not in others (Rogers 1995). The role played by the National Trust to manage these tensions through its own organizational innovations, the framing strategies it uses to promote the goals of the movement, and the structure of its programs and initiatives which shape the form of local movements and practices are of interest (Clemens 1996). The following section will rely on expanded conceptions of resource mobilization theory to show how the movement and the National Trust have accomplished these activities.

A Political and Cultural Movement—

The organized social movement acting within a political environment captures the essential dynamic of resource mobilization theories that have been advanced since the 1970s

in regards to social movements (McAdam et al 1988, McCarthy & Zald 1977). The core of this social movement theory suggests that in order for social movements to be successful in either changing existing ideologies or institutional power (Snow et al 2004), movement resources and the political environment need to align (McAdam et al 1988, McCarthy & Zald 1977, Tarrow 1998). Political opportunities in the external environment and organizational resources—money, labor, and legal aid—are both necessary for effective mobilization such that neither a social movement organization without political opportunities nor political opportunities without an effective social movement organization will result in the creation of a successful social movement (McCarthy & Zald 1977, Snow et al 2004).

Recent challenges to the resource mobilization perspective suggest that the relationship between the external environment where political opportunities lie and the organized social movement system is not only one of contingency or dependency, but also one of reciprocity in that each can influence alterations to the other (Campbell 2005, Meyer & Staggenborg 1996). For example, social movements can alter the external environment by influencing policy changes, altering political alignments, or raising the profile of issues presented to the public (Meyer & Staggenborg 1996) while the external environment, in turn, affects social movement resources, goals or tactics as social, political and cultural values change (Campbell 2005). Resource mobilization scholars have also been challenged in recent years to acknowledge that social movements exist not only in a political environment, but also a cultural environment (Buechler 1993, Gotham 1999) such that opportunities exist within each to change not only institutional power or control of resources, but also to change cultural values and prevailing ideologies (Snow et al 2004). Resources derive from these

environments and can be conceived as cultural or social as well as economic (Bourdieu 1986, Buechler 1993, Gotham 1999).

The reconstruction of the historic preservation movement in light of globalization and deindustrialization offers an example of the reciprocal relationship between movements and the external environment. The movement was successful during the 1960s in raising public awareness about the need to preserve buildings in American cities, thus changing political alignments and ultimately bringing about policy changes that aided movement goals (Barthel 1996). The result of these movement victories was the creation of a new set of historic preservation practices, reliant on professional expertise in architecture, public administration and the law (Barthel 1996). These practices eventually became routine and institutionalized, thereby creating a need for the movement to be reconstructed if it was to continue.

During the mid 1970s, political opportunities for the movement at the national level had subsided as lawmakers seemed content with the level of mandatory preservation practices that had been enacted through the creation of national laws and state-level advisory support for historic preservation (Mulloy 1976). Yet, social opportunities in the external environment continued as more people were now interested in and participating in the movement, at least passively, as signified by increasing membership in the National Trust (NTHP 1976/77). Under the leadership of the Trust, new cultural opportunities were identified within the external environment as groups of Americans developed new cultural values toward revitalizing small communities, appreciating and supporting cultural diversity and conserving natural resources (Barthel 1996, Buechler 2000, Taylor 1989). In addition, political opportunities for the movement were greatly reduced at the national level, but still existed at the local level as the movement sought to create new local policies that would put

local mandatory historic preservation practices in place and provide greater support for voluntary participation in local historic preservation practices (Barthel 1996, Tarrow 1998).

In order for the movement to respond to these opportunities, its national leader, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, played a key innovating role in organizing the resources available to it at the time to advance the movement into additional communities (Barthel 1996, Taylor 1989). The use of cultural resources by the National Trust during this period of abeyance and innovation illustrates how cultural opportunities that exist within the environment in the form of shared values can be identified, organized and deployed by a social movement organization such that cultural values are transformed into a cultural resource (Buechler 2000, Gotham 1999). The transformation of cultural values into resources available to further social movement goals requires the construction and use of collective identities and collective action frames which have been subjects of great interest to social movement scholars in recent years (Bernstein 1997, Gotham 1999, Snow et al 1986, Stoecker 1995, Tarrow 1992, Williams 1995, Zukin 1995).

Through public awareness and outreach efforts, in addition to preservation, the National Trust worked to show how historic preservation aligned with concerns about diversity and economic development by creating programs catering to the goals of greater cultural pluralism and economic development. By targeting programs aimed at the preservation of buildings within diverse urban neighborhoods and small town main streets, the movement advanced the frames of historic preservation as cultural pluralism and historic preservation as economic development. The use of these strategic frames and new movement tactics in the form of program assistance helped to advance historic preservation goals in these places and to construct shared place identities built around preserved buildings

as symbols representing shared history within these places. As these new preservation programs achieved success, preservation became an accepted component of the collective identity of those who were pursuing the goals of cultural pluralism and economic development. Later, during the 1990s, these framing strategies would again be used to align the movement with environmental concerns captured in the smart growth, new urbanism, and sustainable development movements.

The strength of frames as a tool to advance movement objectives, is that local preservation activists can easily adopt these historic preservation frames to engage in debates about the future of their communities in ways that supported not only the goals of preservation, but also sets of goals with broader local support, including, in some cases, members of local growth coalitions. In this way, these place-based collective action frames become tools to bridge preservation with other local concerns such as environmental conservation, diversity or economic development as well as to bridge between broad societal changes affecting communities and local actions to address these changes (Gotham 1999, Martin 2003, Snow et al 1986). Local actors use these frames to construct place-identities with a built-in connection to historic preservation practices. As such, place identity can be viewed as a cultural resource to be used in advancing local social movement goals or other community actions (Gotham 1999).

The challenge in using collective identities as a social movement strategy lies in the character of such collective identities which are not stable, but are constructed and continually reinvented (Stoecker 1995). Further, once such a cultural resource is deployed it exists both within the controlled internal environment of the movement, but also in the external environment of politics and culture where these identities can be appropriated by

other political actors (Elliot et al 2004, Williams 1995). In the case of historic preservation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the organizational structure of the movement work to manage the way that preservation is framed in relation to other political and cultural issues. Further, through its activities and programs, the National Trust maintains control over many of the highly professional practices of the movement at the national level and local levels. These practices serve to reify, to make material, the link between preservation and important place-based identities.

The social structure of the preservation movement highlights an interesting tension that exists between stability and change that plays out in local communities. Obviously, as a social movement, historic preservation is advancing changes in urban development practices. Having secured some support at the national level for preservation, the movement has shifted its focus to the local level, targeting its programs and messages toward local governments, local activists and local development interests. These efforts to promote change rely on the ability of the movement to find ways to convince people of the value or meaning of historic preservation. Fortunately, preservation is symbolically rich and plays a role in constructing identities by adding symbolic value to the way people perceive places and in aligning preservation with other collective interests and values through the use of frames.

The tension for historic preservation lies in the institutionalization of historic preservation practices with localities after a local movement has been successful in influencing local actors. At this point, the movement fades into the background as uniform practices become routine. This tension highlights the ultimate goal the movement which seems to be the complete institutionalization of historic preservation practices within all communities. This suggests a degree of goal displacement within the movement as some

work to promote change and others work to institute stable practices. The role of the National Trust, therefore, is critically important to the movement as it serves a necessary coordinating role between the movement and professional practice activities.

Conclusion

This article has broadly explored a particular type of local social movement with attention toward the forces of stability and change within the structure of its local contexts and within the structure of the movement and its organizations. At the community level, historic preservation has been able to respond positively toward the large-scale societal forces of globalization and deindustrialization affecting cities, thus using these changes to reconstruct itself as a strategy for cities to pursue in improving their competitiveness. Within communities, historic preservation seeks to change the goals and processes of the stable, powerful growth coalitions. The movement has been successful in doing this by recognizing the voluntary character of preservation activities by local governments, individuals and developers and by changing movement goals and practices to influence these local actors. Once convinced of the value of preservation, movement organizations work in harmony to unify and institutionalize preservation practices, sharing power with or, perhaps co-opting the power of local growth coalitions to advance preservation activities. At this point, historic preservation ceases to be an active local movement, but is sustained through abeyance structures (Taylor 1989), ready to be reconstructed if particular buildings or sites are threatened.

This article has attempted to recast the history and practices of a familiar social movement to discuss social movement theory in a way that may add insights to other Land-Use Movements, especially the “smart growth” movement which relates to a variety of

movements such as new urbanism, slow growth, environmental justice, sustainable communities, anti-consumerism and historic preservation.

First, mandatory versus voluntary development practices are an important point of delineation within Land-Use Movements. Given the strong sentiment for private property rights that exists in the U.S., new land use mandates that result from social movements will likely accomplish only part of the goal of Land-Use Movements. As new Land-Use Movements begin, they will likely occur, as they did in the historic preservation movement, as reactions to proposed or planned development projects. Such reactions will secondarily bring attention to the development processes that exist within cities and these processes will become the secondary targets for change by the movement, once the outcome of the initial conflict is resolved. This cycle of challenges toward development proposals and development processes will continue until a particular land use jurisdiction has reached a saturation point of adopting land use mandates.

The result of this is that Land-Use Movement activists will always need to extend their tactics to encourage voluntary compliance. In the case of Land-Use Movements, voluntary compliance with movement goals is aided by the use of both movement tactics and resources as well as changing political opportunity structures. Tactics and resources include the use of “framing” strategies which link sets of shared values within a movement to the values of related movements as well as the creation of a strong organizational structure which keeps the objectives of a particular movement in abeyance through time and aids in consistent, proven tactical strategies across place. So, while the smart growth movement does not yet have an organization as central to its aim as the National Trust for Historic Preservation is to historic preservation, it does have several national-level organizations

(1000 Friends network and Congress of New Urbanism are just two examples) that are working to frame issues and messages and ultimately aid in the longevity of the movements. In addition, the exogenous force of global competition will continue to provide political opportunities for cities to adopt policies and economic development strategies that will encourage the development of quality of life and unique amenities which will serve to distinguish them from their place competitors.

Last, this article has shown that there is a rich amount of information concerning Land-Use Movements and many empirical opportunities for the study of such movements through comparisons across time, place and movement organizations. There is much more to learn here about how local movements can and do affect local development.

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CHAPTER FIVE

ADVOCACY AND PROFESSIONALISM: NEGOTIATING ROLE CONFLICTS IN NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING PRACTICE

An article to be submitted in modified form to an urban affairs or urban studies journal

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Abstract

Professional planners employed by local governments to work on neighborhood revitalization initiatives face two types of role conflict that are not adequately explained or understood in the literature. First, neighborhood planning work by definition requires planners to work with conflicting constituent groups. Second, neighborhood planners often experience inter-role conflict as they try to manage their conflicting desires to be advocates for neighborhood causes and professional colleagues to other local government employees. This paper will examine how neighborhood planning roles emerge and are negotiated within a particular planning context. The City of Des Moines' Neighborhood Revitalization program has existed for twenty years. During that time, twelve different individuals served as neighborhood planners working on both planning and implementation activities with neighborhood organizations. Using an organizational history and the insights gathered from the "guided narratives" of other City of Des Moines neighborhood planners; this paper will highlight one case of the nature of the role negotiations professional planners make. Understanding these negotiations will contribute to a better understanding of the situational factors that influence the selection of the various practice roles of neighborhood

planners and, therefore may also serve to improve urban revitalization program development at the local government level.

Introduction

Within local government, neighborhood revitalization is an activity typically assigned to professional planners, with several cities employing a group of planners dedicated full-time to neighborhood planning. Planning is a profession that works mostly in the domain of local government making plans for future changes that a particular locality will face in the future. Planners are professionally educated at universities where they learn about the forces of change affecting communities, specific skills to forecast and predict changes using a variety of data sources, and skills for working with public officials and citizens. Planning as a profession places a high value on objectivity and equity in public decision-making processes. Given that definitions of objectivity and equity are often contested in public debates, it is not surprising that planning in a democratic society, particularly in the United States where citizens greatly distrust local government, is a conflict-filled activity (Hoch 1994; Scott 1970).

In the context of neighborhood planning, where planners often work in low income neighborhoods, this level of conflict is even more severe given widespread debate over the necessity of welfare programs and the historic distrust of low income residents toward government (Peterman 2000). Further, neighborhood planners are often assigned to work with particular neighborhoods over several months or years as a representative of the local government. This puts these planners and the particular organizational units they work for in the dual role of having to advocate for the wants and needs of neighborhood organizations

and residents while serving as objective professionals making policy recommendations to other public officials with local government organizations.

The contemporary view of planning professionals by planning scholars is that planners are reflexive agents who interpret information and events, learn from experiences and are deliberative in their work with both the public and citizens (Baum 1983; Forester 1999; Hoch 1994; Innes 1996; Schon 1982). These conclusions have been reached through empirical studies of the work of professional planners and the variety of roles planners play in this work. Broadly, planners are recognized in various circumstances to mediate conflicts, propose practical solutions to problems, develop relationships between organizations, and teach and persuade public officials (Hoch 1994; Innes 1996). Further, planners are agents, able to negotiate appropriate roles in particular circumstances (Forester 1999; Hoch 1994). This view is supported generally among social theorists who view individuals as being continually confronted by conflicting sets of role expectations, conforming to a particular set of expectations based on a variety of situational factors such as the importance of particular relationships, the perceived sanctions involved in choosing one set of expectations over another, and the degree of conflict detected by the individual (Scott 1970).

To date, there has not been an effort to more closely examine the particular roles of neighborhood planners in urban revitalization work or to identify the various situational factors that contribute to conflicting role expectations and influence the selection of roles by neighborhood planners. This study aims to contribute to two related areas of urban revitalization studies. First, there is a body of literature that has worked to classify types of professional community practices, including professional roles (Friedmann 1987; Rothman 1995). And while there is general agreement that ideal type models of practice are more

usefully employed in revealing the components and variables of community practice rather than as causal or predictive models, there has been little research about the situational factors that contribute to the emergence of particular professional practices and roles in the community field (Rothman 1995). Second, although there have been many interesting studies of professional planning practice, there is a lack of empirical work examining the practices of groups of planners working in shared contexts such as a particular planning subfield like neighborhood planning or a single planning department (Baum 1983, Forester 1999, Hoch 1994, Schon 1982).

Yet, local government planning remains one of the most sustainable forms of community practice given its institutionalization within the structure of local government and, as such, local government will likely continue to be a primary initiator of neighborhood revitalization programs. Neighborhood planning roles then, are arguably an important component of understanding urban revitalization work (Peterman 2000; Rothman 1995). Given the nature of neighborhood planning work, requiring reflexivity among sets of conflicting constituent groups, it would be helpful to understand the specific sources of role conflict, role negotiations that take place in the context of neighborhood revitalization and the various situational factors that influence neighborhood planning roles.

Framing Neighborhood Planning Roles in Des Moines

The literature in classifying ideal types of community practices is useful here in establishing a basic set of frames for defining the competing roles that will generally be faced by neighborhood planners (Goffman 1986). The primary role types that confront professionals in community practice are: encouragers of broad-based community development initiatives who work to gain the involvement of as many community

stakeholders as possible into a particular initiative with the end goal of neighborhood self-sufficiency; analytical professionals who aid communities mostly by preparing and disseminating technical information about existing conditions and options for working with existing policies; and advocates who work to give a voice to the concerns of groups or individuals that are not normally represented in community decision-making processes (Friedmann 1987; Rothman 1995). Because one of the key features of this study is the examination of the negotiated roles of different neighborhood planners working within the same environment, it may be useful here to briefly describe how neighborhood planning in Des Moines came about as well as how the organizational and environmental factors in Des Moines serve to frame neighborhood planning role expectations.

Setting and Methods

During the late 1980s, a general feeling of dissatisfaction emerged among Des Moines' neighborhood leaders about the City's increase in attention to downtown projects at the perceived expense of the City's neighborhood areas. In response to these concerns, the City Council hired the consulting firm, Stockard and Engler Inc., to prepare a study of the needs of neighborhood areas in Des Moines. Their report, *Housing Improvement and Neighborhood Revitalization*, was presented to the City in November of 1989 and the recommendations within it launched the City of Des Moines' Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP).

The major findings of the report called for new leadership and a new direction for the City's efforts at improving neighborhoods (Stockard & Engler 1989). A major recommendation called for the creation of a new neighborhood planning effort with a broad and ambitious agenda anchored by several guiding principles, among them:

- Strategies must be derived from an understanding of and response to the neighborhood's perceived needs
- Strategies must build and maintain neighborhood capacity to participate in planning and implementation
- Strategies must build confidence in the future on the part of neighborhood residents, so that their daily actions will reflect that attitude and thus reinforce the revitalization and stabilization gains which are the objective of public sector involvement
- In conjunction with that process, an effective means [should be developed] of coordinating the activities of the many public and private organizations whose participation will be needed to implement approved neighborhood plans (Stockard & Engler 1989).

Clearly, from the outset, the NRP was intended to serve all of the various types of community practice roles that may be anticipated in neighborhood revitalization work. The cornerstone of the program, however, was to lie in developing relationships with neighborhood organizations with the long-term goal of neighborhood self-sufficiency.

Effective neighborhood revitalization requires a strong partnership involving the neighborhoods in which programs are being implemented. Without this partnership, there will be no assurance that the programs are responsive to neighborhood needs, and no assurance that the successes of the programs will endure on a longer-term basis. No matter how much private participation is leveraged by public dollars through specific projects, the long term stability of any neighborhood will depend far more on the cumulative impact of the many decisions made over time by current residents—to stay and invest in their properties, work with their neighbors on matters of immediate concern (Stockard & Engler 1989).

Throughout the twenty-year history of the program, the central coordination for the NRP has remained in the Neighborhood Planning Division with planners describing their roles as “technical assistants” and “planning coordinators (www.ci.des-moines.ia.us 2005).” To date, fifteen neighborhoods have completed action plans as part of this program and six neighborhoods have completed most of the suggestions in their action plans (www.ci.des-moines.ia.us 2005).

In addition to this study of the practices of neighborhood planners, the City of Des Moines conducted its own evaluation of the NRP during 2005. They once again commissioned Stockard and Engler, now Stockard Engler Brigham LLC working with the Wisconsin Partnership for Housing Development, to review the progress of neighborhood revitalization efforts in Des Moines. Like the original Stockard and Engler report, the 2005 report contributes to the topic of this article by pointing to the framework of the NRP and how it shapes role expectations. As such, it helps point to areas of role conflict for neighborhood planners.

The report is generally complimentary of the work that has been done to improve many of Des Moines' neighborhoods and, interestingly, the report attributes many of the program's successes to the ability of the planning staff involved to be able to fill the many different roles that were prescribed for them in the original report (Perkins, Karofsky, Engler, and Brigham 2005).

The Community Development Department is at the center of the neighborhood planning and improvement process. The achievements of the limited staff are remarkable: responsibility for neighborhood outreach, resource allocation, neighborhood revitalization program management, plan implementation, [plan] oversight, ongoing program evaluation, and liaison with neighborhoods during and after the planning process (Perkins, Karofsky, Engler, and Brigham 2005).

In the area of building toward neighborhood self-sufficiency, the report recognizes successes and limitations of the NRP and offers ideas for improving neighborhood capacity building.

The increased visibility and political impact of neighborhoods clearly is one of the major success stories of the 15-year history of the City's Neighborhood Revitalization Program. The competition for designation in the program has spurred neighborhoods to become more organized and the planning process has helped them to set priorities and define their key needs for housing and infrastructure improvements. The leaders in this process have been the neighborhood associations, which generally have become stronger and better-

recognized advocates. At the same time, the success story has also revealed or confirmed some issues that suggest the need for adjusting the process (Perkins, Karofsky, Engler, and Brigham 2005).

The findings of this report reflect the ongoing struggles of the NRP and the neighborhood planners who staff the program in trying to balance the professional concerns and obligations of planners generally with the specific needs of successful neighborhood revitalization efforts, but it also acknowledges the key roles played by planners in the case of Des Moines in successfully advancing many program objectives even though the authors of the report believe that to place additional demands on neighborhood planners would be stretching their capacities too far (Perkins, Karofsky, Engler, and Brigham 2005).

This brief case history of neighborhood revitalization in Des Moines describes an organization in which much is expected of neighborhood planners. City officials, with help from their consultants, recognized at the outset the importance of building self-sufficient neighborhoods, conducting quality professional planning work and, at times, advocating for the needs of neighborhoods. At the same time, they proceeded with an organizational structure that expected and continues to expect neighborhood planners to fill all of these roles without much guidance for how to deal with conflicting role expectations when they arise. The frame that planners must try to align their work with, then, requires ongoing reflexivity as they work with a variety of constituent groups and are pulled in various situations to be competent professionals and/or skilled advocates for neighborhood views while maintaining the goal of eventual neighborhood self-sufficiency (Goffman 1986).

The findings of this paper are based primarily on the written reflections of six neighborhood planners who currently do work or have worked as neighborhood planners for the City of Des Moines. During the twenty years since the neighborhood revitalization

program began at the City of Des Moines, twelve different individuals have been employed as neighborhood planners. Eight individuals originally agreed to participate in the study, but responses were ultimately collected from only six.

The research presented here can be viewed as a single case study of neighborhood planning practices with information gathered from multiple sources bounded within that case. Studying planners from the same organizational environment is valuable because environmental factors, especially political and structural elements, will likely influence role negotiations (Baum 1983; Harrison 1994; Scott 1970). Although small, the sample allows for an examination of situational factors influencing role selection and negotiation that do not vary according to differences in organizational structure and environment.

Information about the practices of these neighborhood planners was collected by soliciting written vignettes from the research participants. Vignettes are narratives that allow writers to interpret events in such a way as to limit or bound the events to particular actors and at the same time preserve the chronology of actions (Miles and Huberman 1994). Their usefulness lies in providing descriptions of events that can be “taken to be representative, typical or emblematic (Miles and Huberman 1994).” The vignettes were gathered by using a guided narrative form (see appendix) which asked the participants to describe their educational and professional backgrounds before prompting for vignettes about neighborhood planning practices.

By definition, neighborhood planning work requires coordination between two constituent groups—local government professionals who are colleagues of planners and neighborhood organizations. Inevitably, the goals and tactics of these two groups come into conflict (Peterman 2000). Therefore, the guided narrative form asked the planners to share

vignettes about the struggles and successes they have had in working with both neighborhood organizations as well as other city staff. In sharing these vignettes I asked them to comment on their contributions (roles) as well as those of the neighborhood organizations and other city staff. Finally, they were asked to reflect more directly on the extent to which they believe they have had to negotiate between advocating for neighborhood interests versus fulfilling other professional expectations. Because there is little existing information about the role practices and situational factors that influence the practices of neighborhood planners in particular, the guided narrative prompts were designed to gather general descriptions of neighborhood planning experiences that consider the roles of the various agents involved. Such an approach allowed for various themes about neighborhood planning roles and practices to emerge from the data.

Stories of Advocacy and Professionalism

The vignettes of neighborhood planning work provided by the participants in this study offer interesting and useful insights into the nature of the negotiations they utilize to balance the demands on them from neighborhood organizations to advocate their causes and other city staff to remain objective professionals. The vignettes offer three interesting findings. The first is that neighborhood planners understand their role to be an expansion of what they understand the typical planning role within local government to be which allows them to disregard, in many cases, the concept that advocacy work may be at odds with their professional responsibilities. The second is that neighborhood planners experience a variety of difficulties in developing and maintaining professional roles with neighborhood organizations. And last, neighborhood planners sometimes experience difficulties in their roles as advocates for neighborhood needs to other professional city staff members.

Expansion of the Professional Role Frame—

The stories suggest an expansion of the qualities that are normally linked with professional roles, at least in the minds of these participants. While good communication, negotiation, facilitation and coordination skills are requisites in many professional settings, the NRP planners also placed a heavy emphasis on perseverance and dedication that can only come from having a strong level of “personal” involvement and concern for neighborhoods, which they often distinguish from having only a professional level of involvement with neighborhoods.

One project that I am particularly proud of is the [blank] Project. This was the first project I inherited when I started working at the City...Due to a series of setbacks, the project took over 5 years to complete...I believe that the fact that this project got built is due to my perseverance and commitment to the project. We suffered so many delays that I think a person that didn't feel so personally attached (like I did) to the project would have let it die, as there were numerous opportunities for it to die. Maybe it was my naivety, but I just did what needed to be done to push the project through the process... I genuinely enjoy working with neighborhood groups, and as a consequence, I develop personal relationships with some of the neighborhood residents. I think this makes it easier for me to be successful in my job because not only do I want to succeed for professional gratification, but also because I don't want to let the neighborhood residents down. I have not been successful in developing personal relationships with all my neighborhoods, however.

--Planner #2

The planners also clearly recognize the need to have good relationships—with reciprocated trust and respect—in order to get their work done. They strive to have good relationships with neighborhood organizations and residents which is not always easy to do, especially if the neighborhood has had a negative experience working with the city in the past.

I'm proud of the relationships I forged with the [blank] Neighborhood association and planning committee. It was hard to earn their trust and respect given their existing perceptions of "The City".

--Planner #1

Like their efforts to build relationships with neighborhood organizations, the planners work hard to establish good relationships with other city staff as well and recognize other city staff as having key resources needed to do the work of neighborhood revitalization.

Many of the resources [other] departments offer are vital to revitalization effort such as parks and street maintenance. The hardest part of working with other departments is when the individual staff members you are working with are new to the neighborhood organization world. Many times these individuals don't understand the benefit neighborhood organizations offer and are uncomfortable with neighborhood politics. My general experience has been that these individuals end up seeing the benefit of working with neighborhood organizations. The only personal irritation I have with staff from other departments is that they often do not understand the public input process and disregard it.

--Planner #5

These planners understand that they can fulfill their professional roles more easily by establishing good relationships with other professionals and especially with neighborhood organizations, thus avoiding some potential conflicts. This expanded conception of the professional role frame of planning work as understood by these planners is recognizable in the level of personal pride and commitment these planners express about their abilities to establish good relationships in their work.

Difficulties in Being Professional with Neighborhood Organizations—

Despite their best efforts to build and maintain good working relationships with neighborhood organizations are there several challenges these planners face in doing so. The two central challenges for planners in working with neighborhood organizations seem to be a

lack of trust from the neighborhood to the planner and a lack of professional respect (in some cases) from the planner to the neighborhood.

Neighborhood groups do not trust the City because of bad experiences in the past or because of some type of negative first impression of the planner which is often very hard to overcome. When this occurs, there is an inherent constituent-based source of role conflict for the planners. In fact, a few of them described never being able to build a good relationship or rapport with a neighborhood group.

I was initiated by fire when I did my first information session to the group about “preserving the historic fabric of the streetscape”. I had handouts that demonstrated general house style elements that are typical of the houses in the [blank] neighborhood. I was trying to explain the differences between contributing vs. non-contributing houses in a historic district when everything broke down. I was not bringing the group along. One resident said I was saying that all the house should look alike – just like the suburbs. In hindsight, I wasn’t gearing the information to the audience I was saying (preaching) what I want them to know about historic context. Lesson learned: Know your audience, know the key point to make, shape the method of the message to the audience. I never gained the respect of the neighborhood at-large nor those of the [blank] Committee.

--Planner #4

Another planner described a neighborhood that just never warmed to her despite how much she cared about the future of the neighborhood, creating a source of inter-role conflict.

My problem with this neighborhood is that they have not “embraced” me the way that the others have. Maybe it is all an ego thing for me. I want to feel appreciated and I don’t feel appreciated in [blank] Neighborhood. In fact, sometimes I feel like they go out of their way to undermine me.

--Planner #2

Another constituent-based source of conflict is the level of professionalism that planners perceive on the part of neighborhood organizations. Planners do judge the neighborhoods’ abilities or capacities to conduct themselves in an organized and rational

way. In other words, they expect the neighborhood organizations to be professional and to display the same level of personal commitment that they feel they bring to the job as well. When these professional qualities are evident, the planning process is perceived as being successful while neighborhoods that struggle to have successful projects are often blamed for not having these qualities.

The project that I am most proud of is the [blank] Neighborhood Plan. I was the lead planner on this project and was able to facilitate the planning process from start to finish. It was great to work with this well established neighborhood organization to create a neighborhood plan that they would be happy with and would help them to improve their neighborhood. The whole way they were enthusiastic and eager to talk about many issues and we worked well with many other Departments that were brought to the table as part of the planning process.

--Planner #6

This same planner expresses different feelings about another neighborhood.

On a personal note I think that some of the neighborhoods I didn't have a good relationship with was because the organization of those neighborhoods was not as strong as it may have been when they were actively in the neighborhood planning process. They may have had a few strong leaders who dominated the organization and didn't really adapt to the constant changes that impact good neighborhood organizations.

--Planner #6

Inter-role conflicts are manifested when neighborhood residents are perceived to be micromanaging tasks or not following the advice of planners. Clearly, the planners find these situations frustrating, but they seem to accept them as part of their work. More serious, however, are the instances where planners felt they had to compromise their professional judgment about issues in order to appease neighborhood residents. These stories, offered by two of the planners, point to the conflict that arises when the planner feels their

professionalism is compromised with the result, in this case, being a typed of resigned abandonment of the professional role frame.

I was asked along with another neighborhood planner to come up with some recommendations for how most of the area could be down zoned to preserve most of the existing single-family homes and create as few as possible non-conformities. This was a daunting process, but most recommendations that were considered were quickly pushed out the door because it wouldn't make certain neighbors happy. In the end every single-family home was down zoned and converted homes were left with their original zoning classification, creating confusing zoning boundaries. It was disappointing to see from a planning aspect for me, but it made the neighborhood happy.

--Planner #6

Difficulties in Advocating Neighborhood Needs to Other City Staff—

Other city departments do not have the direct relationship that neighborhood planners do with neighborhood organizations which is another source of constituent-based role conflict. These other departments are perceived by neighborhood planners as not wanting to work directly with neighborhoods. Neighborhood planners believe that other departments object to working with neighborhood organizations because neighborhood projects are perceived as “messy” with too much process or because neighborhood projects are not as high in status as projects in the downtown, for example. There are also conflicting ideas between planners in general and some other city departments about change. Some departments are charged very clearly with upholding or following certain regulations, while planners, especially neighborhood planners, see themselves as agents of change and look for “new ways” to get things done.

As part of their advocacy role frame, neighborhood planners often express the need to educate, translate, or facilitate processes with other city officials to get them to understand or appreciate the value of neighborhood groups or projects.

There is a different mindset in other departments than among planners, and particularly neighborhood planners. I believe that engineers, inspectors, finance people see the world in black and white whereas most planners see the world in infinite shades of gray. Few things are either right or wrong. The political process is necessary in negotiation and I believe that is good rather than a problem...Problems need to be addressed in a variety of ways, and it's not "all just politics." Sometimes processes need to be changed, even though it's not easy for city government employees...I think the key is listening to other departments just as we listen to neighborhood organizations and work out a solution.

--Planner #3

When neighborhood planners have difficulties in finding ways to get their neighborhood revitalization work done within the existing government system, they persuade the neighborhood organizations to circumvent the system by going to the City Council directly to request some type of policy change or some other type of intervention. Almost every planner had a story about when they did this—exercised this power—and every one of them expressed some level of concern that this type of resolution did not fit within their conception of the professional role frame established by the City of Des Moines NRP.

Another example occurred when the [blank] Neighborhood and [blank] elementary school wanted to put a lighted crosswalk across [blank] Avenue. The City's Traffic and Transportation Division hesitated because it was within the minimum required 300 feet of separation from an existing stop-lighted intersection that is considered a controlled crosswalk. When the Traffic and Transportation Division refused to budge on this requirement, I "educated" the neighborhood association on their other option...they could talk to their City Councilmember. Within weeks of the school and neighborhood leaders talking to the City Councilmember, the lighted crosswalk was in place.

--Planner #1

The neighborhood was not supportive of the project, so I felt like it was my responsibility to make sure that the project didn't happen, but professionally, I couldn't just sabotage the project. In the end, the project did not happen and a different facility is under construction on the site. I probably overstepped my

professional boundary on this issue, but I was completely convinced that it was the wrong development for the neighborhood that I felt compelled to work “behind the scenes” to make sure that the project didn’t happen. I think I did the right thing.

--Planner #2

Many things neighborhoods would like to see happen need to be advocated by the neighborhood directly to their council members because they require policy changes or the redirection of resources that are best accomplished directly from the top. I’ve often told neighborhood organization members that they need to call their council member but that they didn’t hear that from me.

--Planner #5

Discussion

To the extent that community development scholars and urban sociologists examine professional planning practice it is often to delineate its shortcomings in pursuing useful urban change. Planners are often viewed as agents of a local government bureaucracy with goals that often conflict with efforts to empower local residents to control change for themselves (Gittell and Vidal 1998; Loopmans 2004; Peterman 2000; Rothman 1995; Vidal 1996; Warner 1996; Warner 2001). Despite this, local government planning is an institutionalized practice in most cities and is involved on a daily basis with urban change processes. This one case of professional planning practice illustrates how bureaucratic organizational actors can expand role expectations.

The vignettes shared above illustrate the vast variety of role negotiations that take place in the work of neighborhood planners. They view their key practice roles as coordinators, catalysts, analysts, advocates and negotiators. At the same time, they view neighborhood organizations as collaborative problem-solving partners, recipients of city services and sometimes as constituents. Their practice roles with neighborhood organizations vary

depending on the shifting tactical needs of neighborhood revitalization goals as well as their personal feelings about the neighborhood. They may find themselves educating neighborhoods to make good decisions; learning about neighborhood needs; and sometimes convincing neighborhoods to use their own political power. The planners also have both reconcilable and non-reconcilable differences with other city departments, many who do not seem to value working with citizen constituent groups. At times, both the City Council and other city officials are viewed as collaborators and at times they become targets for the political actions of neighborhood organizations, sometimes coached by the neighborhood planners.

In order to negotiate all of these variants, neighborhood planners in Des Moines use role expansion processes (Biddle 1986). Specifically, neighborhood planners view their level of personal dedication to their work as an expansion of what is expected of other planning professionals. In addition, they also use the strategy of role transformation (Biddle 1986), as in the examples when planners suggest to their neighborhood constituent groups to exercise their political power. Clearly, the neighborhood planners are somewhat conflicted about this and see this as going beyond the role expected of them. The planners also demonstrate the use of role abandonment (Biddle 1986) such as when Planner #2 admits to helping to sabotage a project that the neighborhood was against—making a clear choice to favor the advocacy role over the City professional role when facing a direct conflict.

Planning literature, while it has not looked explicitly at role theory, nonetheless has recognized planners as agents who are making negotiations in their planning practices in order to overcome issues of power and conflict in order to make persuasive cases for community change (Forester 1999; Hoch 1994; Innes 1996; Schon 1982). The vignettes

shared by the planners in this study offer further illustrations of how contextual issues affect the practice roles of planners.

Aware of the political power of neighborhood associations, the planners are under constant pressure to maintain good relationships with these associations. This is not always easy to do and varies from one neighborhood context to another. The planners expressed concern with neighborhood associations not liking the planner as well as a planner's occasional lack of respect for the way neighborhood associations conduct their business. An additional contextual factor that contributes to role conflict for these neighborhood planners is that the City and the NRP program within it, are set up so that significant resources that will be needed by the neighborhood planners are controlled to a large degree by other City departments, therefore placing pressure on the planners to maintain good relations with other City staff despite many City staff having little concern for the interests of neighborhood associations.

Conclusion

Neighborhood revitalization will continue to be challenging work, requiring the commitment of active neighborhood residents and organizations, as well as outside organizations and local governments. Most often, neighborhood revitalization efforts will be launched by local governments as a form of neighborhood planning. This study has examined the practices of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program in Des Moines with particular attention focused on the roles adopted and practiced by the neighborhood planners in this context. As such, it offers several ideas for strengthening the quality of local government initiated programs for neighborhood revitalization. First, planners need more training and skills to use to help neighborhood organizations build their professional

capacity. This will be difficult because neighborhoods are likely to vary one from another in their organizational needs, but it is essential to make sure that neighborhood planners do not just fall into a cycle of frustration with neighborhoods that are not cooperating because of a lack of trust or respect. Second, neighborhood planners should be recognized for the amount of advocacy they do on behalf of neighborhood organizations. Three, the benefits and limitations of neighborhood planning should be acknowledged openly as well as the political power of neighborhood organizations. Rather than existing as some type of last resort option for neighborhoods that signals some type of professional failure on the part of planners, the ability of neighborhood organizations to request policy changes to their City Council representative should be viewed as one of the most valuable activities for revitalizing neighborhoods. This may make both planners and other city staff uncomfortable, but it is a necessary part of revitalization and should be viewed as such. And last, local governments should do more to improve the status of neighborhood based projects among all city departments. Such efforts would be relatively simple, as they could be handled through existing employee communication systems and perhaps some special events, and they would ease some of the conflicts faced by local government officials in doing neighborhood revitalization work.

The limitation of this study lies in its case specificity. The City of Des Moines has created a unique environment in which its neighborhood planning practices are conducted with a large degree of formal organizational support from the City, the County, and other nonprofit agencies. In addition, it should be noted that Des Moines has a particularly progressive tradition of neighborhood level involvement with federal funding allocations stretching back to the Model Cities era of the 1960s. As such, neighborhoods in Des Moines

have experience with power sharing in this environment. Viewed in this context, then, the ability of the NRP planners to rather easily adopt practices that fit with a variety of models of community intervention is not surprising, but it also highlights areas of structural conflicts that may exist in other cities that would not, perhaps, foster similar conceptions of empowerment in keeping with liberal or progressive traditions.

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- 9) Do you feel that you have to (or had to) negotiate your role as a neighborhood planner between advocating for neighborhood organizations and fulfilling the expectations placed on planning professionals at the City of Des Moines? If so, please share a story (stories) of how you do (did) this. If not, why isn't it a problem?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use this space to share any other reflections that you feel may be of interest.

Thank you for your time and thoughtfulness!

CHAPTER SIX

NAVIGATING THE SPACE BETWEEN CULTURAL IDEAS AND SOCIAL ACTION IN AN URBAN WORLD

Each chapter of this dissertation has focused on different aspects of the “social maze,” or the paths individuals and organizations take to choose cultural ideas and transform these into social actions. Because each chapter is written as an article to be submitted to peer-reviewed journals, their links to one another and around the central organizing concept of this collection are not highlighted within each chapter. This final chapter will summarize the conclusions from each of the previous chapters and show the contributions this set of articles makes to our understanding of the connection between cultural ideas and social actions in modern life.

Chapter Two looks at the *Dear Abby* newspaper column as a reflection of the modern *conscience collective*. This article demonstrates that individuals have plenty of uncertainty about expected values, beliefs and behaviors and that there is a need in modern society to have a forum or social space for sorting out these uncertainties. The key qualities of such a forum are that interactions are voluntary and able to deal with changing values and ideas. Most importantly, such forums must be managed by a trusted authority that is perceived as fair and is willing to offer rewards and sanctions for individuals who comply with and/or challenge shared beliefs and expected behaviors. The *Dear Abby* column has occupied this social space since 1956 along with other similar mass media authority figures. Moving forward, the number of such authority figures is likely to increase, making it more

challenging for individuals to find sources, trusted by a large number of people, for sorting out the social order.

Chapter Three looks at the concept of neighboring in today's society. Neighborhoods have always been sites that represent the investment of time and money for individuals. In recent decades, however, neighborhoods are increasingly places for making investments in one's identity as well (Bourdieu 1984; Centner 2008; Florida 2008; Greif 2009; Lloyd 2004; Zukin 1982). Presumably, they are sites for finding others with shared values and priorities, likely at similar stages in the life cycle and of similar socio-economic status. Neighborhood selection is largely voluntary, but because individuals have so much at stake in such a selection, dealing with neighbors in strained situations can feel more obligatory than voluntary to individuals. Such strains usually occur when there are conflicting values between neighbors. This article lends strength to the importance of shared values in voluntary relationships and elaborates on these ideas by suggesting that proximity plays a role in altering the degree to which relationships are viewed as voluntary.

Chapter Four examines the role that the National Trust for Historic Preservation has played in maintaining the public value and practice of historic preservation in the United States since its founding in 1949. A key aspect of the historic preservation movement is that it is largely voluntary in the U.S. both in terms of its regulatory mechanisms and the funding of historic preservation projects. This article demonstrates how cultural ideas are necessary at the city level of organization as well as the individual level, in order for a movement to survive in a highly voluntary environment. The article also highlights the importance of social movement organizations in maintaining a movement through periods of cultural change.

Chapter Five is a study of a particular group of professionals in one particular practice context. The article examines the stories of neighborhood planners to see how they navigate conflicting values and expectations about their practice activities. As professional planners, the individuals in this study have a shared knowledge base and understanding of their values through the Code of Ethics offered through the American Planning Association. Further, these planners are all working in a shared political context giving them a similar perspective about how to approach their work and prioritize the conflicts that come about as they balance the requirement of professionalism at the City of Des Moines with the expectation of advocacy on behalf of neighborhood constituent groups. In this article, the concept of social roles is used to explain how planners link the sometimes-competing values of professionalism and advocacy with actions. The results of this study suggest that planners use a variety of role transformation techniques depending on the specific contextual factors. It also suggests that planners align roles with the most voluntary aspect in any given situation—either the profession they choose or the neighborhood group(s) to which they have become personally attached.

The studies that have been undertaken in this collection have not been psychological examinations of why actors select certain cultural ideas and social actions over others. Rather, the studies included here have examined the structural elements of the maze these actors navigate in modern life (Greer 1999 (1962)). Taken together this collection of articles reveals that this maze contains voluntary decision-making; cultural ideas are dynamic enough to require trusted facilitation; rewards and sanctions offer guidance; and proximity limits the degree to which individuals perceive their options as voluntary.

Each of the articles illustrates activities that have a voluntary nature to them. Chapter Two views individual cases of anomie that are created because of uncertainty about beliefs and behaviors to adopt by individuals. These individuals choose to write to *Dear Abby* and can choose whether or not to follow Abby's advice along with the reading public. Chapter Three uses the same data source as Chapter Two and looks at the degree to which individuals consider neighbor relations to be voluntary versus obligatory. Chapter Four examines a long-running social movement that has built success largely on the voluntary adoption of a particular set of beliefs and practices both at the city level and individual level. Chapter Five offers the most constraining environment in this collection for examining the link between values and actions. Still, planners select their profession and this article shows that even within the tight confines of expected role behaviors, individuals find ways to transform these roles to more closely align their actions with their values. Taken together, the articles show that there are varying levels of choice in selecting cultural ideas and social actions.

This collection of articles also explores the dynamism of cultural ideas and how these shifts are navigated in different situations. In Chapter Two and Chapter Three, the *Dear Abby* newspaper column offers a fifty-year data set that reveals cultural shifts overtime dealing with a variety of personal concerns. In this study, Abby can be viewed as a facilitator of the public forum allowing letter writers and the reading public to view cultural ideas as they are challenged, debated and shifted. In Chapter Four, the study shows how a social movement adapts across time and to different places to shifting cultural ideas about the value of historic preservation. Chapter Five shows how cultural ideas shift from one professional role frame to another, creating conflicting sets of values.

Key to making sense of these cultural shifts in each of these cases is facilitating devices. In the *Dear Abby* examples, it is the publication of the newspaper column itself, managed by Abby¹⁵, which serves as a facilitating device. In the case of the historic preservation movement, it is the National Trust for Historic Preservation that serves this role and in the case of the neighborhood planners, the facilitating device is the City of Des Moines which created a flexible institutional environment for its neighborhood revitalization program.

Trust is an important quality for building facilitating devices that can be relied on for guidance. Abby and the *Dear Abby* column are trusted because of its perceived fairness in dealing with conflicting perspectives and because of its longevity. The National Trust is trusted for its longevity, its success in influencing the preservation of historic buildings, and for helping to shape a collective identity for movement followers. The neighborhood planners reveal that they do not always trust that they are making the right choices. This may be an indication of the relative youth of the City of Des Moines' Neighborhood Revitalization Program as well as a reflection of the highly political nature of neighborhood planning work.

These facilitating devices work to guide individuals in their adoption of beliefs and behaviors, at least in part, because each of the facilitating devices comes with rewards and sanctions. The *Dear Abby* column frequently serves as a mechanism through which to sanction or reward individuals about their beliefs or behaviors. The National Trust for

¹⁵ To distinguish between analysis about the column and the author of the column, *Dear Abby* will be used to reference the column and the author will be referred to as, Abby, as it appears in the column title and as she is referred to by the readership.

Historic Preservation, a voluntary organization with a voluntary agenda, uses the reward of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu 1993) to attract followers to the cause of historic preservation, leaving sanctions to their partner organizations, the National Park Service and local landmark preservation commissions. The neighborhood planners in Chapter Five also discuss the tension of rewards and sanctions when they reveal trying to avoid political sanctions and also their attempts to please other city professionals or neighborhood groups.

Finally, this collection of articles makes some inferences about the importance of proximity in voluntary relationships. Voluntary social relationships can help to illuminate choices about cultural ideas and social actions. Chapter Three suggests that the proximity of neighbors may limit the extent to which individuals perceive relationships to be voluntary. The stories of the neighborhood planners also support the idea that relationships in work environments can feel both obligatory and voluntary. Proximity in this collection seems to put constraints on the choices individuals have to adopt beliefs or behaviors. Further, proximity also creates perceived social risks making individuals uncomfortable.

Contributions and Limitations of this Collection

This collection illustrates the challenge of navigating cultural values and social action in a world that is increasingly complex and full of multiple, voluntary options for carrying out our lives. Often, sociology looks at the increasing presence of large, institutional constraints on individuals, and while this collection acknowledges these constraints—government, professional roles, geographic location, and societal mores—it also recognizes the smaller social structures within the larger social structure as outlets for choice that take place at varying levels of social organization.

The articles in this collection point to valuable lessons to be learned by the everyday actions of individuals, helping to make links between micro and macro theory. While each article focuses on the micro activities of individuals or organizations, it sets these actions within relevant macro frameworks in order to show how macro structures get translated into micro actions (Collins 1988). At the societal level, the micro-level, daily interactions that take place within the space of the *Dear Abby* column over time form a modern moral conscience that helps to maintain the normative order, lending a human-scaled understanding of some of the dimensions of the mass media's influence on individuals. At the organization level, the organizational evolution of the National Trust for Historic Preservation is a micro-level set of observations, but when fitted into the changes occurring in the larger society and comparing the work of the Trust to that of other social movement organizations, patterns emerge that reveal changes in urban development practices and changes in social movements. Last, at the interpersonal level, observations of strain among neighbors and within planner's work roles, reveal limitations to prevailing ideas about the changing nature of neighbor ties and assumptions about the limitations for individual actors to exercise agency within bureaucratic environments. Embedded in each article, then, is a demonstration of how the macro—societal values, social movements, urban development, social ties and bureaucracies—is composed of the micro—daily interaction in advice columns, the history of a single social movement organization, neighbor conflicts and inter-role conflicts—as well as how the micro adapts to the structure of the macro (Collins 1988).

This collection also makes a contribution to the debate about whether or not urban sociology should only be interested in place-based concerns (Orum 1988; Wellman 1979), suggesting that the concerns of urban sociologists should not be limited to only urban places.

Urbanization is a process of social change that affects individuals who live in lots of different places. While there is obvious value in studying urban places (Orum 1988) and urban organizations (McQuarrie and Marwell 2009), it is also important to understand that urban culture (Borer 2006) and ideas about how to adapt to modern life has further reaching effects than in only urban places. Syndicated newspaper columns, historic preservation, neighbor strain, and bureaucratic role conflicts take place in various-sized settlements across America supporting the notion that cultural shifts in response to urbanization are worthy of concern by urban sociologists in addition to place-based concerns.

The limitations of this collection are closely linked to its strength. The strength of this collection is the variety of methods and levels of analysis used to view similar phenomena, offering several views of the paths individuals and organizations take to choose cultural ideas and transform these into social actions. Comparing across levels, then, yields insights about the limits of voluntarism in choosing particular beliefs and behaviors; the need for trusted facilitators to navigate complexity and change; and the inherent value of rewards and sanctions in maintaining social order. The limitation to this approach is the specificity of each investigation and the seemingly endless number of possible investigations that could be undertaken in order to reach a full understanding of how cultural ideas are transformed into social action.

Suggestions for Future Research

The contributions and limitations point to many future avenues for research. As suggested above, the work here suggests there are many possibilities for examining the links between cultural ideas and social action using various methods and at various levels of social organization. Some possibilities inspired by this collection include: follow-up studies with

regular advice-column readers; further examination of social ties in neighborhoods and in workplaces that have both voluntary and obligatory characteristics to them; and investigating other social movement organizations that have sufficient history through which to examine responses to social change.

The articles presented here using data from the *Dear Abby* study only scratch the surface of the possible uses of this data. As the Appendix in Chapter Two suggests, as well as excerpts of the column used in both Chapter Two and Chapter Three, there are further sociological concepts to explore with rich, qualitative support. A book-length work or several articles could be produced from this data. One set of concepts embedded within this data of particular interest is the linked ideas of success, risk and trust. The two articles included in this selection hint at concerns about risk and the importance of trust in modern life, but the data also reveal changing ideas about success. Another possibility is to build on the concept of the modern *conscience collective* and develop further works around particular issues such as families, friends, health, and so on.

Ultimately, however, understanding how change at the community level of social organization takes place through the influence of new ideas and/or shifts in the processes of community level decision-making remains most interesting. A possible avenue of research is to explore the beliefs and behaviors of other community level design professionals such as real estate developers, architects, and landscape architects. The author's professional experiences suggest that the goals of urban development are shifting in recognition of the link between the monetary value of places and the cultural meaning of places. Examining how these design professionals and their associated organizations adopt ideas, make decisions and collaborate with other professionals and groups in the urban development

process could be revealing and useful for improving professional practices. Investigation of other national social movement organizations, such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, that are challenging prevailing ideas about urban development would also be compelling. Finally, it would be interesting to compare a set of organizations along a continuum of those who are well-established, like the Trust, and more in their infancy, like the 1000 Friends network, in order to compare tactics and effectiveness.

From Planner to Sociologist: Redux

The author's experience as a professional planner creates a sustained interest in both the problems and the promise of cities. Sociology provides an understanding of the social organization of cities set within larger society and constituted of various organizations, institutions, networks, and processes. As evidenced by this collection of articles, the intersections of planning and sociology yield insights into cities and offer several wellsprings for future work.

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