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THE SHOP-LOCALLY DISCOURSE IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, KANSAS

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ABSTRACT—Inhabitants in the villages of Jefferson County, Kansas, respond to socioeconomic changes in a variety of ways. Empirical research conducted in 2004 revealed multiple discourses that constituted such responses. The shop-locally discourse emerged in structured interviews, newspaper articles, and newspaper advertisements as an emblem of socioeconomic empowerment. Discourse was analyzed within its context and interpreted to provide some insight into residents' responses to change. The discourse revealed not only nostalgia for formerly vibrant commercial districts but also the importance of economic vitality to social life. Shopping locally today, however, will not restore yesteryear's social milieu. The proximity of midsize cities in adjacent counties pulls the economic lifeblood out of Jefferson County, transforming the villages into bedroom communities. If their economies are to be revitalized, inhabitants will need to become more thoughtful and creative agents of change within their own villages.

Key Words: discourse analysis, rural Kansas, socioeconomic change, villages

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines one strategy used by local residents of four villages in Jefferson County, Kansas, to respond to recent socioeconomic changes. The “shop-locally” discourse is an exercise in persuading citizens to patronize local businesses, in particular retail businesses, instead of driving to the cities to spend money. The discourse reasons that by patronizing county businesses, a resident not only helps keep local businesses going but also contributes to sustaining local community. “Community” itself is not clearly defined, but its signs and signifiers are taken for granted. A close reading of interview transcripts and archival materials shows it to mean, at the least, a network of interactions and relations in which people know their neighbors, local businesspeople provide personal attention, people feel safe, and family surnames confer insider status to residents whose roots stretch back several generations locally. To shop locally or utilize local services is to support this cultural and historical structure that many residents identify with.

Embedded within the discourse is the notion that community is partly constituted through economic relations (Tolbert et al. 2002; Bell 2004). In the Great Plains, these economic relations have been disrupted by the shift in agriculture from family farms to corporate mega-

farms and by population decline (Adamchak et al. 1999); small-town economies have deteriorated as farm families have disappeared from the landscape (Bell 2004). The heart of the shop-locally discourse, then, is a desire to revive the central business districts of these villages and restore them to some semblance of the thriving, albeit small, centers of commerce they once were.

JEFFERSON COUNTY BACKGROUND

Jefferson County comprises 535 square miles of glacial hills and river floodplain in the northeastern corner of Kansas (Fig. 1). Glacial till deposits blanket the limestone bedrock (Shortridge 1988), and fertile top strata of loess make the area suitable for agriculture. The Delaware River is impounded in the western half of the county by Perry Dam, forming Perry Lake. From there, a trickle of the Delaware meets up with the Kansas River, which flows east toward the Missouri River. Aside from the three villages in the Kansas River floodplain, the rest of the county's towns lie among the glacial hills.

Unlike many counties in the Great Plains or Midwest, Jefferson County never developed a substantially larger town that became a commercial and socioeconomic center (Shortridge 1988). Instead, the county seat, Oskaloosa, and Valley Falls developed as the largest villages

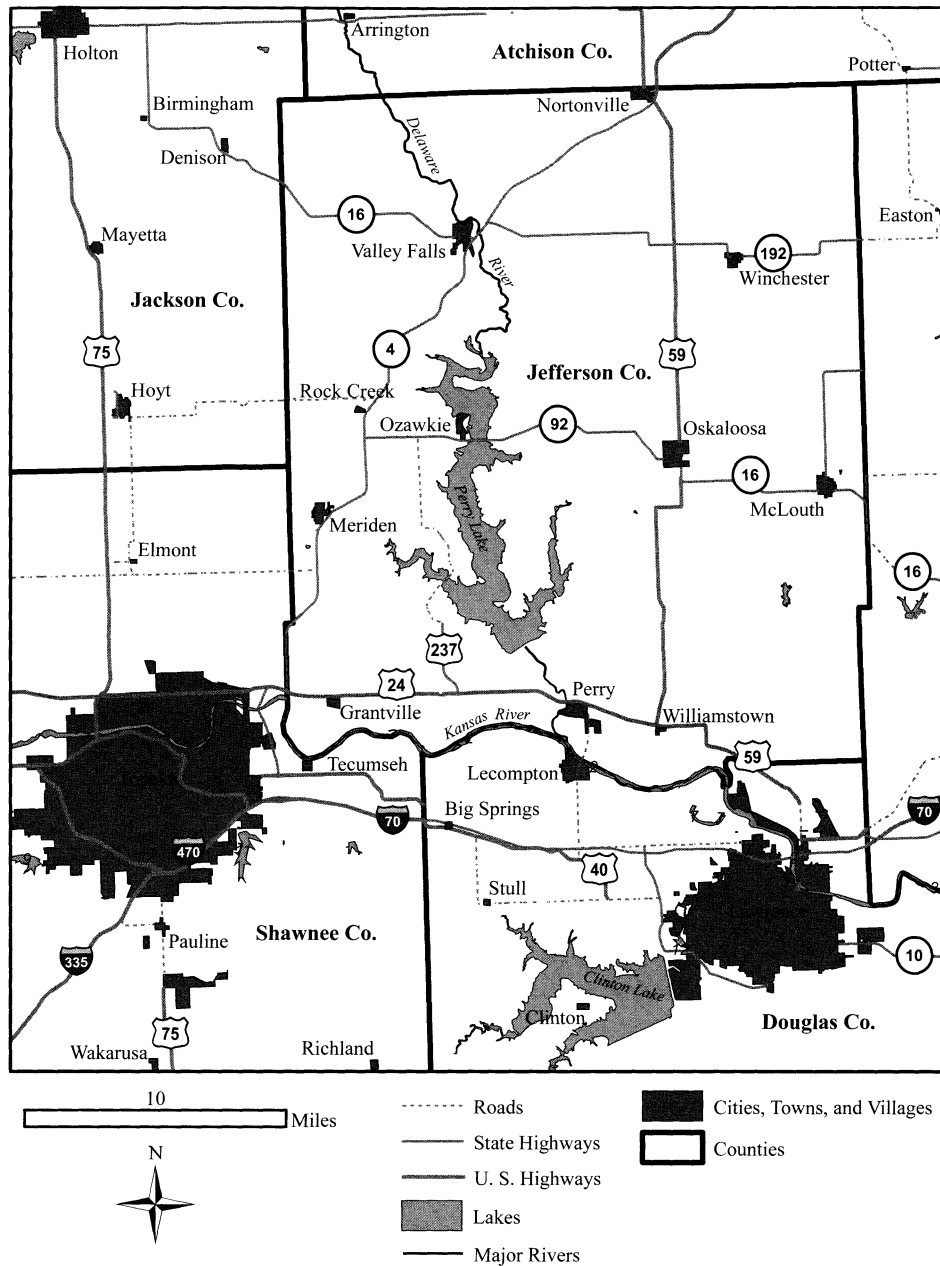


Figure 1. Jefferson County, Kansas, lies in the northeastern corner of the state. Map created by Regan Maas.

without ever surpassing approximately 1,250 inhabitants each. Shortridge (1988) has remarked on the “nineteenth-century urban structure” of the county and has attributed it to the “broken topography” and the county’s location between the valleys of the Kansas and Missouri rivers. These river floodplains attracted larger settlements, major railroad hubs, and important early manufacturers (Shortridge 1988). Today Lawrence, Topeka, Kansas City, Leavenworth, and Atchison are all within easy driving distance of several Jefferson County villages.

Because of its situation near urban centers, the county experiences overall population and business expansion, yet county villages stagnate or decline in population and business functions. This contradiction affects the socioeconomic well-being of the villages. While some exurban residential and commercial development blooms along Highway 4, the main artery leading northeast from Topeka (Fig. 1), and along two main roads adjacent to Perry Lake, competition with the larger cities has negatively impacted the range and number of retail and service

functions available in the villages, a phenomenon documented by Johansen and Fuguitt (1973) in their study of Wisconsin places of under 2,500 inhabitants. At the same time, unlike the near-urban villages studied by Johansen and Fuguitt, most villages in Jefferson County cannot grow their boundaries or populations, because they are hemmed in by private or federal lands or are bounded by streams or the lake. Only through land sales or donations can the villages expand their limits, and this rarely happens. (Even when it does, there is no certainty that a developer will develop the land and attract home buyers.) Although the retail system in Jefferson County restructured as transportation to large urban centers improved, a phenomenon also seen in Wisconsin, the closing of critical businesses in Jefferson County downtown areas, such as grocery stores and pharmacies, has had profound effects on village society. The effects of failing central business districts (CBDs) resonate with current residents and motivate them to take action to resist further economic decline.

In the county's early history, farming was the predominant way of life. After World War II, however, the number of family farms steadily declined. Acreages that had been passed from one generation to another were sold to larger landholders. And although in recent years the number of farms in Jefferson County has dropped, the total acreage in farms has remained relatively steady (PRI 2005a), while farm employment has continued to shrink (PRI 2005b). Until the 1980s Jefferson County was primarily an agriculture-dependent county. Today the economy is classified as nonspecialized, since no single economic sector prevails (Ghelfi 2004).

County population has fluctuated over the last 100 years. Settled before and after the Civil War, more than 15,500 people lived in the county by 1883 (Cutler 1883). The 1930s marked a transitional period when the pace of rural-to-urban migration grew. County population shrank from 14,129 in 1930 to 12,718 in 1940. By 1950 the population hit its lowest mark since Kansas statehood: 11,084. However, long-time residents interviewed for this study who lived in the county in the 1950s recall lively downtown districts during the middle years of the 20th century. Until 1970, county population did not climb above 12,000. During the last 25 years, however, population has boomed, from 15,207 residents in 1980 to an estimated more than 19,000 in 2005 (IPSR 2007). Most of this growth occurs "out in the country," as some residents describe it, while populations within municipal limits remain steady or shrink (PRI 2005c-f).

Growth in the countryside is driven by citydwellers who build homes on former farms; once settled, they con-

tinue to commute into the cities. In-migrants come for the beautiful vistas, tranquility, and lack of urban problems. Such rural-amenity-driven transformation of the landscape has been analyzed in other settings (Daniels 1999; Jobs 2000; Furuseth 2003; Paquette and Domon 2003). In 2003 the Office of Management and Budget reclassified Jefferson County as a metropolitan county because more than 25% of county commuters leave every day for jobs in the capital (Ghelfi and Parker 2003; Beale 2003a, 2003b). They are part of the more than 67% of Jefferson County workers who commute out of the county every day for work (Heiman et al. 2005). Regardless of the metropolitan classification, however, much of the county retains its rural character. Its open spaces are a patchwork quilt of fallow fields, thick woods, linear windbreaks, escarpments and hills, streams, ponds, row crops, and open water on the lake.

County villages display both revitalization and decay typical of rural towns throughout the Great Plains. This mixed pattern of renewal and decline was also found by Johansen and Fuguitt (1973). Macroeconomic forces helped shape the direction of decline in these towns. These forces include the capitalist structures that allow big-box retailers to locate where they want, federal farm and trade policies (Ulrich 1989), the restructuring of the county economy, changes in technology, transportation, and communications, and the disappearance of many former employment sources.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper represents a secondary analysis of interview data collected for my master's thesis. The interviews generated data that provided insight into residents' perceptions of and responses to economic and population change. I later added archival research. During the course of the interviews a discourse on the importance of shopping locally emerged. Rereading the data through the lens of discourse analysis, I posed these questions: (1) Does the shop-locally discourse constitute an effective response to socioeconomic change? (2) How does the notion of community articulate with this discourse? (3) Who benefits from it? (4) What power relations does this discourse conceal or reveal?

DATA AND METHODS

Villages included in the study are the two largest and a sampling of two of the smallest. The former are the county seat, Oskaloosa, and Valley Falls, both with approximately

1,250 residents, while the latter are Winchester and Nortonville, at approximately 630 and 590 residents, respectively. Currently, the two largest villages fare better than the two smaller ones in the sample. Because it is the county seat, Oskaloosa has the highest downtown occupancy rates among Jefferson County towns. In Valley Falls, although business has slowed on the main street, a new restaurant does well just one block away. In contrast, however, an old-fashioned soda fountain-curio shop on the main street struggles to survive following an initial few weeks of brisk business after opening in late 2006. Meanwhile Winchester and Nortonville continue on a decades-long economic and population decline, having lost their grocery stores in recent years. Nevertheless, entrepreneurs try their hand at new businesses: a quilt shop in Winchester has done well the last four years, and downtown Nortonville's new restaurant, opened in 2004, has become a center where local artists display their work on the walls. (I should note that many businesses in these hamlets are sideline businesses of people who have part-time or full-time jobs in the cities.) Businesses along highways at the edges of all towns fare much better, in general, than businesses located within the town centers, a phenomenon observed in Oklahoma (Schulz 1993).

In summer and fall 2004, I conducted 40 structured interviews: 11 in Valley Falls, 10 in Nortonville, nine in Winchester, and 10 in Oskaloosa. I used a 22-question questionnaire and tape-recorded the interviews, which lasted from approximately 10 to 30 minutes. I later transcribed the tapes.

For the purpose of this discourse analysis I used five of the 22 survey questions. These were (1) How has the downtown or commercial district changed since you have lived here? (2) What do you think are the causes of these changes? (3) What are residents doing to support local businesses? (4) Where do you buy your food? (5) How has community life changed over the years? I obtained access to subjects using an initial convenience sampling and then built upon those initial contacts using a snowball approach, which is an acknowledged method for obtaining subjects to interview (Beyers and Nelson 2000; Ruane 2005). I conducted interviews at workplaces, in private homes, in restaurants, and at community events. At the end of each interview I asked for a referral to someone else. All interviews were conducted in person over a span of three weeks in June and July 2004 and one week in October. The average age of the study participants was 59.7 years; individual ages ranged from 26 to 85 years. The average length of residence was 32.8 years, ranging from 3 months to 76 years. The sample included 19 busi-

ness owners, 12 employed persons who were not business owners, six retirees, and three disabled individuals. Among them were 21 men and 19 women. Of all study participants, 19 were current or former farmers. None of them, however, were full-time farmers.

During my fieldwork, I also engaged in participant observation. I attended citywide garage sales, an annual festival, and children's sporting events, and ate at local diners and shopped in local stores. Archival research included a purposive reading of almost two years' worth (spanning portions of 2004, 2005, and 2006) of the *Oskaloosa Independent* and the *Valley Falls Vindicator*, the two weekly newspapers in the county. I examined feature articles, grocery store advertisements, newspaper columns by the director of the county economic development commission (EDC), and a report by a Valley Falls city councilperson. Other media from the Jefferson County EDC completed my archival sources. These included a draft economic development plan for the city of Valley Falls, the county EDC website, and two generations of the county business directory (from approximately 1999 and from 2003).

In an initial data analysis that formed the basis of my master's thesis (Thornburg 2005), I categorized personal data of the interview subjects into business owner and nonbusiness owner categories as well as length of residence. Using SPSS software, I conducted cross-tabulations of these personal data with categories of textual data gathered in the interviews. The current paper includes some of this data and goes beyond it by undertaking a secondary data analysis. For this analysis I pored over the interview transcripts, looking for patterns among the explanations offered for social and economic change, as well as for connections between these explanations and participants' self-reported responses to economic changes. I placed these explanations, connections, and responses within the context of the shop-locally discourse.

RESULTS

Many longtime residents interviewed for this study accept the transformation of their villages into bedroom communities. However, the context of "bedroom community" in Jefferson County is atypical: no contiguous urban sprawl connects Jefferson County with adjacent counties. To the contrary, once commuters leave their villages they pass through open farmland until they reach the peripheries of Lawrence and Topeka in neighboring counties, where suburban-style housing developments or light-industrial businesses line the highways. In Jefferson

TABLE 1
INHABITANTS' FOOD-SHOPPING BEHAVIORS VERSUS THEIR PERCEPTIONS
OF RESIDENTS' SUPPORT OF LOCAL BUSINESSES

Perception	Self-reported food-shopping behavior							
	Business owners				Nonbusiness owners			
	In town (%)	In the cities (%)	Other Jefferson County towns (%)	Local towns and the cities (%)	In town (%)	In the cities (%)	Other Jefferson County towns (%)	Local towns and the cities (%)
Residents do not support	71.4 (5)	0 (0)	14.3 (1)	14.3 (1)	33.3 (3)	11.1 (1)	11.1 (1)	44.4 (4)
Residents support	60 (6)	20 (2)	20 (2)	0 (0)	14.3 (1)	0 (0)	28.6 (2)	57.1 (4)

Note: Figures in parentheses are base numbers for the adjacent percentages. The total numbers of business owners and nonbusiness owners are not included because answers such as "I don't know" or "There's nothing to support" were excluded from this analysis.

County, in spite of the proximity to Topeka and Lawrence, it is easy to feel as if one is far removed from any major metropolitan area.

Clear differences between business owners' and nonbusiness owners' self-reported personal food-shopping habits emerged when cross-tabulations were run (Table 1). In addition, there were differences between these two groups in their perceptions of residents' support of local businesses. Among the seven nonbusiness owners who said that residents shopped locally and/or supported specific local businesses, only one (14.3%) of them said he purchased his food in town, none said they purchased their food exclusively in the cities, two (28.6%) said they bought their food in other Jefferson County towns, and four (57.1%) said they bought their food in both local towns and in the cities. The breakdown of food purchasing among business owners, however, varied from the above. Most notably, six (60%) of the 10 business owners who said that residents shopped locally and/or supported specific local businesses reported buying their food in town. Just two (20%) said they bought their food exclusively in the cities, two (20%) named other Jefferson County towns, and none said that they bought their food both in local towns and in the cities.

Many residents interviewed recalled downtown business districts alive with commerce and customers. Just five years ago, Nortonville had a grocery store and pharmacy downtown. Now it has neither. Some study participants highlighted the effects that business decline has had on social ties. One Valley Falls resident, for example, said:

[W]e had several grocery stores and [the farmers would] come in and shop and visit every Saturday night. It would be three cars deep up and down [the] main street. I would set and visit there and they don't do that no more.

Residents gave an array of reasons for local-business closings. They included stories of personal tragedy, bad business decisions, and interference from government agencies. When asked about the decline of CBDs as a whole, patterns in the responses emerged. Cross-tabulations were run on each length-of-residence group versus six of the reasons given for overall economic decline in the commercial districts (some participants gave more than one reason): (1) competition from Wal-Mart, (2) changes in technology, transportation, and communications, (3) increasing transience in the residential population, (4) the decline of family farming, (5) lack of leadership or civic-mindedness, and (6) changes in aspects of work (Table 2). This last category included remarks on dual-income households, working in the cities, long commutes, loss of local employment, and brain drain, whereby local children grow up to gain an education and start their careers elsewhere.

There was some variability in responses according to how long residents had lived in these villages, although all residency groups pointed to changes in work patterns as a major factor in CBD decline. Residents who had lived in these hamlets for 31 years or more, for example, voiced negative opinions of Wal-Mart more readily than did the other residency groups. (There are no Wal-Marts or

TABLE 2
LENGTH OF RESIDENCE VERSUS REASONS GIVEN FOR COMMERCIAL BUSINESS DISTRICT DECLINE

Length of residence (years)	Wal-Mart	Changes in TTC*	Transient population	Farming decline	Lack of leadership	Changes in work
≤10 (8)	50% (4)	50% (4)	0% (0)	37.5% (3)	12.5% (1)	50% (4)
11–20 (4)	25% (1)	75% (3)	50% (2)	0% (0)	50% (2)	100% (4)
21–30 (7)	28.6% (2)	14.3% (1)	28.6% (2)	0% (0)	14.3% (1)	85.7% (6)
≥31 (21)	52.4% (11)	61.9% (13)	28.6% (6)	47.6% (10)	19.0% (4)	90.5% (19)
Total (40)	45% (18)	52.5% (21)	25% (10)	32.5% (13)	20% (8)	33 (82.5%)

Note: Percentages are of all responses. $N = 40$. Figures in parentheses are base numbers for the adjacent percentages. Numbers in each category add up to more than 100% because respondents offered more than one reason.

*TTC: Transportation, technology, and communications.

other big-box retailers in Jefferson County, but there are several in neighboring counties.) Ten participants named the presence of more newcomers as having had effects on economic and social life, with six of these being inhabitants of 31 years of residence or longer. None of those who pointed to the effects of a more transient population were newcomers themselves. The presence of shorter-term residents in the “farming decline” category is explained by the fact that two of these individuals had migrated from other rural areas and were former farmers, and one had migrated from Kansas City but was well informed about rural issues and sensitive to them. No one who had lived in the towns from 11 years to 30 years mentioned the decline of family farming as having had a significant effect on the CBDs, while 10 of the 21 longest-term residents linked farm decline to CBD decline.

The Discourse among Individuals. The choice to shop locally partially arises from the belief that such individual buying habits can prevent further economic decline. One Valley Falls resident remarked, “We’ve lost a lot of businesses; people shop out of town instead of shoppin’ at home and if they don’t shop at home the [business] people can’t stay.” An Oskaloosa resident said, “I hear from the businesses that they’re struggling. People tend to go to other places to shop because there’s more choices, I think, and cheaper prices. We try and buy as much locally as we can.” A Nortonville resident called Wal-Mart the “ruination of a town.” In the context of discussing what she perceived to be the causes of local economic decline, she went on to say:

I think the whole community either makes it or breaks it on the farm economy. And since the 1980s the farm economy has not been good.

The prices of grain have not been good, and I think that has a lot to do with the economy in the little towns, especially this far from Topeka or Kansas City.

Her remarks acknowledge the capitalist power relations between local actors (the community and the farmers) and global forces (the setting of world grain prices). These relations privilege some actors while disadvantaging others.

To shop locally is an act of community loyalty, while shopping at Wal-Mart is an act of betrayal to community sustainability, according to the shop-locally discourse. Although I did not mention Wal-Mart by name, 18 of 40 study participants named Wal-Mart and/or other big-box retailers as a contributing factor in the decline of the CBDs (Table 2). A 76-year-long resident of Oskaloosa became animated when criticizing local purchasing habits. Slapping his desk, he exclaimed, “They won’t buy it in town if they can buy it out of town! They’ll pay for the gas, run their car, spend half the afternoon, but you know what, they’re going to get a bargain on that ninety-nine-cent item! I always wanted to say, why the hell didn’t you come here first?” Not all study participants disparaged Wal-Mart, however. An 11-year-long resident of Winchester, for example, complained that the nearest Wal-Marts were 25 miles away in each of three directions.

Business owners, in particular, wore as a badge of integrity their patronage of other local businesses. “I kinda expect customers to shop locally and I better do the exact same thing. I don’t want to be a hypocrite and have people notice,” one Oskaloosa businessman said. Sixteen of the 19 local business owners said they purchased all or some of their groceries at stores within the county. They were more likely to emphasize this fact by making statements such as, “I never go in a grocery store out of

town.” Among the nonbusiness owners, 19 of 21 study participants said they purchased some or all of their food at county grocery stores. However, they were more likely to report that they also purchased food in cities in adjacent counties: nine of them reported doing so. In contrast, only three of the business owners reported food purchases in cities outside Jefferson County.

The Discourse in Advertising. With its typically thin profit margins, probably no business wants residents to shop locally more than the grocery store. In Valley Falls, the grocer participates in the Associated Wholesale Grocers co-op of 1,900 stores in a 21-state trade area. Based in Kansas City, Kansas, this co-op provides advertising services, at cost, to its members. In 2004, the Valley Falls Thriftway engaged in a shop-locally advertising campaign that consisted of full-color, multipage “Why Drive?” ads in the Valley Falls and Oskaloosa newspapers over a several-month period. One advertisement, in particular, captured the essence of the shop-locally discourse. It gave the “Top 10 Reasons to Shop Local!” (Table 3).

Inherent in the logic of these reasons is a distinction between village and city, contrasted in three ways: closeness versus distance, insider versus outsider, and local/personal economic benefit versus local economic loss. The village is a place where the local grocer “employ[s] your neighbors and friends” and saves you money because of his proximity to your home. It is a place where the grocer is personally known and where your patronage of the local grocery store strengthens the community.

The Discourse in Newspaper Features. More subtle is the support given to local businesses by the newspaper publisher, who publishes both of the county’s weeklies. Business openings, anniversaries, transitions in ownership, and recipients of economic development awards all make front-page news. Business locations vary. Some are in the struggling CBDs, some along the well-traveled highways, and others in the countryside on private homesteads. Some are home-based, while others are mobile. In the articles, social relations between consumers and business owners are sometimes revealed. One new business owner, for example, appreciated “all the support” shown by area residents as he and his wife opened their new business near Perry Lake. In gratitude, he became a volunteer for the local fire department. “I think if you run a business you should give back to the community as you can,” he was quoted as saying (Lassiter 2005). As in the grocery store advertisements, narratives of the relationship between consumer and business reveal the

TABLE 3
ADVERTISING COPY PROMOTING
SHOP-LOCALLY DISCOURSE IN 2004

Why Drive? Top 10 Reasons to Shop Local!

1. It costs 31 cents a mile to operate a vehicle; if you drive 20 miles to a competitor . . . you spent \$14.80 just to shop there!
2. We employ your neighbors and friends.
3. We bring you the lowest cost with the highest quality and the friendliest service.
4. All of our beef is USDA inspected, grainfed and 100% beef, unlike many super stores.
5. We have donated \$283,359 to local schools through the Declaration for Education program.
6. All of our fruits and vegetables are hand selected for quality and freshness.
7. Our meat is prepared by an instore butcher with absolutely no additives or preservatives.
8. When you shop in our community our community stays strong.
9. We have a large selection of dollar items to maximize your savings.
10. We are your hometown Thriftway . . . families serving families.

ways in which businesspeople help contribute to a sense of community.

The Discourse from the County Economic Development Commission. The shop-locally narrative appears in the EDC business directories and signed newspaper columns and on the website. The greeting in the 1999 Jefferson County Business Guide states, “Your EDC believes that one of the best things it can do to improve the business climate in the county is to make people aware of the numerous services that are available right here close to home” (JCEDC 1999). The commission connects shopping locally with benefit to the consumer: “Besides the obvious benefits from increasing business for local people, there is a tax advantage that helps everyone. A one percent sales tax goes directly to the county general fund each year, further reducing the demand on property tax.” The economic benefit having been highlighted, the commission moves on to emphasize the link between consumer and county: “‘SHOPPING AT HOME’ means a lot to the economy of our county. Most of the businesses in this directory are not on our ‘main streets’ but they are in the county, ready and willing to serve your needs.” This narrative hints at the decline of the CBDs, acknowledg-

ing that most county businesses will not be found there; shopping within the county is important, while the role of the villages is de-emphasized.

Embedded in this narrative is the struggle to convince people to broaden their attachment to place to include the whole county. *Community* becomes less a notion of social relations with neighbors and shops and more an idea of economic relations with the county tax structure. Individual consumption habits, however, do not typically flow from concern for a spatial unit as large as a county. "Home" on the economic development commission's website ("Remember to shop at home!") hardly reflects what most people may consider to be home. When I asked residents to which place they felt most attached, they named a specific village or city, not the county. Asking people to patronize businesses within the county because of the tax benefits that would accrue to all county residents is asking them to acknowledge a potential benefit that is not immediately apparent in space or time.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As residents have shifted their consumption spaces away from their residential communities and toward the cities, they have contributed to the decline of small-town and rural business. Jefferson County's pull factor of 0.31 means that only 31% of the total dollars that could be spent by county residents in the county are spent within its boundaries (Upendram and Darling 2004). County residents follow the path of least resistance in their consumption habits: they shop in the cities where they work. The interdependencies among neighbors and between town and countryside have subsequently weakened. "[T]he social reproduction of capitalism is never guaranteed, but must be continually secured through a range of norms, social networks, institutions, and forms of organization" that ensure the reproduction of a particular pattern of consumption (Busch and Bain 2004). One study participant told me that the sudden subtraction of just one local family from his customer base was noticeable to his bottom line.

Inhabitants, grasping at ways to recapture yesterday's sense of community, discovered that place-bound loyalty came with an imperative to act by shopping locally. Enclosing consumption within attachment to place makes sense in this logic, which equates a healthy economy with a healthy community. Moreover, "community is increasingly visible and relevant to industrialized, first-world locations" (St. Martin 2006). Community is constituted through economic processes playing out at a local scale. When businesses disappear from these towns, social net-

works weaken. Responses to these socioeconomic shifts are mediated by the discourse used to understand, resist, and change them.

Who is served by the shop-locally discourse? Some businesses undoubtedly benefit, if this discourse impels more people to shop locally. I argue, however, that the shop-locally discourse may perpetuate the economic decline that it ostensibly serves to counteract. Since it emphasizes individual behavior while remaining silent on collective action, this discourse distracts people from pursuing alternative strategies for local economic development. Grassroots organizing, for example, could engender a shared vision of development among leaders from several towns. Such development would likely require an infusion of investment and entrepreneurship from outsiders and residents who together can link local economies to regional, national, and perhaps international economic networks to the benefit of local communities. By itself, the shop-locally discourse does not educate local actors about the structural forces that led to economic decline in the first place. By falsely promising local economic empowerment, the discourse reduces residents to their role as consumers in which they perpetuate capitalist economic relations. Their power to transform moribund economies lies in their capacity to consume, according to the logic of the discourse. Economic revitalization, however, requires much more than just this personal behavior (Darling and Randel 1996) and would entail strong local leadership and an assessment of the unique strengths and weaknesses of each village and of the region in general.

Since the rural retail sector's collapse in the 20th century, local residents have altered their consumption patterns by following the stores out of the county. Since approximately the late 1960s the location of purchase has shifted from the CBDs to out on the highways and into the cities. Rupturing consumers' complete dependency on a capitalism fueled by their willingness to travel such distances would entail opening up local spaces in which to operate other systems that function on the periphery of government regulation (Pollan 2006). Local systems organized along the principles found in cooperative enterprises or those that are based on nonmonetary trade and bartering practices are some examples that could co-exist alongside capitalist enterprises that could strengthen community social networks.

In order to believe that shopping locally serves to preserve *local* communities, people have to care about these communities and be a part of them. Fewer and fewer county residents, however, are part of the towns' social life. One resident said,

We see new people every day. In fact, that's the one thing—the difference in the 17 years that we've been here in the . . . store is [that] most of the people, we don't know their names. It used to be we knew everybody that came in that door. . . . These people are mainly moving into the countryside, not really actually moving into the Oskaloosa town.

It is a tale of two counties in both space and time. The farm families who looked to the village to satisfy their social and economic needs have been replaced by urban in-migrants who look to the city for the same.

The shop-locally discourse attributes essential traits to local businesses (e.g., friendliness and familiarity) and rural places (e.g., a sense of community). Defining rural America in terms of “its hallmark industries, its small town lifestyle, and its open spaces” is important when thinking about rural America and formulating rural policy (Isserman 2000). Because of the bifurcated classification of U.S. counties into metropolitan and nonmetropolitan, however, rural America often “disappears into metropolitan America” because it is defined by what it is not—not urban—or by that to which it is adjacent (Isserman 2000). Indeed, Jefferson County's classification as a metropolitan county conceals its essential rural character and obscures the way village residents perceive their communities and feel about their relationship to them.

Rural America requires a development framework that sees economic opportunities within the industries and amenities characteristic of rural spaces (Isserman 2000). Examples of possible enterprises include community-supported agriculture, farmers' markets, agricultural tourism, outdoor recreation, bed-and-breakfasts, corporate or artists' retreat centers, and film-location services. Forging economic connections that ensure a flow of dollars from the cities to Jefferson County would be ideal. Progressive-minded, civically engaged citizens are keenly aware of the central location of the towns *relative* to northeastern Kansas metropolitan areas. Some residents hope for a future housing boom; new economic opportunities may come through the retirement of baby boomers to these beautiful rural settings (Isserman 2000). Jefferson County's proximity to the metropolitan areas of Lawrence and Topeka will continue to contribute to further economic, social, and population changes within the villages. How local residents respond to these changes will largely arise from how they think about them and whether they feel impelled to move beyond a focus on individual consumer behavior and toward a broader, collective vision for their towns and region.

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