

IS A WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL?
SALT LAKE CITY'S NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNANCE
INSTITUTIONS AND THE EMPOWERMENT
OF WOMEN

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite being half of the population, a dearth of women serve in elected office across the United States and in all levels of government. When women do run for public office, research shows that some type of community participation often serves as a pathway to elected office. This study examines one type of community participation, voluntary neighborhood governance. It uses as a case study Salt Lake City, which for at least 25 years has supported neighborhood governance through its well-organized system of place-based institutions known as community councils. Using evidence from document review, interviews, and observation, the study demonstrates how community councils are situated within Salt Lake City's political systems, and the ways in which individuals are transformed through engagement with the councils. It finds that under certain combinations of predilections and conditions, community council participation politically empowers women; specifically, women who ran for political office were over-represented in their incorporation of community council participation as a portion of their pathway to elected public service. Empowerment outcomes, however, were diminished by conditions such as community council role confusion and sentiments about "right" and "wrong" types of participation.

For Mom, Age, Speaker Becky, and Jodi the Beast. This one is for you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
Chapters	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction Overview	3
Definitions.....	3
How I Arrived at My Research Question	6
Family History and Community Minded Motivation	7
Public Administration and Government Relations	8
Established Skill Sets and Lack of Personal Voice and Vision.....	8
Personal Voice Development.....	9
Group Work—Skill Building and Discovery	9
Time in Office / Research Question.....	10
Significance.....	11
Limitations	14
Chapter Overview	14
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW	17
Gendered Organizational Theory.....	17
Overview	21
Detail on the Literatures.....	22
Empowerment Theory	22
Female Empowerment and the Civic Participation Connection—	
Empirical Evidence	24
Civic Participation Literature.....	25
Public Administration	28
Urban Planning Literature.....	31
Candidate Recruitment Literature.....	34
Chapter Summary	36
3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH, DESIGN, AND METHODS	38
Research Philosophy.....	38

Evidence Generation.....	39
Community Councils Chosen	42
Documents	43
Meeting Observations	44
Interviews.....	45
Interview Process and Content.....	46
Analytical Strategies	48
Research Ethics	50
How My Identity Affected Data Generation and Data Analysis	52
A Final Note on Confidentiality	56
Chapter Summary	56
4 COMMUNITY COUNCIL HISTORY	59
Introduction.....	59
Historical Narrative.....	59
Analysis.....	70
Chapter Summary	73
5 COMMUNITY COUNCIL ROLE, SETTING, AND PARTICIPATION.....	77
Community Council Role	77
Place and Space: The Settings for Council Meetings	86
Who Participates: Perceptions of Representativeness and Council Legitimacy... ..	91
Chapter Summary	99
6 LIVED COMMUNITY COUNCIL EXPERIENCES	102
Gender—Since Almost no one Brought it up Spontaneously, Is it an Issue?.....	103
Community Council Access: Awareness, Personal Connections, and Scheduling.....	105
Awareness	106
Meeting Schedules	108
Attracting and Keeping Attendees: Issues, Personalities, Cliques, and Bias.....	112
Issues.....	112
Personalities and Cliques	113
Bias	115
Empowerment, or Not?.....	119
Personal Expression Among Community Members.....	119
Community Expression to Government.....	123
Building Skill Sets	127
Community Council Participation and Change Making	132
Community Council Experience and Running for Office	135
Chapter Summary	141
7 CONCLUSION.....	143

Findings.....	144
Role Confusion	144
Representativeness.....	145
Too Much or too Little Participation?	146
Civic Engagement.....	147
Pathways to Elected Office.....	149
Implications for Theory	150
Empowerment.....	150
Civic Engagement.....	151
Candidate Recruitment.....	152
Contributions to Public Governance.....	153
REFERENCES	158

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*“[I was] raised by fathers and mothers who always taught me about giving back to the community. And they were very politically involved in their local government. And so when I came into this institution [community councils] it was very interesting to me because I wasn’t, I immediately felt like I wasn’t treated the same way as a guy—
immediately.”*

*—Salt Lake City resident on her experience in community councils,
August 16, 2011 (Salt Lake City, 2011, p. 7)*

In May of 2013, Salt Lake City’s Human Rights Commission issued *The Status of Women in Salt Lake City*. The report’s purpose was to determine the appropriateness of City implementation of the 1979 UN General Assembly’s 30 articles issued from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Commission obtained its information on women’s status from surveys and focus groups conducted in 2011 and 2012. The survey data revealed gender disparities in the areas of education, health and safety, and political, social, and economic life. The focus group interviews revealed barriers to political participation including uncertainty about when and where community councils or the City Council met, jargon, distrust of government, and lack of time. The report concluded that “engaging women in local leadership” to address the disparity areas was a “challenge” due to the dismal numbers of women in elected offices statewide and in Salt Lake City (pp. 3–4).

Salt Lake City supports a voluntary neighborhood governance system through its community councils. In theory, this system makes it possible for people to be a part of their local governance because the councils are connected to the issues that directly impact their day-to-day lives, are closely geographically situated, and are composed of neighbors. However, as *The Status of Women in Salt Lake City* reveals, community councils are complex and may even be an obstacle that frustrates women's participation and leadership.

Despite the role of neighborhood governance systems in our local communities, the field of political science gives sparse attention to this area of democratic life. In fact, "there is little evidence to report and few generalizations to be offered about the effects of different forms of neighborhood government on the quantity, quality, and equality of civic engagement in metropolitan areas" (Macedo et al., 2005, p. 93). This dissertation will explore the degree to which Salt Lake City's community councils provide women opportunities for political participation and empowerment, including pathways to run for elected political office. At the very least, "[t]hey would seem, at a minimum, to offer a first step on the ladder of civic leadership, as neighborhood councils are more accessible than many citywide institutions, such as city councils, school boards, or zoning board offices" (Macedo et al., 2005, p. 93).

The research question for this dissertation is the following: Do Salt Lake City community councils politically empower women, including serving as an entry point or portion of a path for women to run for elected office? Gendered organizational theory informed my expectation that community councils may not provide robust political empowerment opportunities for women, or at least unequal ones compared to men, due to

the cultural attitudes surrounding women and politics present within the city of Salt Lake. Literature from multiple trajectories from within the political science, public administration, social work, and urban planning disciplines additionally created layered expectations surrounding race and ethnicity, income, meeting organization, and pathways to elected office. Contrary to some of the expectations of this literature, I argue that, under certain conditions, community councils can politically empower women and provide a trajectory through which they run for political elected office. This research assesses this proposition based on a case study design using documentary evidence, observations, and interviews.

Introduction Overview

In this introduction, I first briefly review the key definitions for this research question. I then describe how I came to my research question as a function of my personal experience—including family history, education, professional life, as well as my decision to run for elected office. Then, I discuss the significance of my research for both theory and practice relative to the community-based organizations as loci for politically empowering and engaging women. I additionally identify key limitations to my research and end with an overview of the dissertation chapters.

Definitions

The literature reviewed contains a variety of terms for community councils, many of which are regionally dependent. By *community councils*, I refer to “place-based collective organizations formed to address local interests that residents share”

(Rabrenovic, 2010, p. 2). These organizations are voluntary in that participants do not receive compensation for participating, and they are formally nonpartisan. People qualify as members if they reside in a shared geographic space. They discuss, formulate opinions about, and strategize action surrounding a variety of quality-of-life issues in neighborhoods associated with public safety, land use, housing, public utilities, and any topic that may impact day-to-day living. They typically serve in a formal advisory capacity to the local governments in which they are situated; certain city processes may require the input of a community council. For example, a real estate developer may be required to solicit feedback from a community council as part of a formal petition to a municipality for a construction permit. Community councils may also operate as conduits through which local government, nonprofits, or other groups disseminate information (e.g., instructions on how to purchase a new public transportation pass). Community councils may also engage in other activities, such as neighborhood festival organizing or park clean-ups. Local governments generally provide financial, training, or ombudsman resources to community councils. I use the following terms interchangeably: neighborhood associations, neighborhood councils, community councils, and community associations.

These forms of association need to be differentiated from town *meetings*, which involve direct democratic rule, used principally in New England, in which the members of a political subdivision, a town, collectively legislate budget allocation and policy. Town meetings differ from community council meetings in that direct legislative action is taken in them; community council action is primarily advisory to the local government in which it sits.

The term “empowerment” may possess many different meanings, at times contradictory, depending on the reader and the disciplinary context in which the term is situated. By *political empowerment*, I mean when “individuals increase the critical consciousness and interpersonal skills to improve their lives, develop the organization to act collectively with others, and mobilize resources to create change in the community or society” (Gutierrez, 1988, as cited in Checkoway, 1991, p. 186). As this definition shows, empowerment is a multidimensional concept. In my research, I focus on empowerment as when a person increases her knowledge of community council operations and its local government context and then chooses to take action to achieve policy goals in their community. Empowerment results in the following: (a) increased confidence and (b) increased ability to authentically express personal preferences within the council’s environment. Empowered women build the relationships and personal knowledge base necessary to collectively advocate for and promote policy change or other government or community council action (e.g., addition of a stop sign at an intersection). Empowered women may also choose to run for elected office in order to directly make policy change or direct government action.

The literature on “civic engagement” and “civic participation” does not carefully differentiate between these two terms although they generally refer to varying degrees of interactions between government, individuals, and various social institutions. Although I treat engagement and participation as cognates, in my observations, to “engage” means a more intense form of participation, i.e., voicing one’s concerns to others. I also characterize people who merely “show up” to community meetings as engaging or participating in civic activity.

How I Arrived at My Research Question

In the spring of 2006, I received a call from a political operative within the Utah State Democratic Party asking me to run for a state legislative seat. At the time it had never occurred to me that I should even consider running for public office. I had had minimal experience with the political system at a delegate level; as a student at the University of Utah, I was introduced to the process as a part of a service learning project, and I became a delegate. This process combined with participation in my community council allowed me to become known by other members of the community, including elected officials. Eventually, the person who held the seat before me personally asked me to run, and I said yes with a great deal of hesitation. The thought of being an elected official seemed like a daunting task, but a culmination of paid work and volunteer service skills, opportunity, and passion for my neighborhood pushed me kicking and screaming to put my name on the ballot for the first time. Two weeks later, boxes of pamphlets with my face on them were littered around my living room. One month later, when I first saw the billboard with my name on it, I panicked and drove off the road and into a community garden. A cycle of continued growth in confidence, campaign acumen, and neighborhood and peer support led to winning the legislative district seat.

Holding public office allowed me to step into several leadership roles that included management within the caucus and eventually into my role as the first female Minority Leader in the Utah House of Representatives. Immersion within the political arena cultivated a visceral awareness that went beyond intellectually comprehending the current statistics regarding the lack of women in office. I was able to understand first hand that women's involvement in politics was not just about an entitlement based on the

right to sit at the table, but the incompleteness of vision for our future as a state and a nation. Lack of female inclusion in elected office makes us weak and vulnerable and diminishes our collective and individual human possibilities. I saw first-hand what women could do and the differences they can make within the political institution. This experience led to my interest in researching why women do not run for political office.

Family History and Community Minded Motivation

The act of putting my name on a ballot could never be articulated as the final act of a completed check list of skill mastery. I had never had any intention of running for political office. I did not envision the opportunity and then reject it; it simply never even entered my stream of consciousness to run. I was raised that serving our country meant service through military duty, volunteer work, and voting. My family did not discuss politics because it was impolite. As a child, I participated in girl scouting and learned leadership skills through camping, service projects, and letter writing to American companies who were exploiting poverty in faraway countries for their own financial gain. As a young adult, social justice advocacy became a way to continue to develop my leadership skills. I protested the Ku Klux Klan as part of my best friend's wedding shower, rode busses for hours to Washington D.C. to march to support affordable housing and women's reproductive rights. My commitment to these efforts was further strengthened by shared comradery and the opportunity to be part of a collective force to influence policy issues to improve the community.

Public Administration and Government Relations

My first foray into government was when I became a receptionist for the Salt Lake City Council in 1994. I was hired in part for my passion, my ability to write a constituent letter, and my mother's upbringing that demanded I offer handwritten thank you notes to each member of the interview team. Fortunately, the office, run by a woman, supported professional growth, and I soon became part of the constituent services team, which led to more involvement with city budget and policy. Eventually, I was recruited to work for the Salt Lake City Mayor's office where I was given additional opportunities to further my education. Eventually, my training led to my recruitment into the nonprofit sector and then into the private sector as a state and federal lobbyist operating in multiple jurisdictions across the United States.

Established Skill Sets and Lack of Personal Voice and Vision

My professional managerial experience in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors was ideal training for my role as a leader in elected office. I developed competencies in budgeting, human resources, community organizing, coalition building, political strategy, and policy analysis. One of the reasons it had never occurred to me to run for political office was that I had no personal vision or voice and the confidence to jump into unknown territory. All of my professional work had been for and on behalf of elected officials, a nonprofit board of directors, and a corporate government relations unit. These activities meant that I took action and was a voice for others. I did not see these activities as a direct expression of myself or my ability to hold public office. My academic studies as a student cultivated critical thinking skills and opinion formation, but

I had bifurcated that into a somewhat private realm.

Personal Voice Development

After I left the city, I was approached by my City Council representative who asked me to serve as a volunteer on the Salt Lake City Planning Commission. This opportunity taught me to trust my instincts regarding community development and provided me with informal training in public speaking and deliberating policy in a formal policy making environment. During this time, I had the opportunity to expand my public speaking opportunities and began participating in my own community council. I expanded my experience by serving on a local festival committee where I was regularly asked questions and offered my insights about open space, crime, or other elements impacting our lives in the neighborhood of Salt Lake City served by the council.

Group Work—Skill Building and Discovery

My experience with public service and public action taught me how to build on other's ideas, how to facilitate group change, and gave me a platform on which to be recognized by others for my own policy-making abilities. Planning Commission work, for example, involved 10 other people often possessing 10 divergent opinions; it was difficult and often extremely technical. To be effective, I had to be able to translate lived knowledge into professional community development language and find the common values with other commissioners to be able to sway opinion or build consensus. Delegate service and community council work taught me persuasion and gave me experience working with a wide variety of personalities. My involvement in the public arena is what

I am told led to local leaders asking me to run for office because I was able to demonstrate what I could do as a leader. This involvement also afforded me the opportunity to make the community connections that made winning elected office possible.

Time in Office / Research Question

While in office, I won some battles, lost others, and constantly opened myself to new learning opportunities. I also experienced the vacuum and the transformational power of women in leadership. When I first came into office in 2006, the Utah State Legislature was comprised of 21.2% women. The peak of women's service during my tenure was in 2009–2010 with 22.1%. During my last year in office, women composed 16.3% of the body, and currently, women make up only 19.2% of the Utah State Legislature (Center for American Women in Politics, 2017). Regardless of party, women spoke from their academic and professional knowledge base and used their experiential knowledge gained as women in our society to fight for their communities. During this time, I also witnessed elected women intentionally distance themselves from their gender while simultaneously destroying attempts to form a women's caucus in the Body. It was also during this time that I was fortunate to serve with Utah's first female Speaker of the House, Becky Lockhart. Speaker Lockhart passionately believed in the public process and although we disagreed quite a bit on public policy, she created a space for all voices to be part of the legislative conversation, and she uplifted the voices of women throughout both the Utah State House and Senate.

Women should avail themselves of the opportunity to run for public office.

Further, women should be empowered to create a shared vision of community and run for office so that we may achieve that reality. The love for my neighbors and my neighborhood was the tipping point for becoming active in elected politics. This personal experience motivated me to research whether neighborhood governance institutions are instrumental for others running for public office, or whether my personal experiences were atypical. If these neighborhood centers are indeed a place for empowerment to act politically and to eventually run for office, then these spaces and organizations need more attention from academia and the public and private sectors.

Significance

What is politically distinctive about women worldwide “is their exclusion from the political process and their collective status as political outsiders” (Baldez, 2002, as cited in Beckwith 2010, p. 160); what is politically distinctive about men worldwide is their universal presence in national, international, and political institutions and their disproportionate dominance in these institutions.
(Beckwith, 2010, p. 160)

Ratios of women office holders to population are deplorable at all levels of United States government. In comparison to other countries, we are equally as dismal. For example, as of June 2017, the United States is ranked 101st in the world on the percentage of women in national parliaments (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017). Women deserve, and strong democratic government demands, equal opportunities at our entry-level institutions. Nationally, although nearly 50% of the population is composed of women (United States Census Bureau, 2017), only 19.4% of the seats in the U.S. Congress are held by women and 24% of the statewide elective executive offices are held by women (Center for American Women in Politics, 2017). Nationwide in 2017, 24.9% of the state legislative members are women, and among cities with populations of people

30,000 and above, 20.7% are women (Center for American Women in Politics, 2017).

Discouraging numbers of women hold political office in Utah, and Salt Lake City office gender ratios provide little consolation. For example, despite 2015 US Census Bureau figures indicating that Utah's women compose 49.7% of the state's population, women currently fill only one Congressional seat or statewide elected offices. Only 19.2% of the Utah State Legislature is female. Utah ranks 38th nationwide in the percentage of women serving in state legislatures (Center for American Women in Politics, 2017). 2010 Census figures indicate that females compose 48.7% of Salt Lake City's population (United States Census Bureau, 2017) whereas 62% of Salt Lake City's state legislators are female, and only two women, about 30%, serve as city council members. The current Salt Lake City Mayor, however, is a woman; only the second woman to ever fill this seat.

Existing research demonstrates that women legislators “manifested a strong level of civic activism before running for office the first time, indicating their involvement in their communities [via local organizations] may well have helped pave the way for their candidacies” (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013, pp. 23–24). My research is important because it seeks to understand the experiences that women have within Salt Lake City's community councils to facilitate civic engagement. If these experiences are not positive, women trying to enter in public life through these institutions will be discouraged.

The scholarly contributions of this research are fourfold. First, my project produces a *more complete understanding of neighborhood governance organizations* both internally and externally, i.e., the way they function within a citywide system of community councils. This deeper understanding reveals gaps in existing empirical

literature on neighborhood councils. Internally, I focus on interactions between formal and informal rules of the organization, how the rules and participants interface, and how gendering contributes to the types of and frequency of opportunities for men and women who participate in these organizations. Externally, I concentrate on the community council system design and purpose as articulated by formal placement within *Salt Lake City Code* and the historic and contemporary tensions created by silences within the code. Second, this project contributes to the *understanding of civic engagement* and addresses a lack of information about neighborhood councils as loci for potential opportunities for quality and equality of engagement. I study people's experiences while they are in the act of participating, or trying to participate, as well as the degree to which this engagement politically empowers them. Third, my research contributes to the understanding of political spaces and pathways people follow to run for elected office, and in turn, *informs candidate recruitment strategies*. This is particularly important for efforts to create gender equity in elected office. Finally, my research informs *strategies of public governance*. Public administrators need to understand the complicated landscape in which they operate. Governmental entities occupy space with multiple public, private, and nongovernmental entities that often cross jurisdictional and mission boundaries. Neighborhood councils are one aspect of this space. Public administrators can use this awareness to provide public steward accountability in a shared-power setting but also to build coalitions and develop resources for problem-solving and accomplishing public policy goals.

Limitations

No community council I observed was completely homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity, but overall, attendees were not reflective of the populations in which the community councils were situated. The largest proportion of attendees were White. In addition, with the exception of one man of color and one woman of color, community council leadership was entirely White. Identities are complex, and different threads of inequality, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, intertwine with individualized multifaceted backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This concept of intersectionality demands that there cannot be a universalized representation of an everywoman (Choo & Ferree, 2010). My research uncovered a need for further examination of existing and potential political participation pathways for people of color, particularly women. Finally, the emphasis of this dissertation is on women. For analytical purposes, my research compares conduct of women and men in the council system but it does not concentrate on understanding men's experiences.

Chapter Overview

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this dissertation provide a background context on how I arrived at my research questions, the status of women in politics, specific language I use, and the literature mined to respond to my research inquiry. Chapter 1 addresses the current state of women in international, federal, state, and local elected office, definitions, and an account of how I arrived at my research question. I articulated the research question and discussed the significance of my research as well as the limitations that may provide opportunities for further study. Chapter 2 provides insight into the way in which

gendered organizational theory informed my research questions and established an expectation that women may have limited political empowerment opportunities within the community council settings based on gendered expectations of political participation. Later in the chapter, multiple literatures are examined to identify better theoretical resources and empirical evidence useful to addressing my research questions. Theoretical constructs of empowerment are additionally introduced to serve as means to analyze the degree to which empowerment occurs on an individual basis. Chapter 3 dives into the methodological approach, design, and methods I utilized to reveal the way in which I approached the research question. Document review provides a formal perspective of community council history, role, and relationship with the city of Salt Lake. Meeting observations allowed me to note actual behaviors of individuals within the community council setting; subsequent interviews allowed me the opportunity to understand the differences and similarities between what people reported and how they acted. Interviews additionally brought out the silences left by city code and other formal documents about the role, responsibilities, and experiences of community councils and their membership.

Chapters 4 through 7 present research findings and explain their significance for current theory and practice as well as their potential for informing future research. Chapter 4 specifically delves into the history of community council formation and the tensions between Salt Lake City and community councils as revealed by city ordinances, formal informational documents about community councils, newspaper articles, and budgetary allocations. Chapter 5 interlaces expectations from the literature, archival document reviews, interviews, and meeting observations with analysis in order to convey the overall environment in which engagement occurs within the community councils,

including the cultural norms of behavior associated with engagement held by government officials and council membership. Conflicting understandings of community council role, the subsequent challenges this lack of agreement causes, and the shared passion all community council members express about their neighborhoods are revealed. Chapter 6 also delves into the environment but concentrates on the individual experiences that community members and government elites have while participating or attempting to participate within Salt Lake City's community councils, including the harmonious and dissenting interactions community members and government officials have within their own groups as well as with each other. I examine meeting logistics such as times, dates, and locations and their impact on attendance. I additionally evaluate perceptions of the community space as "nonpolitical" and the impact conflicting personalities have on participation. Chapter 7 concludes the research project by summarizing the now more robust understanding of community councils, the experiences individuals have within them, and the combination of predilections and conditions under which women are politically empowered vis-à-vis community council participation. The results of this study challenge expectations from some theoretical literature. The facts of women's active participation in community councils and their challenges to powerful speakers, for example, were noteworthy components to my research findings.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter 2, I first explain gendered organizational theory; research about women in organizations was seminal in framing my research question. Because my research question is situated in the community council setting, I then consulted literature from multiple trajectories from within the political science, public administration, social work, and urban planning disciplines. I offer a brief overview of these disciplinary literatures before providing detail on studies directly relevant to my research question.

Gendered Organizational Theory

In this dissertation, I argue that community councils provide political empowerment opportunities for women including a potential pathway to run for elected office. Gendered organizational theory established an expectation that women and men would have dissimilar political empowerment opportunities because of the gendered values concerning politics within the municipality in which the community councils are situated. People are multidimensional, and their characteristics intersect and converge in order to navigate different contexts. A range of factors such as race, ethnicity, and SES can play a part in how people identify themselves in politically relevant ways. Addressing all of these attributes is beyond the scope of this study. This research utilizes gender to

begin to fill the gap in literature that allows us to understand the lived experiences of women as they relate to political empowerment.

Gendered organizational theory provides a lens through which the individual impacts on women participating in the community councils may be identified. This perspective argues “that organizational structures, processes, symbols, and culture are not gender neutral; instead, gender is deeply embedded in conceptualizations of organizational phenomenon (e.g., leadership) as well as substantive organizational practices” (Schwartz-Shea, 1998). Acker (1990) theorizes that the gendering of organizations is ongoing and occurs in different processes including dividing labor and acceptable behavior along gendered lines; explaining those divisions through symbols and images (e.g., the portrayal of a leader as powerful, rational, and masculine), and producing components of an individual’s identity such as choice of profession, clothing, and speech. The results of my study demonstrate that some of Acker’s processes occur, but in very heterogeneous ways depending on the individual community council; and when they visibly do occur, meeting participants often challenge the behavior.

These gendering systems may present themselves as societal norms of expected and accepted behavior for women and men. Women “should” work without pay, in the private sphere of the home. When working outside of the home, women “should” fulfill clerical or support staff roles. Gender norms impacts men as well. Choices of work for men “should” be paid and outside of the home.. Stereotyped images reinforce gender norms; nurturing and emotional females tend to home, children, and elderly parents, and rational and aggressive men earn incomes to support family and battle against threats to the family. These ideas of what is “right” and “wrong” re-create themselves in the

allegedly gender-neutral institutions, thus continuing the cycle of gendering. Because politics occurs in the public sphere, away from the safety of the hearth and home, these norms disadvantage women in their political participation.

Gendering is visible in both the formal and informal “rules of the game” within the organizations (Chappell & Waylen, 2013). To be a gendered organization means that all people within that organization possess a gender identity; there is no universal everyman. Secondly, to be a gendered organization means that people within the organization will experience the organization differently. Women have fewer opportunities and barriers differ by gender (Kenney, 1996). Women’s true desires are also not always reflected in their choices; choices, rather, are decisions manufactured by the social context and subsequent norms and expectations in which a woman finds herself (Markovits & Bickford, 2014).

The gendered organization normalizes the socially prescribed roles of actors within the institutional design and rules of engagement and this extends to the political sphere. In the UK Parliament, for example, rules govern masculine dress codes and sword stowing but guidelines for child care are absent. Language is adversarial and frequently contains military metaphors, and staff still bar women parliamentarians from certain areas (Lovenduski, 2005, as cited in Chappell & Waylen, 2013, p. 601). Context shapes gendered organizations and in turn, the organizations propagate the inequities. They impact people’s knowledge of themselves and their sense of how they fit into the larger world (Stivers, 2002).

Laws protect against gender discrimination and create a formal framework within the judicial system to address such behavior. Bias, however, often subtly manifests

itself. Sue (2010) defines microaggressions as “the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group” (p. 5). The use of sexist language, such as policeman or chairman, suggest that men properly fill these positions; another example would be serving a group of men in a restaurant before serving a group of women when the women arrived first. These assumptions of inferiority and difference damage and punish people for acting in ways not “appropriate” to established roles. People are trapped in gender stereotypes.

Gendered organizational theory provides a useful framework for my research because community councils are institutions reflective of cultural norms and values, and this theory will better uncover ways in which gender inequalities are challenged or perpetuated (Krook & Mackay, 2011). Empirical evidence already demonstrates that community councils are not neutral organizations. Paulsen and Bartkowski (1997) show that even when men and women share certain characteristics related to their length of participation with community councils, perceived levels of personal political efficacy, and perceptions of neighborhood physical conditions, men generally evaluated their neighborhood groups less favorably. In this case, men and women viewed the functionality of their neighborhood associations much differently. Gender matters. Gendered organizational theory provides the means to better determine the experiences women have within community councils and provide explanations for those experiences.

Overview

Sociology and social work research provides insights into the multidimensional nature of empowerment, i.e., including individual dynamics as well as intimate connections to the community (Collins, 2009; Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1999; Itzhaky & York, 2000). In political science, the civic engagement research illuminates participation disparity among socioeconomic and gender groups (Burns, Scholozman, & Verba, 2001; Verba, Scholozman, & Brady, 1995). It recommends neighborhood space for its robust potential for civic engagement (Macedo et al., 2005) and suggests that women often find unique opportunities for voice here (Ackelsberg, 2013). Finally, it argues that in order for participation to be transformational for those who participate, it must allow for authentic voice, involve genuine work, and influence governmental decisions of consequence (Boyte, 2011; Fung, 2015; Mathews, 1994). Stivers (2000) cautions us that public administration operates under the scientific management rubric and attends to process and procedure rather than to meaningful outcome; expertise serves as the language of approval and overshadows any knowledge gleaned by those outside of dominant power structures. Stivers (2002) also argues that gendered norms of excellence may potentially hinder the success of groups or individuals that offer government different types of knowledge and symbols of authenticity and effectiveness. Empirical evidence indicates that neighborhood-based governance does impact public policy and can empower groups, but most of the data concern socio-economic status alone and does not address gender (Berry, Portney, Thomson, 1993; Rabrenovic, 2010; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). Studies in urban planning show empirical evidence of opportunity for women's empowerment in the public sphere (Martin, 2002) but also warn against governmental co-optation

(Harwood, 2007). Leavitt (2003) argues that feminist evaluatory strategies are rare; these feminist approaches uncover the ways in which community design impacts daily living, such as access to transportation or childcare services (Leavitt, 2003).

One final literature that is relevant to this study concerns candidate recruitment. This political science literature offers insight into specific social and political pathways women candidates have taken into elected office (Lawless & Fox, 2012), as well as the positive impact of women leaders on the political ambitions of girls (Fox & Lawless, 2014), but the literature is limited when it comes to addressing the potential for efficacy of neighborhood-based democratic institutions to facilitate enhanced female political empowerment (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2009).

Detail on the Literatures

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment has been a popular term used in both academic circles and contemporary culture for decades. Gutiérrez and Lewis (1999) include in the conceptualization of empowerment both individual and group dynamics.

When empowerment occurs on a personal level, individuals develop feelings of personal power and self-efficacy...with empowerment on the interpersonal level, people increase their ability to influence others, often through the development of specific skills, such as training in problem-solving or assertiveness...political empowerment consists of social action and social change through a process of social support, coalition building, and praxis. (p. 12)

The empowerment of the individual results in behavior, or action, that creates social transformation because empowered individuals are more likely to support group efforts for change.

Similarly, for Collins (2009), empowerment also involves both the transformation

of the individual and the transformation of unjust social institutions. “Empowerment cannot accrue to individuals and groups without transforming U.S. social institutions that foster exclusion” (p. 296). Groups must also be mindful of one another and develop “coalition strategies” so that they are not trading empowerment for themselves at the expense of others (pp. 306–307). Collins identifies two approaches to power, dialectical and subjective. Dialectical approaches focus on group identity and unite people in a particular group to fight against others who oppress them. The subjective approach relates to the individual and how she or he translates everyday experiences into a new consciousness or awareness. Both approaches work together. These systems of power are organized into a “matrix of domination” and change strategies are usefully organized into each several domains (pp. 294–295). First, the structural domain includes the organization of institutions. Second, the disciplinary domain of power addresses how power is managed, such as in bureaucracies or hierarchies. Third, the hegemonic realm of power justifies power structures through culture and ideology and uses symbols, ideas, images, curricula, and “commonsense” ideas to be effective. Finally, interpersonal spheres of power replace an individual’s way of knowing with that of the dominant power structure; one’s own belief systems and behavior end up reinforcing oppression. Collin’s definitions are useful in parsing experiences of community members to better understand how empowerment materializes and fostered or hampered within Salt Lake City’s community council system.

These definitions of empowerment are useful to my inquiry for three reasons. 1) They address the connection between institutions and the potential of empowerment for individuals within them – in this case community councils. 2) They connect an

individual's empowerment to empowerment of the group. In this case, empowerment for a woman connects to empowerment for women to serve in elected office. 3) They caution against the re-creation of power hierarchies with merely different actors at the top.

Therefore, to maintain the same organizational structure and merely adding more women does not necessarily substantively change an institution or a system.

Female Empowerment and the Civic Participation

Connection—Empirical Evidence

Itzhaky and York (2000) provide empirical evidence of Gutiérrez and Lewis' and Collins' multidimensional conceptualization of empowerment, identifying "the relationship among community participation, personal empowerment, and gender" (p. 225). Evidence for their analysis derives from a case study of a low-income neighborhood in Israel. The authors surveyed 190 neighborhood residents who participated in community activity. Their findings suggest that men felt empowered when they had more control over themselves and their communities vis-à-vis serving in the role of the community's representative. Women, in contrast, did not require status designations to feel empowered. If a women wanted to feel personally empowered within their neighborhoods, they only needed to attend activities related to the government provision of services. If, however, women wanted to feel empowered to have control over government services and agencies, then women needed to participate in decision-making in them.

Civic Participation Literature

Civic engagement scholarship focuses on any activity, individual or collective, devoted to influencing the collective life of the polity. (Macedo et al., 2005, p. 6)

Citizen participation is important because it creates community, provides protection for individual interests in public life, and finally, participation enhances citizens' lives and capacities by providing civic training. Political and nonpolitical voluntary institutions, or institutions people attend by choice (i.e., not due to a paycheck), serve as a locus for networking and skill building, which in turn facilitate individual political efficacy. A variety of these institutions have been in place since the founding of our nation, and yet, much discussion persists about the overall participatory decline and the increase of participation differentials between socioeconomic and gender groups within the United States.

One trajectory of civic participation scholarship attempts to unpack the motivations behind participation and the gaps that exist between societal groups, including gender, in participation levels. Early research findings connected income, education, and job status to participation predictability through a socio-economic status (SES) model (Verba & Nie, 1972). Later, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) focus on the linkages between socio-economic variables and participation by identifying the participatory factors of resources, psychological engagement, and recruitment that serve to explain the degree to which an individual will participate. In this model, if people have finances, time, and skills, and if they care about issues and feel like they can make difference, and if they are invited, then people are more likely to participate. In an updated study, Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001) attend to the degree to which individuals gain such participatory factors throughout life in institutions they identify as

nonpolitical (e.g., religious, social, and those that do not take political stands).

Participatory factors, such as family of origin and education, multiply and build on each other; people who are better educated have higher paying jobs and leadership responsibilities, and interact in social and professional spheres with others of the same class, thus intensifying group advantages and disadvantages. Women and men both use participatory factors, such as education, income, and civic skills, while engaging in political activity, but women's factors accumulate less; women have fewer experiences to gain the skill sets (Burns et al., 2001).

These studies provide partial clues concerning the degree to which community councils may empower women (Burns et al., 2001; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1995). The researchers' methodological approach (random sample survey data) provides a broad-based view with questions that may be asked over time to offer a longitudinal assessment of changes or similarities to determine typicality and differences among groups and the overall population. Such data, however, are gathered at particular points in time and are aggregate. They do not allow a full understanding of the nuanced realities of individuals outside of a homogenous group understanding or contextualize their experiences. Researchers have identified participatory factors, groups who participate, and levels of inequality among groups, but their findings do not explain the degree to which participatory factors are positively or negatively influenced by community institutions (Burns et al., 2001; Schlozman, 2002, Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1995).

Other lines of citizen engagement scholarship shift analysis to voluntary neighborhood level governance as potential spaces for participatory behavior. "Ideally, the existence of neighborhood councils, associations, and similar bodies could increase

the quantity of civic engagement by multiplying the avenues through which citizens can engage with each other and with local government” (Macedo et al., 2005, p. 93). These “free spaces” are rooted in everyday life settings wherein people—even those outside of typical power hierarchies—can learn how to engage politically and civically (Boyte, 2011). Institutions located in these spaces potentially provide an opportunity to challenge norms separating public and private spaces and to provide women opportunities to civically participate. Neighbors may walk together to meetings after sharing meals with each other and other family members; meetings may feature potlucks in which political discussion and value sharing occurs during bread breaking; people may more easily bring their children to meetings; and meeting spaces may double as education centers or other places of community life during different times of day. As place-based neighborhood institutions, community councils intersect where people actually live, work, and play. Political decision-making is not done in isolation but in spaces in which the impacts of policy are experienced throughout the lives of all community members (Ackelsberg, 2013).

Location creates an access point, but if meaningful operational opportunities do not exist, political empowerment cannot occur. Citizens must be central to the action, producers of public policy, and not mere recipients or consumers of government services (Boyte, 2011; Fung, 2015; Mathews, 1994; Sharp, 2012). Mathews argues that to create true change, people need to “band together” in order to take responsibility for community problems, make a long-term commitment to problem solving, and collectively choose how to address the issues (p. 400). Reports, debates, and panels are modes of imparting information that render the community passive recipients. People need to authentically

blend different perspectives to create genuine public transformation. Boyte appreciates public deliberation but articulates a further need of shared work in order to place citizens as “co-creator[s] of democracy” (p. 325). Work means continued efforts by a group of people to make “things of lasting civic value” (p. 325). Work helps create civic identities and facilitates people of different backgrounds building bridges across their life differences (p. 330).

Work can also mean coproduction of services in community and government partnerships (Sharp, 2012). Fung (2015) also underscores action as an essential component of legitimate and effective citizen participation while cautioning against triviality; are citizens identifying neighborhood needs and prioritizing recreation space in municipal budgets or are they merely deciding what color to paint the park benches?

Public Administration

Stivers (2000, 2002) adds the lens of gender to analysis of space that is missing from Boyte (2011), Mathews (1994), and Fung (2015). She does not specifically address neighborhood associations, but Stivers does theorize about gendered organizational constructs of government. During the Progressive era, women, in settlement houses, and men, in research bureaus, both worked to reform city governments that were saturated with corruption and mismanagement. Everyone acted in manners “appropriate” to their gender roles during that time period. “Men set about trying to make the city run like a business, and women aimed to make the city more like a home” (2000, p. *x*). Shared efforts bifurcated in the 1920s and 1930s into professionalized public service and professionalized social work. Previous efforts utilizing shared knowledge and

experiences in public policy making devolved into a competition between the ideas of “efficiency” versus “caring” (2000). Scientific management ideals, including a separation from politics and a neutrality ethic, persist today in public administration; they are utilized by public administrators to strategically legitimize the fact that they are not elected. Stivers (2002) also argues that images of professionalism and business within government can disempower workers and citizens who do not conform to masculine ideals or who ground their wisdom from experience as opposed to science. This tendency by government is particularly troublesome for grass roots organizations intended to amplify public voice within government; instead of cultivating independent thinking citizens, inequity for those who do not conform may be perpetuated (Collins, 2009).

Researchers have provided empirical support for Macedo’s (2005) claim that local governance groups demonstrate that citizens can effectively mobilize into associations and impact policy outcomes (Berry, Portney, & Thomson, 1993; Musso, Weare, Elliot, Kitsuse, & Shiau, 2007; Rabrenovic, 2010; Sharp, 2012; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). Berry et al. (1993) utilize surveys, interviews with community members and elites, and focus groups to compare civic participation in cities in which there were established neighborhoods to those that were demographically similar but where such participation systems did not exist. Their research findings suggest correlations between participation and people’s strong senses of community, feelings of political efficacy, and knowledge about local government and the neighborhood association itself. Rabrenovic (2010) uses statistically-based demographic and land use characteristics, interviews, and meeting observations to examine New York’s Albany and Schenectady neighborhood associations. She highlights the contextual impact of a city governing structure on the

success of a neighborhood group. If the city does not view the association as legitimate, or if the association does not meet the requirements of interacting with the city, the association will not receive the resources it needs to survive. In short, she finds that success directly links to context. Community groups are both constrained by their environment but can also help create it by agenda setting and value articulation. Action strategies can be adjusted depending on the needs and the environment. Associations located in lower income neighborhoods, for example, may build coalitions with religious institutions to grow political power.

Sirianni and Friedland (2001) found that community groups often begin with binary strategies of advocacy and protest but then evolve based on issue and context. Participant training, such as in Portland, Oregon, facilitates coalition building, law compliance, and increased numbers and diversity of those who get involved. Cities can offer leadership development programs, staffing, and financial resources that help empower the neighborhood associations. “[W]ell-structured citywide systems show significantly greater impacts of face-to-face democracy on individual citizen learning” (p. 70). This outcome is especially true for low-income areas.

Musso et al. (2007) report on Los Angeles’ neighborhood council reform. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups were used to gather data. The authors evaluate Los Angeles’ community council network based on the Berry et al. 1993 study to determine if there is a developed citywide system of councils, resource and political support, and empowerment innovations. Musso et al. identify characteristics of empowerment innovations such as early warning systems, so that neighborhood groups can know ahead of time when issues of importance will be discussed in city government. Musso et al.

found that Los Angeles' did possess a system, but efficacy was not equal in each of the neighborhood councils. Councils needed a more diverse group of stakeholders included, needed more city assistance for the councils, and required more structured opportunities for different kinds of engagement depending on the issue. While the authors' discussion of representative legitimacy is useful to my research as well as the identification of empowerment strategies, the research of Musso et al. did not address the individual experiences, or even aggregate experiences, uniquely of women within the neighborhood council system (2007).

Despite the attention Berry et al. (1993), Rabrenovic (2010), Sirianni and Friedland (2001), and Musso et al. (2007) have provided to community governance models, their findings primarily relate to the efficacy of the organizations. When individual behavioral data are obtained, SES and race/ethnicity are measured but not gender. Without including gender as a lens of analysis, the perceptions and experiences of women remain unknown.

Urban Planning Literature

The urban planning literature offers empirical evidence of opportunity for women's empowerment in the public sphere (Martin, 2002) and cautions against governmental co-optation (Harwood, 2007). Urban designer practitioners and academics, however, infrequently utilize feminist evaluatory strategies, so the impacts of community design and support on women's lives are not well-known (Leavitt, 2003).

In her 2002 analysis of a neighborhood block club in Minnesota, Martin rejects public / private dichotomies and identifies "integrated webs of social relations" (p. 333)

in which activities of the individual and the collective converge. This diverse community shared a common territory and their efforts “focused on community as the primary concern and goal” (p. 347). Martin’s observations and interviews revealed that individuals working within the block associations did not align with gendered expectations regarding home or private life and engagement in the public. Men sometimes spoke of connections, and since three quarters of their board was made up of females, women availed themselves of leadership skill cultivation and organizational policymaking. People did what they wanted to do and needed to do to create change and were not bound by gender stereotypes.

Harwood (2007) utilizes participant observation, interviews, and document evaluations to study two neighborhood association projects, both of which are run by women, Ms. Jones and Ms. Perez. Harwood argues that municipal employees label certain behaviors as “good,” such as working with the city, and other behaviors as “bad,” such as calling the media. “Good” community leaders are rewarded with quick allocation of resources where as “bad” community leaders find their requests are met with hesitation (pp. 267–268). Government officials may have demonstrated preferential treatment to certain classes of residents within neighborhood councils who more closely resemble city staff. “Ms. Jones advocated for a neighborhood that was white and relatively united. She was able to interact with council members in their own language and style. She could also vote” (p. 267). Her economically advantaged neighborhood’s project focused on neighborhood beautification through trees and street lighting. “Ms. Jones’s style, manner and socioeconomic background were similar to those she had to negotiate with at the city. At the time of the tree controversy, most people in positions of power were middle-class

and white” (p. 266). In contrast, Ms. Perez’ neighborhood association served many with “limited or no English and undocumented residency status” (p. 266). Ms. Perez was known by city workers as an outspoken activist, and she used the media as a tool to draw public attention to neighborhood concerns (p. 267). Their community council priority was gang violence. Ultimately, Ms. Jones was successful in securing enough municipal resources to complete her project. In contrast, gang members destroyed Ms. Perez’s automobile and threatened to kill her children; she ultimately moved out of the neighborhood.

Harwood identifies potential governmental attitudes, behaviors, and nuanced interactions between government staff and community members for which to look in studying neighborhood association empowerment opportunities. The mere formal facilitation or establishment of neighborhood councils is only one piece of the experience. Formal and informal interactions between city staff and association members create or destroy empowerment opportunities as well. Harwood’s article introduces provocative ideas about women leaders in neighborhood associational contexts, but the evidence is underdeveloped; we do not know, for example, if the city helped complete Ms. Jones’ beautification project merely because the resources were readily available. Ms. Perez’ gang project was far more complex; multiple complex layers of socio-economics, generational values, and multiple governmental jurisdictions are just a few of the factors bounding criminal justice problem-solving. Ultimately, Harwood’s stories are intriguing, but insufficiently unanalyzed in terms of local government capacity.

Martin (2002) provides empirical evidence highlighting the community sphere as a location where gendered expectations and norms can be superseded. When people in a

shared space work together on quality-of-life projects, people contribute the talents they possess regardless if the skills are congruent with expectations about “male” and “female” tasks and behavior. Urban planning evaluations, however, do not generally focus on the experiences of people within a community, but rather concentrate on benchmarks relevant to business and government ideas of efficiency (Leavitt, 2003). A lack of research utilizing a gendered lens limits empirical knowledge about how well-intended government efforts to empower communities can transform into punishments of organizing efforts that do not fit into the conceptualized models of what those efforts are anticipated to be (Harwood, 2007).

Candidate Recruitment Literature

The civic participation literature inadequately attends to the impacts of civic participation on women; the potential for empowerment exists, but there is little direct empirical evidence of its utilization. The candidate recruitment literature provides clues about how empowerment can stretch beyond the act of participation at a neighborhood level to what motivates a woman to run for political office. Encouragement and organizational support are important factors. Visibility in leadership is additionally important to remove biases against women leaders and to model behavior and opportunity for young women.

Women’s pathways to serving in state legislatures exhibit strong levels of civic activism before deciding to run for office the first time (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013), and participating within an organization plays a larger role for women than for men (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009). Organizations encourage women to run, particularly

women's groups, but all elected women were active in a wide range of organizations before running for office. The researchers' survey instruments, however, specifically inquire about professional groups, service clubs, teachers' organizations, women's organizations, religious organizations, and civil rights groups (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009), so the extent to which community councils could also serve in this role is unclear. In addition, it is not clear exactly what occurs within these groups—beyond the actual recruitment—that prompts running for office.

Recruitment groups are important to both women and men no matter what level of elected office they seek; “sixty-seven percent of respondents who have been encouraged to run by a party leader, elected official, or political activist have considered running, compared to 33 percent of respondents who report no such recruitment” (Lawless & Fox, 2012, p. 13). Women especially depend on recruitment since potential women candidates do not believe that they have enough political experience to run even if they actually have more experience than men, and women often encounter people that discourage their electoral efforts (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009). Overall, “women are less likely than men to receive the suggestion to run for office – from anyone” (Lawless & Fox, 2012, pp. 11–12).

Women acting in group leadership capacities demonstrate credentials that the public and the potential candidate perceive as needed to serve in office. These demonstrations help to eliminate bias against females as political leaders (Beaman, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2009). Visible female political leaders also increase the likelihood of young women to be politically active in the future (Fox & Lawless, 2014). This female leader modeling is potentially more impactful for adolescent

women who have received negative feedback at home regarding potential political participation. Jenkins (2005) found that the home is a space in which young women are influenced to a greater degree than are young men about politics.

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed suggests that community councils may provide opportunities for people to empower themselves and their communities in advocating for governmental policy direction and allocation of resources – if certain external and internal conditions are met. Unfortunately, empirical research provides little to no evidence on the impact these neighborhood-level institutions have on women specifically. Recruitment literature suggests that civic organizations may be positive institutions for women to gain and demonstrate skill sets and to receive encouragement to run for political office, but more needs to be known about the extent to which community councils can serve in that capacity.

Other literature not reviewed, such as that on deliberative democracy, could provide additional insight about design of democratic institutions and their ability to promote equality of participation through specifically designed decision-making and discussion strategies. Community councils, however, rarely use elaborate discussion procedures. In addition, community councils are spaces in which more occurs than public deliberating and decision-making. In these spaces, relationships are built and community and personal identities may be established or re-created through neighborhood celebration festivals or potlucks. For these reasons, this research focuses on the

opportunities and constraints that organically, formally, and informally present themselves within community councils for political empowerment.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH, DESIGN, AND METHODS

Interpretive ethnography, in particular, brings something special to the study of local governance: access to the experiences lived by the people under study. Ethnographers not only look at the experiences of the people in and around local government, they also draw on their own experiences. Because the experiences of politicians, administrators, bureaucrats, professionals and citizens are both the result and the basis for their acts, understanding these experiences helps ethnographers to explain the practice of local governance.
(Van Hulst, 2008, p. 144)

The research question for this dissertation is the following: Do Salt Lake City community councils politically empower women and even serve as an entry point or a component of a path for women to run for elected office? Empowerment results in (a) increased confidence and (b) increased ability to authentically express personal preferences within the council's environment. Empowered women build the relationships and personal knowledge base necessary to collectively advocate for and promote policy change or other government or community council action. In this chapter, I discuss my philosophical approach to the research and methods of data generation and analysis. The final section addresses how my specific identity impacted the research process.

Research Philosophy

In investigating my research question, I used an interpretive methodological approach. From this perspective, human behavior is not tied to any natural law; it has

meaning, and this meaning must be understood within a context of social action.

Neighborhood associations, like any institution, have their own formal and informal rules of engagement as well as social relationships; these elements provide the context through which community members operate.

My overall design was ethnographic and bounded by Salt Lake City's community councils' political connections and geography. This method allowed me to focus deeply on this area in order to better understand how opportunities within the neighborhood council system were gendered. My method emphasized spending sufficient time with neighborhood councils to build positive rapport with members as a precondition for gaining the tacit as well as more explicit forms of knowledge needed to understand and articulate the complexities and nuances of how gender manifested itself in neighborhood council settings. Ethnographic design served my puzzle exploration well; as Van Hulst (2008) expresses, local governance is personal and largely the result of people's experiences. The near decade that I have spent living in the community and representing the community allow me to recognize and explain individual and group behaviors that are regular or extraordinary.

Evidence Generation

In this section, I discuss the strengths and weaknesses of a study located in Salt Lake City and my three methods of data generation, including the characteristics of the three community councils I studied, interviewee characteristics, and research ethics.

My research was conducted within the boundaries of Salt Lake City's municipal corporation. The local government studied was the City of Salt Lake, and the community

associations considered fell within the city's geographic boundaries. Three factors influenced the decision to target research in this area: physical proximity, existing neighborhood association structure, and my existing relationships with political and grass roots elites. The University of Utah and my home are both located within Salt Lake City. As such, time and resources spent commuting to research sites were minimal. In addition, Salt Lake City's neighborhood associations have been in existence for nearly 40 years, and during this time, they have established a continuing relationship with the city government and municipal political system; interactions between them will be more predictable, documented, and easier to access both from a historical and contemporary perspective than if I had chosen another location.

In addition to proximity and a long neighborhood association tradition, access to elites proved to be an important factor in determining the specific study subjects. I worked for Salt Lake City in both the City Council and Mayor's office for a total period of nearly 8 years. In addition, I served in the Utah State Legislature as a Representative from this area for four terms (2006–2014), which gave me access to and rapport with several neighborhood councils.

Some might question the validity of Utah as a setting for the study of women's political empowerment; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), headquartered in Salt Lake City, is a patriarchal religion insofar as only men arguably hold the primary power within the institution. In addition, many doctrinal and cultural expectations, actual and perceived, within the LDS religion traditionally situate women primarily as an actor within the home. As a result, some might perceive that women would have a very limited role in government, politics, and neighborhood activism. Salt

Lake City, however, is considered particularly progressive. Women are present in realms associated with politics and civic engagement. While situated in the lower rankings of states for numbers of women in elected office, Utah is not at the bottom (Center for American Women in Politics, 2017). Several states, particularly in the southern and midwestern parts of the United States, are home to widely practiced religious fundamentalism. In this “Bible Belt,” church practitioners frequently emphasize literalism in religious texts. As a result, doctrinal and cultural expectations often place women outside of any role that involves government, politics, or activism. In sum, here is no perfectly “representative” place to study gender; although the state as a whole has more traditional gender norms compared to some other states, Salt Lake City is noticeably more liberal. Context matters and influences meaning, and, thus, the learning gained from each geographic location legitimately contributes to the knowledge of women, political power, and institutions that may help or hinder women’s contributions to public policy making.

I generated data in three ways: I located and accessed relevant documents, interviewed a total of 51 individuals, and observed public talk and other forms of participation in order to identify actors, learn of personal experiences within the community councils, and unpack formal and informal rules of institutional engagement to reveal the degree to which local ideas of gender materialize. The research began with analysis of public documents to learn of neighborhood council area history as well as a record of former and current council leadership. The document analysis identified areas ripe for further investigation through the interview process, as well as relayed a story about who typically participates, and neighborhood characteristics. Observations of

public meetings allowed me to gain an understanding of the community within the community councils, from their perspectives. I observed interactions for their gendering. This was designed to include, but not limited to (a) expressions of different role expectations for women and men, (b) differentiated styles of debate or speech between men and women, and (c) norms of attendance for women and men. Finally, interviewing provided an opportunity for individuals to relay their own information about their individual lives and experiences; it allowed for comparison between the observational data and people's self-understandings (which may or may not match up to various degrees). My use of multiple methods of data gathering facilitated a multidimensional understanding of community council functioning and the people who are members.

Community Councils Chosen

My research data were derived from membership or governmental actors connected with three community councils within the political boundaries of Salt Lake City. These councils are located in three separate communities encompassing portions of the west, east, and central geographies of the municipalities. Each council possesses its own unique demographics and SES populations. All three community councils are well-established and have each been in place at least 20 years. I chose pseudonyms for each of the councils to help ensure confidentiality: Vonnegut, Hazelwood, and Orchard. Table 1 gives general statistics about the three councils. My purpose here is to provide specific enough data to paint a picture of the areas and to demonstrate diversity, but not to be so specific as to identify the community councils with which I worked. Numbers and percentages are rounded to whole numbers. Therefore, for example, the lowest actual

population is 7254 and the highest is 13,467.

Observations of three community councils located in separate geographic areas of Salt Lake City afforded me the opportunity to better understand 1) any potential connections between SES status, and its potential implications for community council participation; 2) individual neighborhood cultures and subsequent connections with meeting operations and participation nuances; and 3) the impacts of diverse physical spaces on engagement.

Documents

Archival document analysis provided evidence of organizational structure, membership and the activity patterns, and an awareness of the historical and contemporary relationship between the City of Salt Lake and the community councils. Review of the initial documents led to the discovery of additional informative archives I did not know were available (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Historical documents additionally helped to identify people to interview, particularly those I did not know, so that I better ensured that I expanded research engagement beyond my own circle of acquaintances. Although the government documents were public, obtaining access to some archival information proved problematic; and I am knowledgeable about where government documents are located within the City of Salt Lake, but many neighborhood documents were stored in people's homes and haphazardly kept. In the review, I was mindful that public documents are records authorized by either community council or city leadership to stand as the "official" record; dissent or other perspectives may not have been represented.

Meeting Observations

I utilized public observation of community council meetings for “hanging out—with a difference. The difference is that an ethnographer doing participant-observation attempts to interpret observations and experiences systematically by looking for sociocultural patterns.”
(Pader, 2013, p. 196)

Women may claim to speak as much as men, for example, but I was able to compare observations of conduct to what people reported about themselves and their experiences in interviews. I was also able watch interactions between people and viewed the interplay between formal and informal organizational rules. For example, leadership elections may be open to all, but if only men run, except for the position of secretary, gendered informal rules about appropriate work roles for men and women might be at play. The meetings were public, so access was generally not a problem—except when advertised dates and times were incorrect. I took notes during meetings “to form ideas about what [was] going on in the field that [was] of importance to solving the puzzle that brought [me] there in the first place” (Van Hulst, 2008, p. 147).

Between the dates of June 2014 and March of 2015, I attended four meetings of the Vonnegut Community Council, three of the Hazelwood Community Council, and three of the Orchard Community Council. One of the Orchard meetings was not of the full community council but of a neighborhood group that is part of the community council – a smaller subdivision within the Orchard Community council boundaries. Information on the Salt Lake City website about the full Orchard Community meetings was incorrect, and the chair was not able to provide any indication of when the full council would meet after the first meeting I attended. I learned of the third Orchard area meeting a few days prior to it via the personal contact from a board member. Meeting

length varied from 90 minutes to 120 minutes and frequently, participants stayed after the meetings for an additional 15 to 30 minutes of continued conversation, which I observed.

Interviews

Interviews allowed me to explore the individual perspectives and logics of those within the community council and the surrounding institutional context. Interviews additionally allowed me to pursue information not available in official accounts of community councils and learn of details, silences, awkward language, and other nuances that are not easily expressed or understood on a survey form (Devault, 1990). Interviews were particularly helpful in discerning the nuances between formal and informal systems within community councils and the relationships between the councils and government officials. I interviewed two types of individuals: (a) current and former government elected and administrative officials, whom I dub “elites;” (b) citizens who were currently or formally members of the three councils I chose to study.

In terms of interviewee characteristics, the elites were either government officials currently or formally representing (via elected office jurisdictions) either the Hazelwood, Vonnegut, or Orchard community councils or Salt Lake City public administrators whose occupational responsibilities included interaction with the community councils. Of the 25 individuals with whom I spoke, 11 were men and 13 were women, four were people of color, and four identified as gay or lesbian. The backgrounds of these individuals (without gender, race, or sexual orientation specified in order to protect their identities) are as follows: City of Salt Lake employees, Salt Lake City Councilmembers, Salt Lake County elected officials, Salt Lake County employees, Salt Lake City School Board of

Education, Utah State Legislators. Many individuals combined multiple roles in their histories such as having previously served as a former elected official but now working in an administrative government office.

In terms of the citizen interviews, I interviewed those expressing interest after announcements were made about the project via community meeting, group email, or snowballed recommendation. Ten affiliated with Vonnegut, eight with Hazelwood, and eight with Orchard. Nearly all were currently serving or had served in a leadership capacity within the organization. Of the 26 interviewed, 12 were male and 14 were female. Two people were of color, and I know from prior interactions that at least three were gay. Participant ages were fairly evenly distributed from the early 30s to mid-60s. Three people were in their 70s, and two were in their 80s. Four people I interviewed had participated in the community council system but left, primarily due to experiences of a single or multiple negative incidents. All of the interviewees, save one, owned property within their respective community councils. The one renter had resided in the neighborhood for over 20 years.

The interviews occurred in many locations, including libraries, coffee shops, offices, a diner, homes, and two were conducted over the phone. No interview lasted less than 1 hour and one continued for nearly 2 ½ hours. The interviews were conducted between January and August of 2015.

Interview Process and Content

All interviewees were given standard IRB information (required by the University of Utah IRB), and I gave them my personal assurance that the insights they provided

would remain confidential; for this reason, I characterize them in ways that aim to protect their identities.

My goal with the interviews was to gain insight into how people originally connected to the community councils, what they felt was beneficial or not helpful about them, and in what way community council participation personally impacted or transformed them as individuals. I focused on gender to learn if this was a subject about which people thought or opined, or at least through the act of conversation with me would begin to be mindful of in terms of its impact on community council recruitment, participation, and success.

While interviews were originally scheduled for 30 minutes each, I quickly learned that my planning was extraordinarily shortsighted; people enthusiastically offered their insights, and quite frankly, it felt like they had never been asked about their community council experiences (or civic participation generally)—at least not in a way that demonstrated that their views mattered. A few even contacted me with additional thoughts days, and sometimes weeks, after the original interview; “you know, I’ve been thinking about what we talked about, and I have more ideas” or “I just remembered something I forget to share with you” began most of those conversations. The older interviewees, those in their 70s and 80s, seemed lonely in general and happy to have the contact and to be asked about their perspectives. The majority of people requested a copy of the completed project; they were excited to learn how their individual insights helped shape the final product and could potentially pave the way for innovation within the community council system.

Interviews were semistructured, conversational, or the ordinary language

approach (Schaffer, 2014) as needed. This allowed me latitude for a consistency in questions, but additionally provided me the opportunity to build rapport in a conversation-like setting, ask questions when they naturally fit, and to “take seriously their words, and the categories that these words reflect[ed]” (Schaffer, 2014, p. 186). Words are individually and culturally symbolic – a great locus to identify attitudes concerning gender. All interviews were taped, and I took notes during the interview to record aspects of the setting and any facial expressions or body language that revealed certain feelings about the topic. Notes were helpful as well during a couple times when I experienced technology challenges; the charge ran out on the recorder at the end of the interview, and portions of one conversation were not clear when I listened to the recording.

With regard to issues of gender, I used a particular interviewing strategy. I asked questions about community councils without mentioning gender to see whether interviewees would raise that issue on their own. Only if the issue was not raised by the interviewees themselves did I ask direct questions about the ways in which gender may or may not have mattered. This approach allowed me to understand what was of primary importance to those interviewed. I wanted to know their priorities and not inadvertently create them.

Analytical Strategies

In the end, the idea behind ethnographic fieldwork in an interpretive mode is that fieldworkers immerse themselves in others' worlds, which involves “both being with other people to see how they respond to events as they happen and experiencing for oneself these events and the circumstances that gave rise to them.”
(Emerson et al. 1995, as cited in Van Hulst, 2008, p. 146)

Data analysis within the interpretive design milieu is iterative and occurs in a spiral succession between data gathering and writing about it (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Document analysis, for example, informs interview question choices that may lead to gathered data that suggest a reevaluation of documents. Nevertheless, it is beneficial to recognize elements of data analysis, wherever they occur during the research process. Marshall and Rossman identify six phases of data analysis: “(a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report” (1999, p. 152). I regularly checked my sense making during the gathering and analyzing loops to ensure that as a researcher, I was not merely looking for what I expected to see, and to consider how my presence as a researcher may have impacted the kinds of information I received or did not receive. This checking involved techniques such as not drawing conclusions about patterns in behavior too quickly, identifying tensions in my assessments of behavior, and consciously seeking out contrary evidence (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

I utilized Marshall and Rossman’s (1999) phases of analysis in a fluid and reoccurring basis; it was not linear. I organized and reorganized data based on origin and meanings derived from my readings. Coding involved far more than identifying actual repeated words; I unpacked connotations that often changed based on the life experiences of the interviewees or their confidence or discomfort in using individual words or phrases. For example, several interviewees utilized the term “political.” Government actors most frequently placed this term within the context of negotiations for limited resources or balancing between different stakeholder needs. The word exuded a neutral

and technical feel. Community members, in contrast, spoke of “political” very negatively. Some even physically winced or tightened when they said the word. A few actually shouted that particular word in an otherwise calm conversational sentence. Pastoral neighborhood images and narratives sharply conflicted with superficial, combative, and fraudulent meanings connected with elected office, politicians, and governing institutions, such as those at the Utah State Capitol. This analytical unpacking of meaning required repeated review of notes and recordings. Frequently I did not recognize nuances until after the several reviews of the material.

Testing understandings and “trying on” alternative explanations additionally occurred in an ongoing and spiraling fashion and required the repeated review of gathered data. Observed details such as checking a mobile phone but not sharing ideas during a meeting, for example, could indicate that the person was distracted by personal or professional obligations or perhaps, the meeting topics of conversation initiated waves of anxiety for the community member; talking would have been next to impossible. Interviews were helpful in seeing what people thought about a particular behavior, even ones that I noticed from the individual during the meetings. I consistently reflected on my own interpretations of events and conversations as well. Analysis far superseded any conceptualization of the process as box checking; it was ongoing discovery.

Research Ethics

Throughout all stages of this research project, I was mindful of the ethical responsibilities that I have as a researcher; one of these is to understand that I bring my own identities into the knowledge transactions that occur between the community I am

researching and myself. I have lived in Salt Lake City for nearly 23 years, and I served as a member of the Utah House of Representatives. During my time in office, I possessed no authority over the councils or control of their operations. I attended some meetings, which are open to all members of the public, to listen to community priorities, and I provided information or took criticism when called upon.

The power relationships, real or perceived, between myself and the community were continuously and seriously considered. People must be treated with respect, any potential harm must be reduced, and the process must be fair (Fujii, 2012). I anticipated several strategies to meet these criteria and was open to others as they presented themselves. For example, though community councils are public meetings, I found it important to tell people that I was observing as part of my research project. For interview selection of community council members, it was helpful for general announcements to be made to members, via email or public meeting “open mic” time, for people to contact me privately if they would like to be interviewed. In this fashion, the initiative is placed on the potential interviewee to say “yes,” as opposed to being in a position to say “no” if they were approached on an individual basis. Care was placed in dealing with consent forms too; people needed to understand what they were reading and agreed to, otherwise the information could not be helpful to them (Fujii, 2012). Finally, I employed pseudonyms in my research report; this approach to research confidentiality facilitated openness, even among municipal officials, and it protects people from any harm they may receive from disclosing their experiences. Again, I was continuously mindful of ethical standards and my duty to treat each individual with respect and care.

My approach to ethical conduct caused some dilemmas during analysis. While

testing my assumptions of meeting observations during interviews, I was careful not to identify any individual actors in my accounts of happenings. This may have sacrificed clarity in order to maintain my promises of anonymity; this became particularly cumbersome when different members of the same family were interviewed individually and commented on the leadership styles of their relative. One notable direct quote revealed a great deal about gendered leadership expectations. I could not, however, use the quotation in my chapter analysis because the source could have easily been identified by family members.

How My Identity Affected Data Generation and Data Analysis

Traditional research attempts to disembodify the investigator; an experiment, for example, creates a sterile setting apart from the natural environment in which activity occurs (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). I wanted to interact with people in their own space on their terms absent a contrived laboratory. My background as a resident of Salt Lake City, a government employee, and an elected official significantly enhanced the knowledge building in this project by providing me better access, a keen perception of symbolic language and behavior, and a more astute awareness of certain document existence than a researcher unfamiliar with the people or the settings. In contrast to some conceptions of research, this familiarity increased rather than compromised the trustworthiness of my data gathering and analysis. As important, throughout my research, I was very mindful of strategies to ensure that the perspectives of those I gathered were incorporated in a way to ensure their authenticity; one method I used, for example, was to double check note-taking with the actual recordings of the conversations. I wanted to

ensure that the language I recorded on paper was specifically that of those I interviewed. I did not want meaning lost in shorthand.

My experience is what brought me to my research question and to the data-gathering strategy. Community-level governance has been largely overlooked in the literature insofar as its capabilities to empower or inspire women to run for office. Because neighborhood political activity was an integral part of the distinctive configuration of experiences leading to my elected service, it was an advantage for understanding my research setting and participants. Motivations to run for office and for participation in general are highly personal, and an ethnographic approach to data gathering was essential for uncovering the powerful nuances I know are so prevalent in political decision-making.

My experience allowed me access to government administrative and legislative elites and citizens engaged in neighborhood governance as well as their confidence. By access, I mean pragmatic tools such as phone numbers and relationships that facilitated, for example, face-to-face meetings with government actors as opposed to staff designees or information about a community meeting that was inaccurately posted on a government website. By confidence, I mean trust. I believe my shared experiences as a public administrator and as an elected official elicited more candid conversations with elites even when their opinions or experiences were not aligned with campaign-ready thought norms of vibrant citizen democracy. My historical personal, professional, and community service presence in the neighborhoods instilled confidence in citizens; government can intimidate and when many neighborhoods are desperate for services or resources, or when people or family members have had negative experience with government,

straightforward talk about government can be rare. University IRB protections are important, but to an individual whose entire career could be ruined by an attributed quotation, confidence in a known person plays an instrumental role in just how much information sharing occurs.

My involvement in both elite and citizen spheres additionally provided me with insight into language or cultural behavior not readily identifiable by outsiders. The term “activist,” for example, possesses a negative connotation for many elites, and public clapping at a community meeting does not necessarily equate with approval of presented policy or project; it is often just about being polite. Words, silences, and action outside of the norm additionally provided clues for further probing during interviews in order to better elicit what was notable or difficult for interviewees to articulate. My background also countered reactions to my presence in some circumstances; as a known persona among several community members, that familiarity mitigated the Hawthorne effect in many meetings. People were familiar with me sitting in the corner taking notes, so my presence lessened any potential elicitation of performances related to normative conceptions about citizen participation. My experience with community council culture, additionally, served as a benchmark for any activity out of the ordinary.

Personal government experience, in particular, enhanced my ability to locate particular documents of relevance to this research. Documents may be retrieved from any formal records request, but sometimes official responses may be hampered by evolution in language referring to programs over time. My knowledge of these changes allowed me to widen the breadth of my requests. Other documents were not considered part of the formal public record, but were helpful to this research; I recalled seeing a community

council outreach pamphlet years ago as a city employee and located it through one employee who had kept one in an old file cabinet.

My intimacy with Salt Lake City did not preclude my use of strategies, such as reflexivity, to protect against “bias” in any phase of research. Reflexivity “refers to a researcher’s active consideration of any engagement with the ways in which his [or her] own sense-making and the particular circumstances that might have affected it, throughout all phases of the research process, relate to the knowledge claims he [or she] ultimately advances in written form” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p. 100) . I understand that I had a role in the process as a cocreator of conversation and that people reacted to my presence as a woman, a potential neighbor, and perhaps as a former elected official, so I actively sought out people outside of my circle to interview; snowballing connected me with individuals from different political parties, race and ethnic backgrounds, and people who had left the community council system. When I encountered any evidence from any data gathering that contained variation from my expectations, I reported it, and revisited previous observations and conclusions to ensure that I had not merely seen that which I expected.

My embeddedness provided me a unique position to use theory as a lens for better understanding the subtlety of the day-to-day grit and glory of people’s individual lives that influence decisions to politically engage and the subsequent personal transformations that occur. This closeness also facilitated investigations into government processes and policies that provided opportunities or barriers to individual and group empowerment. My mindfulness of my background and of my role as researcher constantly pushed me to follow the evidence throughout the process, to check my sense-making, and to protect the

integrity of my knowledge claims. Familiarity with the communities and governmental entities precluded any treatment by me as other or group of others who are merely two-dimensional research subjects who were beyond the scope of harm; the respect and concern for their well-being was and is real.

A Final Note on Confidentiality

Throughout the entirety of my research project, I have erred on the side of protecting the individuals who participated. I promised anonymity, and I was mindful about creating a conversational environment in which people felt free to speak honestly of their experiences. I continue to be present in these neighborhoods, both personally and professionally, and I want to continue to be welcomed. More broadly, I highly value the opportunities for researchers, community members, public administrators, and elected officials when they work together; I wanted the experience to be positive for all involved, so that people would take advantage of future opportunities for shared learning.

Chapter Summary

The interpretive methodological approach I chose to address my research question as well as the subsequent design for evidence generation allowed me to gather information in close proximity to the neighborhood groups I studied as well as the contexts in which they were situated. Local governance is extremely personal and impacts the day-to-day occurrences in people's lives; understanding the meaning making community members engage in when they gather in neighborhood groups necessitated this research path. Utilizing Salt Lake City as a geography of study provided excellent

access for me to engage in the interviews, observations, and document review I used to generate data. Finally, my embeddedness within the community provided me a unique opportunity to fully maximize the benefits of this methodological approach for understanding the influences that cause people to participate in community governance and the personal transformations that occur when they do. Significantly, the results gleaned through this nuanced approach demonstrate the continued relevance of Acker's framework, and yet in some community councils, both women and men challenged gender processes. People pushed back against bluntly gendered macroaggressions and challenged male leadership stereotypes by supporting female leaders. Although some interviewees identified community councils as nonpolitical spaces, during meetings, members clearly engaged in activity identifiable as political, such as arguing for limited resources and expressing public policy preferences. Women challenged authority, frequently asserted themselves, and created opportunities to be heard. In addition, women often utilized community council participation as a notable portion of their path into choosing to run for elected office.

Table 1: Demographic Statistics about Vonnegut, Hazelwood, and Orchard

Demographic ranges across the three councils are as follows:¹

- → Total population: 7,000–14,000²
 - → Percent Female: 46–51³
 - → Percent Minority: 21–54³
- → Total population over the age of 18: 6,000–12,000²
 - → Percent Female: 46–51³
 - → Percent Minority: 21–54³
- → Average median household income (estimated/calculated using median household incomes and total households for tracts/areas comprising the community council)⁴
\$35,000–\$52,000⁴
- → Median home value: \$134,000–\$215,000⁵
- → Educational attainment information (This is for the population age 25+.
Estimated/calculated using educational attainment and population data for tracts/areas comprising the community councils)⁶
 - → Percent high school graduate or higher: 72–95%⁶
 - → Percent bachelor's degree or higher: 18–54%⁶

¹ Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

² Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data (source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010 Summary File 1, Detailed Tables, Tables P5, P12, P12H, H4, Census Block)⁷

³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey, Subject Table S1903, Census Tract⁸

⁴ Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute Analysis of Salt Lake County Assessor's Data⁹

CHAPTER 4

COMMUNITY COUNCIL HISTORY

Introduction

This chapter gives a basic history of community councils in Salt Lake City from 1974 through 2015. Its purpose is to establish a context for the organizational structure of Salt Lake City's community council system as well as for the relationships between government and community councils. The narrative section references the documents presented in Table 2. The second section analyzes this history for clues about the original intent behind the city's creation of the community council system, and community member and government expectations of individual roles and performance

I constructed the narrative using the documents presented in Table 2, supplemented from interviews conducted for the research. In the table, the documents are presented chronologically and with brief annotations. Documents reviewed include formal city ordinances, staff reports, a newspaper article, meeting minutes, as well as resource guides and a program information pamphlet.

Historical Narrative

Salt Lake City officially recognized community councils vis-à-vis the passage of Chapter 2.60, the Community Recognition Ordinance, on July 17, 1990, and their

notification provisions in 2.62 of notification provisions for these organizations. The city officially altered community council boundaries in November of 1994, and in 2013, the city enacted more substantive municipal policy changes. Prior to codification, evidence exists that community councils existed in the city as off-shoots of federal policy goals to involve citizens in more local-level decision-making.

Many community councils arose locally in a federal environment supporting nationwide urban renewal efforts via The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. “With the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 came the community action program (CAP), intended to attack poverty by tapping the energies and imagination of those on the local level. The underlying strategy of the antipoverty efforts of CAPs was that local solutions would be tailored to fit local problems” (Berry, et al., 1993, p. 22). The Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 established Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) that provide annual funding for cities, counties, and states to address low and moderate income community needs such as housing and economic opportunity expansion. “The CDBG law requires that a grantee must develop and follow a detailed plan which provides for, and encourages, citizen participation” (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015, p. 2).

During the Salt Lake City administration of Mayor Conrad Harrison (1974–1976), the councils were organized around eight city planning districts that were divided into three areas each. Representatives from each community council formed a central board known as the Salt Lake Association of Community Councils. Later, under Mayor Ted Wilson’s administration (1976–1985), CDBG funds were directed to administrative and

mailing resource assistance. Mayor Ted Wilson wrote:

Neighborhoods have combined their respective talents to attempt to impact the City decision making process, and bring about changes conducive to neighborhood preservation. The result of this effort has been numerous street and sidewalk improvements, additions to our street lighting, parks and recreational opportunities, and an anti-crime effort centered around neighborhood council. Additionally, home owner throughout the City have worked on special clean-up, paint up, and repair projects to beautify their homes and neighborhoods. I applaud the efforts of those individuals who have unselfishly given numerous volunteer hours to their neighborhoods. (Salt Lake Association of Community Councils, n.d., p. 2)

Salt Lake Association of Community Council's (SLACC's) foundational premise was "the decision making powers belong to the people" and they served "as neither a supervisory nor policy making organization, but function[ed] as a coordinating and fact finding unit, as well as a resource for City government" (SLACC, n.d., pp. 6–7).

Community members' experiential knowledge of the neighborhoods, dedication to the group, and volunteer work provided the necessarily qualifications for serving as a valued contribution to the city. Information access and the commitment of residents to serve the whole community as opposed to special interests created a mechanism to improve the lives of all city residents (SLACC, n.d.).

SLACC highlighted a wide variety of specific community council accomplishments and policy focus areas in its information pamphlet including land use planning, infrastructure improvements, and health care access (SLACC, n.d.). Several councils mentioned successes in neighborhood preservation zoning born out of concerns of land speculation and business encroachment in residential areas. "Streets and chuckholes have been repaired," and a medical center's services were expanded "to help with financial assistance to low-income families for needed medication" (pp. 20–21).

One noted its evolution from dealing only with "emergency problems" to a more "long-

term” vision “as the need for schools, street lighting, and better parks developed” (p. 21). Many councils mentioned working with the city or city departments on projects as well as striving for increases in citizen involvement in the neighborhoods.

After multiple lobbying efforts by SLACC, in July of 1990, Salt Lake City passed Ordinances 63 and 64, formally recognizing SLACC and neighborhood organizations and delineating a formal communication processes between the city and the community groups. The preambles to both ordinances articulate the importance of community councils, the need for a process through which information can be exchanged between them and the city, and community council roles and responsibilities. The City Council in the preambles to Ordinances 63 and 64 states that their body “believes it important that the city obtain input and information concerning decisions affecting residents” from community organizations; “input and information should come through a regular established process”; and “such neighborhood-based organizations should be encouraged and permitted to recommend actions, policy or plans to the city on matters affecting the livability of their neighborhoods or the city as a whole.” Community participation, regardless of vehicle, is additionally encouraged in both ordinances. Citizens impacted by legislative or administrative decision-making “are encouraged and invited to participate whether through their recognized organization or individually.”

Recognition Ordinance 63 delineates SLACC as a body receiving official identification. In addition, the law specifies operational conditions for the community groups including not-for-profit registration with the state of Utah, a provision in bylaws “against discrimination and encouraging representation and participation from all qualified members,” membership open to all owning property or residing within

organizational boundaries, the support of all citizens to participate in city affairs regardless of community council membership, and that “recognized organization members shall be considered volunteers and not employees, officials or officers of Salt Lake City.”

Ordinance 64 provides guidelines for required public notices, primarily potential land-use policy changes but other departmental “significant activities” are also included, to be sent from the City to the community groups and asks those groups to make recommendations on the projects. Groups could request the city to delay a project petition “for a period not to exceed four weeks....to allow the recognized organization to consider the application at its own meeting.” Organizational recommendations need to include type of meeting held to review the issue (e.g., board, committee, full membership), notice procedure, the vote, and dissenting reports. The ordinance also directs city staff to “encourage all zoning petition and/or conditional use applicants to meet with affected recognized organizations to discuss and receive input” on their proposals and issue “a report of the discussions.” City failure to give notice specified under the code, however, did not “affect the validity of any act or decision.”

The ordinance changes were not without controversy. In a May 8, 1990 public meeting with the Salt Lake City Council, public comment was taken. Several people spoke in favor of the ordinances. According to the official meeting minutes, one participant conveyed, “as neighborhoods face encroachment by developers, the community councils could work on these issues and keep the neighborhoods strong. She said a neighborhood was stronger as a group than as individuals trying to resolve issues.” Dissenting opinions included two main themes: community councils would establish

“bureaucratic barriers” for individuals to participate, and councils did not provide equality of opportunity for participation. One gentleman speaking against the ordinance changes,

said he represented the Utah Hispanic Association and would inform them of these ordinances. He said that they had not taken a position because they were not aware of the ordinances. He said they found that traditionally in this state in the last 10 years, minorities had been left out of many things. He said they were making an effort to become a part of issues and said they were making an effort to become a part of issues and said SLACC had done a good job but many people did not belong to that group. He said there were other groups that would like favored status. (Salt Lake City, 1990)

Interviewees indicated that around 1995 or 1996, the city stopped supporting SLACC’s office needs, including staffing. They further indicated that SLACC requests were “out of control” and the sentiment among some officials serving at the time, both administrative and elected, was “if you are getting funds from us, you don’t get to come in [public meetings] and slam us.” Another person reflected, “it just became apparent that in many cases there were one or two people that would drive a whole process. It did not necessarily feel like a community response. It was just a couple of activist people. It was just getting out of hand.” According to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, several people indicated that SLACC originally offered training for community council leaders and brought city elites closer to the neighborhoods, but “SLACC had become a place for board members to gripe about city policies” (Baltezare, 1995). The *Salt Lake Tribune* further reported that some of the SLACC board members expressed frustration because the city never provided performance standards. ““SLACC had acted irresponsibly over the years, but the city set us up to fail”” (Baltezare, 1995, p. B2). One interviewee noted that city elected officials met with community council chairs in a facilitated meeting in 1995, and that about half of the community council chairs decided that they preferred meeting with

city officials directly as opposed to working through their association.

SLACC continued for “a while” even after the city eliminated its funding but not for “much longer.” SLACC continued registering with the state until 2011, but did not formally function beyond the act of filing the registration paperwork. The community councils, however, persisted absent their association, and Salt Lake City initiated a mailing program for each community council to directly use for outreach and made neighborhood matching grants available through which community councils could apply for matching funds (using labor or actual dollars for the match) to support neighborhood initiatives. One interviewee believed the shift from SLACC benefited the city by “pitting” community councils against each other on policy issues and financial acquisition.

In March of 2005, the Salt Lake City Mayor’s office published *So You’re a Community Council Chair* to congratulate new community council leaders, provide role definitions, list and describe city government processes and contact people, and offer information about other problem-solving resources. This document, written in English, describes a community council as:

- A group of dedicated people working to improve their local community, organized for a purpose, with established boundaries
- Opens up new opportunities for citizens to exercise a public role
- Useful to city government in pointing out what services and improvements are most needed
- Seeks to serve all the people in the community; is general-purpose, addressing a multitude of issues; not just single-issue oriented

- Seeks to influence what happens in the community
- Has varying degrees of influence depending on numbers involved
- May be further defined in bylaws and articles of incorporation
- Serves in an advisory capacity to the elected and appointed officials of city

Government. (p. 6)

The guide reiterates the City's view that community councils are useful advisory organizations. The guide also provides skill set development goals for community council leadership, including speaking, listening, analytical, brainstorming and ethics (p. 3).

Readers are encouraged to get better attendance at meetings and provide attendees a space to communicate, "[e]veryone is treated fairly; everyone is given the chance to be heard" (Salt Lake City, 2005, p. 24).

The Salt Lake Community Network (SLCN) incorporated as a Utah Nonprofit organization in 2009 and merged with SLACC's nonprofit State of Utah filing in 2011. Salt Lake City lists SLCN as "officially recognized" (Salt Lake City, 2015). Governance is by all community organization chairs and membership is open to any community organization or activist recognized by the network. Bylaws state the group's mission is to:

Benefit the greater community by promoting understanding, cooperation and mutual appreciation by the Community Organizations (CO) of Salt Lake through:

- Enhancing communication among CO.
- Identifying significant issues affecting multiple CO.
- Coordinating education and action on those issues.
- Providing a forum for the development of common goals, policies and procedures amongst CO.
- Providing a forum for sharing and appreciation of divergent goals, policies and procedures amongst CO.
- Providing a forum in which expertise in various councils may be pooled.

(Salt Lake Community Network, 2009, p. 1)

The bylaws further indicate that SLCN acts as a locus for access to community

organizations for government and others and supports all community organizations by making policy and action recommendations. Salt Lake City officially offers grant opportunities to SLCN that are available to any other recognized community organization but no other additional financial or staffing resources. Citizen interviewees expressed that while SLCN may be officially recognized, and may be eligible to apply for grant monies, the organization's applications have never been funded.

On Tuesday, October 1, 2013, the Salt Lake City Council passed changes to the sections of the ordinance governing neighborhood group recognition and notification provisions, and the mayor approved the official action. The changes were crafted to reportedly accomplish three objectives. 1) “[B]roaden recognition of community groups and organizations beyond neighborhood-based organizations – most commonly community councils.” 2) Expand public engagement beyond planning-related issues and 3) Eliminate “the requirement for a petitioner to obtain a signed statement from the appropriate community organization that states petitioner has met with that organization and explained the proposal before making an application.” It was further stated that some of the changes had been made to the city ordinance because some requirements from the 1990s had not been practiced. In addition, “Over the years, there have been many diverse community groups and organizations that want to be involved in city issues but haven’t been able due to the current structure” (Salt Lake City Council, 2013, p. 1).

The purpose statement of the 2013 Ordinance No. 58 reads, “It is the policy of Salt Lake City to create a framework by which the people of the city may effectively organize into community organizations representing a geographic area or field of interest, and use this as one way to participate in civic affairs and improve the livability and

character of the city and its neighborhoods. Salt Lake City values the benefits these organizations bring to the community and holds each in equal regard.” Language mentioning SLACC was eliminated and language identifying participation in terms of interactions with community councils is changed to include all community organizations. These organizations are “A voluntary group of individuals organized around a particular community interest for the purpose of collectively addressing issues and interests common to that group. A community organization is not a subsidiary of Salt Lake City government.”

Recognition requirements echo many of those delineated in 1990 including the need to be a registered nonprofit with the state of Utah, public meetings, space to provide opportunity for public input and participation of all organizational members, and policies against discrimination. New responsibilities for community organizations were added in 2013 such as defining membership, holding at least one meeting annually, developing a reporting method to the city to reflect group positions, and fostering “open and respectful communication between the community organization and representatives of city departments” on matters impacting the organization.

The 2013 changes in Salt Lake City Ordinance No. 58 additionally added responsibilities for the city beyond specific notification requirements related to city actions. Currently ordinance requires the city to educate the public on “city policy, procedures, and actions,” and annually “make a reasonable attempt” to provide a list of recognized organizations to the public, business and property owners, nonprofits, and schools in the city. City departments in particular are required to develop policies and procedures for public participation opportunities that would impact community-based

organizational membership. Interviewees indicated that community education efforts about community councils and more generally city processes have primarily been accomplished through web postings and press releases, and that city department outreach plans are in the process of completion.

Again, the ordinance changes were not without controversy. During a public hearing on July 9, 2013 to obtain input on the proposal, one member of the public expressed that the proposal “fail[ed] to recognize the historical relationship built with community councils.” Another said that time restrictions on community responses to proposed projects were onerous. One oppositional viewpoint did not want “other organizations on an equal basis with community councils. Would make it hard to stay informed if groups don’t participate and raise issues at community council meetings, other groups can raise awareness of special interests but can’t represent a broader spectrum of citizen, and it would give the views of self-selected groups the appearance of representing more of the public at large.” One person thought that expanding the groups included in the ordinance would “dilute the effectiveness of the established councils.” The Utah Non-profits association supported the proposal and indicated, “Additional voices in the democratic process create greater transparency and more functional projects as well as more satisfied community members” (Salt Lake City Council, 2013, p. 3). These changes diluted the power of the place-based community councils by adding the pathway for issue-based advocacy groups to form and be officially recognized by Salt Lake City. The full impact of this change is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Also in 2013, Salt Lake City discontinued the community council mailing program during the federal sequestration period due to the loss of the federal dollars. The

city perspective was that paper mailings were becoming antiquated. During the 2013 budget cycle, the city instituted policy that required community councils and other recognized groups to file grant applications. Grant opportunities included resource options for communications and outreach as well as neighborhood physical improvements. These grants required 51% neighborhood support and a dollar-for-dollar match between neighborhood-generated money and city financial resources. Awardee requirements include responsibility for any ongoing project maintenance costs.

The city's administration followed the ordinance passage with an update to the 2005 *So You're a Community Council Chair* guidebook in June of 2015 with the *Salt Lake City Community Organization Guide*. Much of the content remained the same, with the exception of contemporary photos and new language that reflected the addition of issue-based organizations to the place-based councils. In addition, phone numbers and the 2013 ordinance language was included. This manual, like the 2005 version, focuses on organizational chairs as opposed to full membership, and discusses leadership skills and informational resources for problem-solving and meeting running. The guide book is available online, and an interviewee indicated that the manual had been distributed at a meeting of recognized organizational chairs and the mayor.

Analysis

Throughout the history of Salt Lake City's community councils, ordinances and formal public policy documents reflect several threads of commonality: 1) the importance of the community-based organizations to increase and maintain or improve neighborhood quality of life standards, or livability; 2) the status of community council leadership and

members as volunteers; 3) articulation of community councils authority as advisory; 4) the structure organized as State of Utah nonprofit (with added federal designation if the council chose); 5) the need for councils to include opportunities for all members to voice opinions; and 6) the desire for diverse and robust participation in community engagement groups. Individual leader skill building and participation by a broad sector of the communities in which the councils are situated are additionally encouraged and community successes, particularly those associated with neighborhood improvements, are lauded by the city.

City funding availability for community councils followed a different trajectory. When community councils began their formal relationship with the city, the councils received funding for staff and mailings through their collective nonprofit association, SLACC. This was eliminated in the mid-1990s due to governmental perceptions of SLACC not being representative of the community at large, inhibiting full public participation, and not expressing appreciation, i.e., in the vernacular by biting the hand of the city that funded them. Some community members felt the defunding was merely a city “power grab.” As with the resource bare community councils of New York, Salt Lake City’s had lost a reputation for legitimacy (Rabrenovic, 2010). The SLACC resource pamphlet indicates goals of increased citizen participation and skill building, but there are no indications of success measures. The current association, Salt Lake Community Network, does not receive funding from the city except through grant opportunities available to all community groups. It is troubling to think that a Salt Lake City community group would be “punished” for their opinions, as Harwood found within Los Angeles (2007). This reaction leaves me to question whether civic engagement

within Salt Lake City is only deemed appropriate until the public becomes too empowered.

It is unclear the connection between individual community member empowerment and the defunding of the association. Associations empower their organizational membership, and then ideally the individuals composing the organizations are empowered through collective action and shared resource opportunities. Association independence does create pressure on the city, and decreases the likelihood that such organizations would act merely to “rubber stamp” municipal action. Finally, associations facilitate member groups working together and protect against intergroup fighting and competition for limited resources—both of which distract from action impacting government policy and budgetary action.

Grant programs allow flexibility for groups to determine their own needs, but they also require considerable expertise in making application, project management, and accountability reporting. Community council members are volunteers and their skill sets are varied. Skill building exists in online documents, and interviewees reported some brief educational sessions during quarterly meetings with the Mayor, but the efficacy of those briefings remains suspect in the minds of community members who attended as well as city staff. Neighborhoods that do not attract members with acumen for the grant process or fundraising in general are at a disadvantage. Grant support may disempower certain neighborhoods and further exacerbate disparities that already exist; inconsistencies in power and effectiveness of individual community councils within the system create discord and hierarchies among the community councils that may not facilitate empowerment of those groups operating within a system or of the individuals

who participate within them (Collins, 2009).

Chapter Summary

Document review demonstrates a long history of a community council system in Salt Lake City, at least since the beginning of the 1970s. Throughout the 40 plus years, Salt Lake City has indicated in ordinance, information pamphlets, and guidebooks the formal intentionality of valuing community organizations as loci for citizen participation and tools for quality-of-life improvement in city neighborhoods. Municipal practices, however, offer a mixed narrative of the relationship between the city and the neighborhood organizations and raise questions regarding the City's actual commitment to community civic engagement institutions. These contradictions were illuminated in 2013 when issue-based councils were added to city ordinance as additional recognized groups and when funding to the community councils was eliminated.

The 2013 group additions and resource cuts throughout the lifespan of community councils came as a result of government officials wanting to formally acknowledge and support neighborhood participation in policy making, but informally not wanting too much of a certain kind of engagement. The "right kind" of participation at least generally supported elected official decision-making and did not primarily involve neighborhood "activists." Government actors viewed community councils as theoretically romantic and as robust symbols of democracy; in practice, the messy and unpleasant realities of people developing public policy and service delivery priorities and critiquing governmental action or inaction inspired formal institutional adjustments that tended to check

grassroots power and opportunity, for the organizations and, residually, for the individuals operating within them.

Table 2 Salt Lake Community Council History Document Review

Date	Name	Description
circa 1979–1985	<i>Salt Lake Association of Community Councils (SLACC) Citizen Participation Organization</i> pamphlet	The document is not dated, but contains a letter from Mayor Ted Wilson on official city letterhead. The City of Salt Lake does not have any additional information. Interviewees narrowed the possible publication date range from 1979 to 1985. The pamphlet provides community council history, boundaries, and leadership
May 8, 1990	Salt Lake City Council Motion Form, File #: 090-20	Public comment and consideration adopting an ordinance amending Title 2 of the <i>Salt Lake City Code</i> by adding a new Chapter 2.60.010, and related sections dealing with recognition of neighborhood based organizations.
July 26, 1990	Salt Lake City Ordinance Number 63 of 1990. (Chapter 2.60)	This ordinance recognizes SLACC and neighborhood organizations. It was a new addition to <i>Salt Lake City Code</i> and passed in conjunction with Ordinance Number 64 of 1990.
July 26, 1990	Salt Lake City Ordinance Number 64 of 1990. (Chapter 2.62)	This ordinance provides guidance on city notification of certain actions to recognized or registered organizations. This was a new addition to <i>Salt Lake City Code</i> and passed in conjunction with Ordinance Number 63 of 1990.
March 2005	<i>So You're a Community Council Chair</i> (4 th Edition).	A guide developed by the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs for community council chairs. Subject areas including leadership, city government organization, resources, and meeting management. No additional editions were located.
August, 5, 1995	<i>Salt Lake Tribune</i> article: Community-council group in Salt Lake may be history.	Newspaper article covering the elimination of funding for the Salt Lake Association of Community Councils.
November 14, 2012	Salt Lake City Planning Commission Staff Report, Petition #TMTL2012-00013	Salt Lake City Community and Economic Development staff composed this information for the Planning Commission in relation to the proposed changes to Chapter 2.60 Recognized Community Associations.

Table 2 (Continued)

Date	Name	Description
September 27, 2013	Salt Lake City Council Office Recognized Community Organizations Motion Sheet and Staff Report	The Motion Sheet and Staff Report were written by City Council staff and contain issue briefs and suggested motions pertaining to Salt Lake City's recognized community organizations.
October 18, 2013	Salt Lake City Ordinance Number 58 or 2013 (2.60, 2.62)	This ordinance amended and deleted particular sections of the existing code concerning the recognition of community based organizations.
June 30, 2015	<i>Salt Lake City Mayor's Office Community Organization Guide</i>	According to the Salt Lake City Mayor's Office, this document was originally authored in 2009. Much of the material resembles that which is contained in the 2005 <i>So You're a Community Council Chair</i> . This is a living document in that changes are made directly on the web as needed. There is no record of which changes were made when.
September 23, 2015	<i>Salt Lake City Registered Community Organizations 2015. Office of the Mayor and City Recorder's Office</i>	This spreadsheet is also posted on the Salt Lake City website http://www.slcdocs.com/comcoun/pdfs/Community_Orgs_List.pdf . The document contains community organization names, boundaries, chairs, meeting information, and the City Council districts overlapping each community organization area.

CHAPTER 5

COMMUNITY COUNCIL ROLE, SETTING, AND PARTICIPATION

The intention of my research is to learn whether participation in Salt Lake City's community councils politically empowers women and motivates them to run for political office. As discussed in Chapter 4, my research was conducted in Salt Lake City and centered on three community councils located in different geographic and socio-economic areas. Data were collected from document review, interviews, and meeting observation. I attended at least three meetings from each community council and interviewed a total of 25 government elites and 26 current or former community council participants. Chapter 5 weaves together expectations from the literature, evidence from document review, interviews, and meeting observations with analysis in order to convey the overall environment in which engagement occurs within Salt Lake City's community council system: understandings of the community council role, physical meeting location, and the people who attend are all integral elements of this setting.

Community Council Role

Existing literature identifies five distinctive roles for neighborhood governance organizations. First, they stimulate engagement by creating more relaxed opportunities

for people to learn about government and policy and to state their service preferences than more formal meetings or the isolated actions of voting (Macedo et al., 2005; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). Second, they transform self-interest into cooperation through face-to-face interaction and discussion (Berry et al., 1993). Third, because community councils are place-based, they also serve to foster social togetherness and community identity building—despite differences such as race or ethnicity—because all residents share the experience of a common geography (Rabrenovic, 2010; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). Fourth, community councils act as advocacy units to defend and promote neighborhood interests (Berry et al., 1993; Sharp, 2012; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001) and, fifth, they can serve as a locus for partnerships between government and community that coproduce services such as a river clean up or community policing (Macedo et al., 2005; Sharp, 2012).

Salt Lake City and community council formal documents convey a vague definition of the community council role. Salt Lake City Municipal Code (2013) organizes community council purpose under the rubric of “community organizations,” which include issue-based collectives, as well as place-based community councils. Community organizations are “a voluntary group of individuals organized around a particular community interest for the purpose of collectively addressing issues and interests common to that group. A community organization is not a subsidiary of Salt Lake City government” (Salt Lake City Municipal Code, 2013). The 2013 Code further articulates that community organizations are “one way to participate in civic affairs and improve the livability and character of the city and its neighborhoods.” *The Salt Lake City Mayor’s Office Community Organization Guide* (2015) indicates that community

organizations exist to “encourage participation,” to “provide a forum for public input,” and to “address specific issues and needs in the community” (p. 8). Community council bylaws offer a wide range of assistance to understanding community council purpose; some are highly detailed and articulate the community council as a place for deliberation of neighborhood issues, a place for building community ties, and to plan community activities. Other bylaws provide only skeletal language such as requirements of membership and delineation of officers, but no purpose or mission statements. Meeting agendas offer clues to the way community councils conceive of themselves by revealing discussion topics. Agendas primarily contain time slots for government reports to the community. Less frequently, reports from nonprofits or businesses are included. Many agendas contained committee reports of special projects on which the community was working on their own, such as neighborhood breakfasts, or coproduction with outside groups to address such issues as traffic signal installation. Many agendas contain open time for issues not on the agenda to be raised.

Salt Lake City’s formal documents offer limited guidance in defining the purpose of community councils due to some problems of accessibility as well as vagueness in the policy language. On the one hand, *Salt Lake City Code* is easily retrievable off of the municipal website and individual council bylaws are additionally located on the city’s web page. Bylaws, however, are only required to be filed once per year, and any changes in the interim would not necessarily be reported to the Salt Lake City Recorder’s Office to keep on file for reference. On the other hand, *The Salt Lake City Mayor’s Office Community Organization Guide* (2015) is difficult to find on the city’s web page and several community council leaders did not know the document even existed. The formal

language within *Salt Lake City Code* creates space for a multitude of defined purposes, allowing for flexibility as well as creativity to meet the needs of individual neighborhood pockets. This flexibility is evident in the council bylaws where the language of purpose community councils is tailored to each council. The pliability of the formal definition, however, also generates room for misunderstanding about community council purpose. The lack of formal guidance about possible community council activities means policy makers, administrators, or community members may not be sure about what they are supposed to do.

Interviews and observations uncovered some of the possible understandings of community council roles not specified in the formal document definitions. Indeed, community members revealed diverse understandings about community council roles. Moreover, many times across my interviews, a single interviewee identified several overlapping duties of a community council. Community members raised the following understandings of community council roles during interviews: 1) A place where information about government action and experience could be shared and compared with neighbors' experiences and observations. "You help each other see each other's view." 2) A place where government, neighbors, and local businesses or nonprofits could partner on projects such as festivals, land use planning, and emergency response efforts. "We got a lot of people involved in the community. I have my bag and 72 hour kits for all of my employees. I've got things ready for people to go straight away. That's because of the community council. You have food and water and [know] where you are going to be." 3) An organization that protected the neighborhood from what was viewed as development encroachment. "We try to get way ahead of a [land use] project. By the time people are

filing permits, to change anything it is too costly for the building people." 4) A space to meet neighbors and create social and assistance networks. "I had moved in with my mom, and she was starting to fall in the night. I couldn't get her up myself....I thought it would be great if I could get acquainted with neighbors. If I could develop friendships all the better." 5) An organization that builds community pride and identity. "[W]e like to point out cute things in the neighborhood, show backyards for sustainable living, bee keeping, gardens, just building community."

Taken altogether, community interviewees' conceptions of community council roles did not differ from empirical evidence or theory presented in the neighborhood governance literature. No one individual community council interviewee, however, holistically referenced all of these roles. Without any clear over-arching, shared understanding or specific guidance from *Salt Lake City Code*, bylaws, or other formal documents, the groundwork for potential confusion, misunderstanding, and tension among community council members, between community councils, and between community councils and elites was laid.

Elites' perspectives on the roles and responsibilities of the ideal community council also differed, sometimes manifesting in my interviews in contradictory ways. According to one government official, "the role is a difference of opinion. They're either independent freestanding organizations that deal with any type of community issue, or they are creatures of the city that exist to review issues related to the city. The tension has always been there." One elite mentioned that community councils were "just another interest group."—a role identified in literature as neighborhood-based lobbying (Sharp, 2012). Lobbying connotes narrowed advocacy for issues without regarding for their

impact on the wider context. In this situation, neighborhood advocacy for the restoration of a community golf course may not take into consideration the impacts of the golf course on the overall water supply of the city. Several elites echoed claims of Berry et al. (1993), Sharp (2012), and Sirianni and Friedland (2001) that community councils serve as institutional linkages between government and the neighborhoods. Many elite interviewees appreciated that the councils provided opportunities for learning about community concerns and for communicating details about programs, legislation, or other government business to neighborhoods. Another stated that community councils give people an “opportunity to gripe, but it’s good to have a forum to gripe. Good for people to know they have a place to do it.” One elected elite proclaimed, they are “Norman Rockwell in action!”

Unlike the community council interviewees, elite interviewees did not, without prompt, stress the importance of the coproduction of services or projects in which government and community partners contribute to achieve service delivery for the public at large. Some elite interviewees did mention projects or festivals community councils planned, and the work was highly praised by elite interviewees. Ostensibly, there would be some level of government involvement on some level in those activities because permits would need to be issued, garbage cans delivered, or parks reserved, but the actual act of partnering with government was not associated with community endeavors by these elites. Partnerships create opportunities when limited resources strain service delivery and produce tangible outcomes as well as symbolic recognition of citizen preferences (Sharpe, 2012). Shared work also bridges divides among individual citizens (Boyte, 2011) and creates favorable conditions and collaborations through which trust

may be built between government and citizens (King & Stivers, 1998). Without prompting, two elites lamented this underutilization of community council ability to coproduce and partner. “We have a lot of opportunity in our neighborhoods that go untapped. A lot of good people.” Another said, “they have way more potential” and government needs to better consider “the mining” of the talent and knowledge within the councils.

Community and elite interviewees identified community council role confusion as the cause for missed opportunities in both government and in the neighborhoods. One community council board member was particularly exasperated stating that "having a clear vision from the Council and Mayor's office would be nice too, or if we are on our own or what." Another community council interviewee stated “it would be nicer if there were guidelines to make it easier to be a positive force. You don’t want to be tilting against windmills all of the time.” And finally, a community council member stated, “I just think that there needs to be better understanding on what it is we do or what we are.” Government elites were additionally frustrated about role confusion, “that’s the problem, instead of being arms of the city, they don’t know what they [community councils] are supposed to do.” Another government elite stated, “more understanding of the role of the community council and the weight they have in the decision-making process [is needed]. This should be explained to the people. Some people get really disappointed because they express their voice, and then they don’t get what they want. More transparency will help.”

Confusion not only led to missed opportunity, but also to acerbic tensions between community council members and elites – particularly elites in city government.

“The city doesn’t hear,” “the city isn’t supportive,” and “I don’t know that the city cares that we are here,” were sentiments frequently expressed by community council interviewees. “Sometimes the city just wears you out. You have a project, and you keep asking and requesting and keep it going, and roadblocks are put up for you, and then you just finally say it may not be in their purview of what they should be doing, not in line with what they want to be doing right now. I just have seen that.” Some elite interviewees also expressed frustration with attempts to engage the public vis-à-vis community councils. As one elite noted, communities “can be a blessing and a curse.” Others loudly exclaimed, “they’re activists;” “they’re myopic.” One elite interviewee did say that, ultimately, the “city thinks the [community council] is a pain-in-the-ass because it is an organizing tool that neighbors can do to bring people together on one issue and in a way that the city doesn’t really want to deal with.” This may be an inevitable tension between notions of public administration as professionalized scientific management and a lay public who wants to actively engage in governmental decision-making.

In addition to community residents and property owners, elected and public administrative government officials attended community council meetings. Police and fire employees were most visible, largely because of uniforms, and specific officials that were listed on agendas were recognizable to me. Others may have been in attendance who were not introduced, and that I did not recognize. One key thing I observed was that participation by government official was expected. At one meeting after an elected official’s report, a woman yelled across the room, “when do we get to see you again?” I was told after the meeting that people did not feel like this elected official attended as often as was desired by the community. Government elite attendance allows direct access

for the neighbors, and creates opportunity for trust building between government elites and the community (King & Stivers, 1998). Regular attendance by government elites also, however, symbolizes a relationship between the community councils and government elites that may be misconstrued as formal. Community councils are legally separate entities from the City of Salt Lake, and the visual incongruence could potentially exacerbate the already confused notions of community council purpose and responsibility.

Role confusion is a root cause of discord among community council members, community councils, and community councils and government. This discord matters because it can lead to deficiencies in personal and institutional efficacy. For example, when the community group and the government do not understand each other's responsibility, they limit themselves in partnership opportunities with, for example, a public park whose infrastructure could be paid for by the city, but the community council could provide volunteer activity programming and clean up. When individuals within the governmental entity do not understand the roles of each, much energy and angst is expended, for example, on conflict regarding procedures instead of on public policy. Neighborhood governance literature is largely silent on this issue. Ancillary literature regarding citizen participation in town land use processes hints at the discord public participation can cause, particularly when participants in a process are not organized into a system of engagement, but rather stand alone as a cacophony of groups whose responsibilities appear to overlap and sometimes contradict (Fiorina, 1999). The lack of a clear road map for who does what and when can leave citizens, businesses, and governmental actors perplexed and angry.

In addition to a lack of shared understanding about community council role, during the 1990s, Salt Lake City cut funding to the association of community councils, SLACC, in part to a perception that they never accomplished anything (see Chapter 2). Interviewees indicated that the Salt Lake City Mayor's staff dedicated to helping community councils were cut nearly in half over the previous decade. Financial resources used to operate the community councils and human resources serving as their ombudspersons to Salt Lake City were severely impacted. This greatly disadvantaged the community organizations and limited the amount of activity in which they could engage without developing independent funding sources.

Place and Space: The Settings for Council Meetings

The settings in which community councils are situated should help accomplish the objectives of the community council role. Neighborhood governance by definition occurs in the neighborhood and geographic location provides low barrier opportunity participation because of its close proximity and familiarity with area residents (Harwood 2007; Macedo et al., 2005).

Additionally, the organization of space within the buildings used for meetings influences their accessibility to potential participants as well as whether or not their tone is welcoming. In his deliberative democracy research, Fung (2006) notes that room arrangements help mitigate power differentials between law enforcement and the community. While Fung's study relates to community oriented policing discussions, as opposed to community council meetings, his research points to the importance of the organization of space to democratic deliberation.

All the meetings attended for this research were located in the community council boundaries and were reasonably close to public transportation, walking, bicycles, or vehicular travel. This variety of available transportation modes creates greater accessibility for those who travel not only by car. Meetings took place in a public library, a school, a senior center, and in a government building. *Salt Lake City Code* (2013) indicates that meetings must be open to the general public, but no other formal Salt Lake City document provided any more specific guidance as to location or the organization of the space.

Vonnegut community council held meetings in a public library, a well-known space heavily utilized by a variety of groups with varying ages, races, and ethnicities from across the entire neighborhood. The building is ADA, American's with Disabilities Act, accessible. The meeting room was directly off of the main entrance, so people could easily find it; however, there was no signage outside of the building or outside of the meeting room door. The surroundings were relatively informal; industrial short light grey carpeting covered the floor, and metal and plastic portable chairs were provided as seating. The most formal aspect of the setting was the room arrangement. Chairs were arranged classroom style facing a podium and long rectangular tables where board members sat. The Vonnegut community council was located in a well-known and friendly space that welcomed regular attendees as well as those who were there for the first time.

Hazelwood community council was held in a building within a larger government complex. No signage was placed outside of the meeting room or on the grounds of the complex, and the location was not easy to find. The room itself was accented with dark

wood, a thick patterned carpet covered the wood floors, and a large dark oval table engulfed the center space of the room. The table was surrounded by 20 tall black leather chairs. Additional leather and wood chairs lined the room's perimeter. The tone set by the meeting space was very formal. ADA access appeared to be legally sufficient, but travel from parking to the actual room was across a lengthy campus. This did not make access particularly easy. In contrast to Vonnegut, Hazelwood's location was not warm and welcoming. The overall tone was formal, elitist, and unforgiving of those who may not know how one is supposed to participate in such meetings.

Orchard community council and its subgroup neighbor meeting met at multiple locations. Two of the meetings I attended were held at a private elementary school, and one was held at a senior center. At the elementary school after hours, there was no clear unlocked ADA entrance. At the time, I had a broken ankle and was using a scooter mobility device. I would not have been able to get in the building through any other mechanism, except for crawling down stairs. A woman who had attended the meeting before and was familiar with the surroundings noticed my floundering; she entered from a different set of doors, and walked through the building to let me in. There was no directional signage outside of the school or within the building. The meeting was held in the dining hall of the school. There was a podium with a microphone in the front of the room. The subgroup meeting was also held in the school, but in the library. There were notices posted on the outside of the school, but no internal signage. My ankle was healed at this time, so fortunately, I did not have to yell for help or crawl down a flight of stairs to enter. I did have to wander around the building to find the location. The meeting space was located in between book stacks and there were about three round tables and four

rectangular tables loosely organized in a circle. There was no podium, and the floor was carpeted. As my experience suggests, the room itself was very conducive to friendly conversation and welcoming to those who came for the first time. The most difficulty occurred, as with Hazelwood, in traveling from the parking lot to the meeting space.

Orchard's senior center location, in contrast, was ADA accessible, and the meeting area was located in a cafeteria with portable round tables and metal chairs. Unfortunately, the doors to the center were locked, and a staff member arrived 10 minutes after the scheduled meeting time to open them. Meeting information was posted on the doors, but I do not know if anyone arrived and then left when they could not get in the building. In spite of the accessibility problems, all three of Orchard's meeting settings were informal and projected a relaxed environment that welcomed participants.

During the community council meetings, participants would travel in and out of the spaces in unique ways. Observations supported notions of differing cultures within each community council. Movement of attendees within the meeting spaces was semiformal. Attendees would sometimes come in later than the beginning meeting time or leave before it ended, but this behavior was not the norm. The most free-flowing attendance behavior occurred at the library; people would generally sit through the entire meeting, but some entered late, others would leave early, and many people would leave for a bit and then return. Attendees in all meetings wore a variety of clothing ranging from sweat suits to business suits. Councils situated in spaces with groupings of tables, such as Orchard's, appeared to encourage more side conversation with people during the meeting. I overheard talk that was sometimes personal and other times related to the agenda. Many attendees in meetings multitasked and were observed checking phones or

looking through papers.

The relevant literature praises opportunities for meeting at a neighborhood level and how this location can lead to fewer barriers to participation (Harwood, 2007). Location influences who attends, as borne out in my interviews. One interviewee recalled, “seniors were well represented at [a community council meeting] because the meetings were held at the local senior center.” Another interviewee discovered the community council existed by wandering into it. “[I] went to the library one night and thought ‘what are all these people doing up here’, I asked. I wanted to know what was going on. Of course I was nosy.” On the one hand, a community meeting space contained within a government sphere may connote neighborhood access and influence. On the other hand, it may imply governmental watching or control and so could be intimidating to those who are fearful of government.

As Fung (2006) has argued, table and chair arrangements in a meeting space establish power relationships and expectations concerning formality (Fung, 2006). This point was understood by my interviewees. As one elite noted, “physical space is really, really important. I actually think that [this community council] struggles with that.” This interviewee further explained, “I actually think that meeting around a table like that is less good [than other spaces] because sometimes people don't have a place at the table, and I think that's a significant metaphor you know when it fills up, it fills up, and you're not really sitting at the table.” My observations at meetings also show how room layouts can hamper or hinder individual movement throughout the meeting time and space. Unyielding arrangements may not be inviting to those who need arrival and departure flexibility due to other obligations.

More attention should be placed on the structural space where meetings take place. Locked doors and missing ADA entrances exclude participation. Locations situated on government campuses may not convey community council autonomy from elected officials or public administrators. Welcoming spaces readily invite first time attendees and create an environment to which people want to return. Minor adjustments regarding space may positively create opportunities for those who had not previously attended.

**Who Participates: Perceptions of Representativeness
and Council Legitimacy**

In American politics literature, there are robust patterns of participation by race and socioeconomic (SES) status. “There are racial disparities across every form of political activity in both the electoral and governmental [participation] arenas...In addition, wealthy Americans are more likely than poor Americans to take part in political activities” (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993, as cited in Sharp, 2012, p. 102). Socioeconomic status continues to be an important factor in individual participation (Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1995).

The findings of these studies are generally consistent within participation in the context of neighborhood governance (Macedo et al., 2005; Musso et al., 2007). Yet there are a few studies that demonstrate the contrary. For example, Berry et al. (1993) show that typical reduced civic participation rates in neighborhoods with lower socio-economic status (SES) may be positively impacted when community councils exist within a context of a strong citywide neighborhood council system. Furthermore, Sharpe (2012) argues/

people of color may participate *more* when engagement occurs through neighborhood association involvement—even if other empirical evidence suggests that cities with structured neighborhood governance do no better job of representing people of color than cities that do not have such structures (Berry et al., 1993). Additionally, home ownership serves as an important factor in predicting levels of civic engagement; homeowners typically are more invested in the neighborhoods in which they live (Macedo et al., 2005; Musso et al., 2007).

Which actors participated within the neighborhood governance settings I studied? The current research was conducted in three community councils, which were located in three distinct SES communities. Evidence from the interviews and observations indicated that participation in Salt Lake City’s community councils is somewhat consistent with the literature.

Although the *Salt Lake City Code* (2013) utilizes the term “representative” to describe desired public input, it does not define this term and provides little guidance to create any measurable standard for assessing the extent to which public input at community councils qualifies as representative. “Representative input” might refer to the majority views expressed at a community council meeting; it might refer to whether the majority views expressed at the meeting are representative of the views of neighborhood members as a whole; or it might refer to the sorts of demographic indicators assessed in the research literature, i.e., race, SES, or home ownership.

Salt Lake City Code further requires that community organization meetings be open to the public, that there are opportunities for public input, and that their bylaws contain a policy against discrimination must provide a schedule for the election of

officers and must:

B. Establish orderly and democratic means for forming representative public input through civil and respectful dialogue.

C. Establish and follow a clear method for reporting to the city actions which accurately reflect their position. Include the means by which a recommendation or decision was reached, how many members were involved and what the outcome was. (2013)

City requirements allow for the expression of minority opinions, and therefore a more nuanced expression of the diversity of community voices, but this reporting of minority views is not required. The *Salt Lake City Community Organization Guide* (2015) expresses that meeting leaders should “[c]reate an environment of welcome and inclusion” and that when attendees disagree with the majority, they can still submit their opinions to council leaders (pp. 9, 17). Communities are composed of many voices. If neighborhood governance institutions do not allow for, or even facilitate a wide breadth of participation, their legitimacy as representing community opinion is tenuous.

Guo and Musso (2007) provide a conceptual framework for better understanding different types of representation in voluntary and nonprofit organizations to determine the extent to which the organizations are acting on behalf of the public or if they are merely amplifying the perspectives of a few within the community. Musso et al. (2007) utilize this framework in their evaluation of Los Angeles neighborhood council reform. The framework identifies four concepts of representation that may be used to better understand more precisely how community members are using their neighborhood councils as vehicles for public engagement with government: substantive, formal, descriptive, and participatory. Substantive refers to the alignment of the public’s interests with that of the representative. Does the community council echo public interests? Formal representation ensures that there is accountability and legitimacy of

representatives through processes such as elections and open meetings. Descriptive representation means that the representatives look like or mirror the population served. Finally, participatory representation means that members of the neighborhood have access to take part in neighborhood council activities.

All but three of the community council participants interviewed emphatically stated that their community council did not mirror the demographic characteristics of the communities in which they functioned and that this scarcity of descriptive representation was a problem that needed solving. They did not know how to do this or thought they needed more resources to be effective at actually making change. One community leader indicated that “a large amount of residents have no clue that a community council even exists.” Some characterized attendees as primarily elderly and White and all but one of the community interviewees revealed that they were property owners. The one participant who was a renter had lived in the neighborhood for over 20 years. According to the government officials interviewed, it is mainly mid-to older age White property owners who “are engaged, and have the time and interest.” Out of this group of council attendees, the government officials further classified them into those who are the “regulars” and attend nearly all of the meetings and those who come for specific issues.

Government elites robustly and independently concentrated their comments on their perceived lack of “representativeness” of the community councils. Attendees do not mirror the racial demographics of the community council boundaries and this perceived deficit often translates into a lack of legitimacy. Some government elites did, however, believe that community council voice was still important despite the lack of racial diversity of the attendees because of the networks the attendees represented and because

of the dedication of those that did participate. Respondents' thoughts fell into three categories in assessing this notion:

1. Giving authority to one group of attendees over nonattendees is arbitrary and unfair; "How can you give power to a group that doesn't represent [look like] the whole community?"

2. Disparate levels of participation occur in all forms of civic engagement; "No, they're not a reflection of the community, but neither are voters."

3. Community council attendees are community leaders, and they function like "an iceberg," small in the space, but vast through their connections; "Each person represents a huge network of people."

A few community and government elite interviewees also discussed representation in terms of how the community council attendee viewpoints aligned with the opinions of the whole population within the community council districts, i.e., what Guo and Musso (2007) termed substantive representation. Only one interviewee, a community council member, indicated without prompting that this person's community council was representative substantively, or representative of diverse interests in a community. One government elite emphatically concluded: "they don't represent the values of the community as a whole." Another government elite recounted a controversial policy issue process in which the community council position for the area was reportedly different from what was reflected in a community-wide survey. To this government elite, this story was part of the narrative of why the community councils were merely an interest group and lacked legitimacy. The community council position may have been formulated after deliberation between neighbors, which could very well result in a

different position than the tallying of individual survey responses. Conversely, the council position may have been derived from a closed group of self-interested stakeholders. Details of the survey and of the community process are not known so which of these explanations is most plausible cannot be determined.

My observations were generally consistent with those I interviewed. In Vonnegut, attendance ranged between 28 and 70 people, 5%–18% of the people were of color, and ages represented were from 30s to 70s, though most people appeared to be between 30 and mid-50s. At three-quarters of the meetings I attended, there were scout troops (as identified by uniforms) or high school age appearing young people in the group. Attendance by women ranged between 30% and 54%. At Hazelwood community council meetings, between 12 and 30 people attended each time, 3%–8% were of color, and 25%–35% were women. Ages appeared to range from the 30s to the 70s with over half being well over 50 years of age. Finally, in Orchard, 22–23 people attended each of the two full community council meetings and 12 people were in attendance at the neighborhood subgroup meeting. At the council and subgroup meetings combined, 8%–17% of attendees were people of color, 41%–60% were women, and ages appeared to about 50% 30s and 40s and 50% of people over the age of 50. At nearly every council meeting a few children (infant through middle school aged in appearance), generally no more than three, were present. Most of the older children, aside from those wearing scout uniforms, appeared to not be participating and typically sat in a corner engaged in computer games or other activities.

Observations demonstrated that the community council situated in the area with the lowest SES had the most populated meetings and the most racially and generationally

diverse participation. In interviews, some members of this community council attributed the diversity in age to civic participation requirements of local scout troops as well as a high school class attended by young people from the area. Racial diversity, however, did not fully reflect neighborhood demographics, and attendance at these council meetings did not reflect a reversal of racial bias in civic participation as some literature has shown (Sharp, 2012). The community council system I studied is a space primarily utilized by White property owners, or at least Whites who have long-term personal investment in the area in which they live.

Most notable was the high participation levels at the community council meetings in the lowest SES area. This evidence is consistent with the Berry et al. (1993) findings; neighborhoods with lower socio-economic status (SES) do not necessarily participate less when participation is through community governance, particularly when this governance takes place in the context of a strong citywide neighborhood council system.

A lack of diversity and a lack of substantive representativeness is a problem for two reasons. First, it indicates missed opportunities for community vibrancy and resilience as well as missed opportunities for supportive resources from government. When only a narrow segment of a community engages within the community governance framework, the insights and skill sets of the remainder of the population is left out of problem-solving and the creation of a vision to guide the community's future. Second, it also means missed opportunities for supportive resources from government if the lack of representativeness undermines the legitimacy of community council communications to city government. Government elites find it difficult to allocate scarce resources to organizations not viewed as substantively or descriptively representative of the wider

public. Community council preferences are also suspect; why should they be valued if they are not reflective of the greater whole?

Participation primarily by one group can also exacerbate tensions between different populations within the same neighborhood. One community interviewee who was not distressed by the dearth of diversity, not only due to race and ethnicity but also of age, agreed that attendance at the community council meetings was not representative, but it was due to personal priorities. She believed that the institution was equally open to all. “I have to say, I like the fighters. I like the people who will go and show up.” She further articulated that people were in general too self-centered to participate; “We’ve created a generation of the ‘me program.’” For this interviewee, the people who do not show up are viewed as “other”—as not caring, and seemingly not part of the legitimate public (Mathews, 1994). For this community member, the lack of diversity within the community council meetings resulted in a *further* division between different groups coexisting within the neighborhood.

Despite the frustration over a lack of diverse attendees, community council and government elite interviewees both enthusiastically recognized, without prompt, the shared emotional connection community council attendees have with their neighborhoods. This attribute of passion for community mitigated some of the government elite concerns about legitimacy. For example, one government elite—after expressing grave concern about the lack of people of color participating in community councils—did state without prompt that community council participants are dedicated; “[They] are group that cares, and they are active. They could be doing something else. I still think that it is legitimate.”

Empirical evidence exists in the literature that strongly connects civic engagement and neighborhood identity (Berry et al., 1993). Rabrenovic (2010) finds strong evidence for the emotional connections people have with their neighborhoods. In my reach, community council individual and family identities and histories wove back and forth into a very well-defined sense of place. For participants, the community and the neighborhood are *them* in a very emotional, tactile, and intellectual sense. Some were part of generations of family who had lived in the same community, while others had moved in less than 5 years ago. “I love it. I’ve never been anywhere with such a community feel. I love my neighbors. I can’t imagine going anywhere [else] honestly.” Another respondent stated, “I’ve personally been [here now] for 9 years but grew up in that neighborhood. I live in the house my grandparents were in. My dad grew up there. I bought it from him and my uncle. I recall listening to the neighbors that knew my family...riding my bike around.” One responded said, “I live in one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city. It’s quirky, and funky, and eclectic. I’ve been here for 22 years.”

Chapter Summary

The roles Salt Lake City’s community councils serve are as complex as the settings in which they operate and the actors who participate within their system. Overall, the perceived roles of Salt Lake City Community Councils are consistent with empirical and theoretical tenets in the literature. However, individual community and government elite notions of this role are multifaceted and sometimes differ. This incongruence of understandings results in frustration between groups, a lack of agreement of what each is

supposed to do in relationship to each other, and an absence of understandings about what it means to be successful. These differences threaten resource allocation by city government to the community council system. Existing literature does not clearly address the impacts of neighborhood governance role confusion; more attention from scholars would improve understanding of these councils and could assist in development of best practices in public management.

Community council role confusion additionally influences the capacity of community councils to balance the power structure of city government (Collins, 2009). If understood as independent advocacy organizations, they ideally provide a counterview and check to government policy and action (Sharp, 2012). When viewed as “dependent” volunteer organizations, they may provide training grounds for individual skill set building and more formally efficacious engagement with the city (Sirianni & Friedland, 2001), but for some elites, this means they should “play nice” and not be too empowered if they want to receive government resources and attention (Harwood, 2007; Rabrenovic, 2010). Despite the confusion, nearly all current and former elected officials interviewed visited community councils during their election efforts. This indicates that at least on one level, the councils hold a type of power that is needed, in combination with other efforts, to win elections.

The literature recognizes the benefits of the physical proximity of the meetings to the neighborhoods in order to facilitate easier entry into participation (Ackelsberg, 2013). Building design and material access points, however, create barriers as well as opportunities to engagement. Meeting space arrangement additionally influences meeting tone and perceived role of the community councils. More attention to the way in which

geographic location, building design operations, as well as room arrangement come together as a whole could enhance understanding of welcoming and unwelcoming meeting factors.

Other factors also contribute to the overall functioning of neighborhood governance. Primarily White property owners were attendees, but the areas with the lowest SES demonstrated the highest levels of participation, supporting claims by Berry et al. (1993) that community councils can improve access for low SES communities. The lack of ethnic diversity within the meetings led to perceptions of representative illegitimacy by government elites, frustrations by community participants, and assumptions of more pronounced differences between those who care and do not care about their neighborhoods. One viewpoint shared by all government elite and community council interviewees was that community council participants love their neighborhoods and are passionate about them. More attention by scholars as to how such emotional commitment occurs could provide clues about how to attract a wider breadth of participants.

CHAPTER 6

LIVED COMMUNITY COUNCIL EXPERIENCES

Chapter 5 conveyed the overall environment in which community councils are situated and the space they offer to attendees. Human life does not take place in separate isolated moments; places, histories, and interactions weave together to create overall lived experiences (Brodkin, forthcoming; Collins, 2009). Chapter 6 analyses data from document review, interviews, and meeting observations to learn about the encounters community council attendees and government elites have while participating, or attempting to participate, within Salt Lake City's neighborhood governance setting and the way in which these experiences are interpreted. Special attention is paid to whether or not attendees felt participation empowered them politically as individuals and as part of a group, whether participation led or could potentially lead them to run for political office, and how men and women similarly or differently encountered these environments. During interviews, I introduced broad topic areas of personal and family political backgrounds, aspirations of running for elected office, and knowledge of and experiences with community councils. With the exception of three interviewees, one government elite and two community members, the topic of gender did not arise spontaneously, i.e., without a specific prompt. The absence of gender consciousness is discussed more fully below.

Gender—Since Almost no one Brought it up

Spontaneously, Is it an Issue?

It was not unexpected that most interviewees did not automatically raise issues of gender inequity. Often, people can see inequities in a system only if they are not part of the power structure (Kteily, Sheehy-Skeffington, & Ho, 2016). Institutions are organized and managed in ways that replicate power relations. These operations are subtle, seducing, and propagate “knowings” that are contrary to one’s own truth (Collins, 2009). In addition, people may fear discussing controversial issues (Eliasoph, 1998) and could avoid topics that might cause tension, such as inequity and gender bias.

Only two community members raised the theme of gender without prompting; one person was a woman and the other, an openly gay man. For others, gender inequities were naturalized, i.e., accepted as “ordinary.” When explicitly asked about women’s experiences, interviewees readily described both opportunities and barriers within community councils for women’s participation and leadership; there were no hesitations in responses. When asked about the lack of spontaneous issue initiation, most interviewees generally thought that: (a) people just accepted the inequities because “that’s the way it’s always been”; (b) people did not connect the issue of gender to the subject of community councils; and/or (c) that gender is a “taboo subject,” because it is associated with feminism and “depending on how people are raised, if they say ‘feminist,’ they are man haters. Bringing up women’s inequalities pushes that a little bit forward.”

The elite interviewee who introduced the topic of gender without prompt initially raised the issue in connection with her decision to run for office. For her, “it was

ridiculous that there were only a few people of color and women. This didn't make sense." From her perspective, representative democracy meant that public officials should mirror the communities in which they serve, and she was working to correct the inequity. This keen gender awareness, however, did not automatically transfer to her conceptualization of community councils. The topic was only raised in connection with neighborhood governance when specifically asked about women's presence in community councils.

Two interviewees resisted the notion that gender was a relevant lens through which community councils should be evaluated. For them, gender was irrelevant or, worse, an excuse. One man expressed that one's skill set is what counts in the community council setting: "Part of the process is that you have to show that you care. If you're flakey at the meetings or events, people are gonna be like...regardless of gender." Another man from a different community council stated that people bring their own discrimination problems on themselves: "I certainly view men and women as equals in every way. I think there's a bias whether it is gender or ethnicity, they bring this. I don't think the community sees them as a gender or as a nationality or as a specific type of person, though people bring it with them, and they have to prove themselves, [there are] a lot of leaders [on the council] that are women." One of these women he described as a "good girl."

Yes, gender awareness matters if community councils are going to serve as equitable low-barrier entry points for civic engagement and political empowerment. Without this consciousness, prejudice and inequality will persist. Without challenge, social change will not occur and community councils will remain underutilized in their

capacity. For the community interviewees who did raise gender as an issue, without prompting, community councils were simultaneously both a place for opportunities and barriers because of gender. For most of interviewees who did not spontaneously raise the issue, prompting revealed personal theories, observations, and experiences about and because of gender. Even if notions of gender were not predominant in the interviews, they were present as undercurrents of awareness in topical frames of community council access, skill building, group success, and pathways to running for elected office.

Community Council Access: Awareness,

Personal Connections, and Scheduling

Empirical evidence demonstrates that personal connections are important to many forms of civic participation, particularly among underserved communities (John, 2009; Musso, Weare, Bryer, & Cooper, 2011). Knowing about meetings is not enough; people participate when they are directly asked to attend. In addition, scheduling and organizational culture impact community council attendance and depth of participatory activity. Practices such as meeting times are not neutral, impact people differently, and influence people's ability to participate and the degree to which they can engage with any institution (Acker, 1990; Schwartz-Shea, 1998). Meeting observations, document review, and interviews revealed information consistent with these studies and also exposed municipal practices that do not lend themselves to robust participation levels.

Awareness

My research focused on those who already participate or who previously participated in community councils. The manners or ways in which interviewees initially connected to the community councils, however, provide clues about how alternatives may be constructed in order to invite greater breadth of participants and greater depth of participation. All meetings are public and meeting notices are reportedly communicated in various ways: mailed out to email lists, posted on social media, and, least common, printed in paper newsletters. The efficacy and choice of delivery varied with each community council. I only observed notices written in English. Salt Lake City additionally posts meeting dates, times, and locations (http://www.slcdocs.com/comcoun/pdfs/Community_Orgs_List.pdf). Some councils mount yard signs around the community notifying members of the meeting that evening. Others mentioned that the city used to have a mailing program until it was eliminated.

Some government elites noted frustrations and inconsistencies with community council communications associated with community meeting locations and schedules:

Unfortunately, even though I check the city's community council website for schedule changes, the [council] group sometimes doesn't meet or meets in smaller subgroups. I think there is a Facebook page for the community council, and I have checked that site for changes, too, having shown up in the past for what I thought was the time and date of monthly meetings, only to find an empty meeting room. I've run into others who are also perplexed, like the local community police officer. I can't imagine how a new neighbor who wants to get involved might feel if they look up the meeting schedule on the city's website and then find no one at the posted meeting place. There has to be a way to broadcast changes to schedules.

I also experienced this frustration when locating meetings for observation; the city's web page does indicate that there are "occasional seasonal modifications to the schedules" and directs interested parties to contact the chairs for the most up-to-date

information. On two occasions, I relied on personal connections to be able to determine when an actual meeting was going to occur and where it would be held.

The majority of public attendees interviewed were informed about the council only by word of mouth: “a neighbor told me,” or “I learned about it in church.” Several community council interviewees indicated that they had much more success in getting people to participate when they were personally asked: “We used to hand deliver letters to houses to invite them to come”; “you have to go door-to-door constantly to keep people involved”; “in the community council it is door-to-door recruiting, visiting.” Personal contact invites people into new spaces to engage in unfamiliar activities. This strategy, however, is time consuming and the community councils that engaged in door-to-door canvassing did it on their own volunteered time.

A few community council members originally heard about the councils via personal contact with a government worker or an elected official. One person lost family members in a horrific pedestrian and automobile accident and wanted to make changes in city transportation policy to help protect others. She called the city and, as part of her offered assistance, an employee directed the woman to the community council group. Another interviewee attended a Salt Lake City Council meeting to testify about dog park issues, and her elected Salt Lake City Council Member telephoned her the following day with information about the community council.

The majority of current and former elected officials and community members interviewed learned about community councils from a personal interaction with government or community members. Most of the information about community councils is disseminated through electronic mediums such as email and social media; these routes

are inexpensive and more time efficient for both Salt Lake City government and for community volunteers. Electronic communications facilitate information exchange, but they are only as helpful as they are accurate and as they are accessible to people. Lower income populations who may not have computers at home or internet services are disadvantaged when entities use electronic means to disseminate information. Older generations additionally may not be comfortable in using the most electronically contemporary methods. Strategies for successful efforts would need to include a wide breadth of personal interactions and intentional outreach to those not normally electronically connected; this type of robust outreach requires financial and human resources that many community councils simply do not possess.

Meeting Schedules

Administrative choices such as when to hold meetings influence who can attend. These choices are not neutral and influence people's ability to participate in different ways. Observations and interviews were consistent with literature, particularly regarding the bias inherent in administrative decision-making. Observations and interviews additionally raised unexpected results concerning actual participation numbers between men and women. Some interviewees reported that typical council schedule of meetings made attendance challenging. Most councils meet once per month, at the same time and day, save for summer vacation periods. They are generally scheduled for week nights, many at 6:00 pm or 6:30 pm and generally lasting for 90 or 120 minutes. This pattern benefits some while operates as a barrier to others. A community council chair stated:

We find that we're going to miss people no matter what day we hold our meeting because of other commitments, obligations, etc. I don't think any particular

individuals or groups are included or excluded by our holding on [the evening they hold their meetings]. Our 'regular' people come if they don't have a competing commitment. If they do, they don't come. Sometimes, I'm not able to be there because of a school or other commitment. It's just the way things are in our world.

For this chair, each iteration of time and day attempted to hold meeting revealed a unique set of benefits and drawbacks.

When community members and government elites, both male and female, stressed the difficulty in chosen meeting times, they expressed these difficulties primarily in terms of conflicts related to family caregiving. One former male elected official stated, "evening meetings are a problem. They took me away from my role as a father or helping around the house.....this is a real barrier." Most meetings are held once per month beginning around 6:00 pm and typically last for 90 minutes; this scheduling places meetings right in the middle of dinner and bedtime for many children, but organizational influences impact men and women in different manners (Kenny, 1996). For a female elected official, meeting times were more than an inconvenience; they prevented her from attending until after her children were older. Prior to that time, she was putting her kids to bed during meeting times. "People my age are absent, but they're absent from all sorts of venues, like alumni associations, now with so many mothers working in Utah, they are less likely to do things at night. I was resentful of things because they were at night, that's a really important time." One female community council member, however, indicated that the evening time was less of a burden for her because her council meetings were scheduled so far out in advance; "As a person who has young children, a predictable and consistent routine helps us function better. When I have meetings that I know are the same time and place every month, I can coordinate better and frequent the meetings."

Despite caregiving barriers, most interviewees believed that community councils had “equal participants of men and women in meeting[s].” Only three elected officials expressed the belief that women’s involvement was altogether less frequent than men’s, and this was thought to be due to the fact that “women have busy lives” with many responsibilities including family caregiving or “women are not socialized to seek roles outside of home or faith.” My observations indicated that attendance by women ranged from 25%–60%.

When asked why women’s participation in the community councils exceeded what was normally found in elected office, responses generally conveyed that the neighborhood space was, as one respondent put it, “their territory, their curb and gutter.” Also some interviewees assigned different interests to women: “women are more invested in the quality of life issues that make [the neighborhood] a great place to live.” Another added, “issues are closer to home, more comfortable.” And: “Women are trained to think locally in our homes and in our neighborhood space, property crime, traffic calming, neighborhood development.” A related subtheme was that more community councils provided more accessibility to participate and opportunity to thrive: “you don’t need money, easier entry. You don’t have to set aside weeks to go up on the [Utah State Capitol];” and, similarly, “you gain influence and support by your presence and your ability to contribute” as opposed to other spheres in which raw political power and access to cash play a major role in one’s ability to create change. A different trajectory of thinking on this theme conveyed women as being present and active due to an absence of men. Women as “filler,” because “there’s no power there,” and “men are more busy with other issues.”

Some literature suggests that neighborhood governance models provide opportunities for women not otherwise realized because of social and physical proximity to home life. This space is articulated as neither public, nor private, but a mixture of both wherein people may walk there with their neighbors, attend with family, and enjoy potluck while discussing policy issues of import to the community (Ackelsberg, 2013; Harwood, 2007; Martin, 2002). The meetings I observed, however, were generally not friendly toward *children*. With the exception of the occasional child or two, young people were not present in the meetings. High school and, far less frequently, middle school aged people would attend for scouting or school assignments. Younger children were not part of the group's activity; they appeared to be brought there because childcare arrangements had fallen through. Most of the young children in meetings appeared to be present with a female caregiver. Two government elites, both women, and one community member specifically mentioned without prompting that the community council culture did not include children. One female government elite questioned: "if this is a community meeting should kids be there crying? Maybe they should. This is community."

Meeting time interference with family caregiving responsibilities such as meals and bedtime as well as a meeting culture unfriendly to children impacted the ability of elites and community members to attend. While the presence of children in a family influences all members of that family, women continue to face higher societal and familial expectations of caregiving (Markovits & Bickford, 2014). The cultural environment within the community councils is not conducive to children, so people with young families did not typically attend together. Some participants were able to mitigate

barriers through hired childcare or family or friends who could help, but only those with the resources to do so had these options. Without attention to the impacts community council meeting times and cultural norms have on the experiences of those who participate or who want to participate, certain groups will continue to be discouraged in their engagement efforts.

Attracting and Keeping Attendees: Issues,

Personalities, Cliques, and Bias.

If people's lives allow them to attend or if people have the resources to mitigate any barriers from personal or professional duties, do people actually want to go to council meetings? One community council chair concluded that "attendance is driven more by issue than by the date/time of the meeting." People need motivation to participate. To effectively compete for people's time and attention, meeting agenda topics must have relevance to people's day-to-day lives (Eliasoph, 1998; Fung, 2015; Verba et al., 1995).

Issues

I observed attendance nearly triple at a community council meeting when a controversial city issue was on the agenda and double at a separate community council meeting when the mayor was scheduled to make an appearance. A community council interviewee accentuated this point by noting at some meetings, "there have been conversations and topics so dull that I wouldn't want to come back." One community council member from Hazelwood did not come back; he felt like his community council did not "aim to get anything significant done – just traffic and parking." According to the

interviewee, the community council needed to focus more on broader statewide topics such as government redistricting.

Perceived issue relevance is sometimes neither provocative nor congruent with what is actually a decision that could greatly influence the well-being of an individual, family, or community. For example, a zoning change might severely alter the residential character of a neighborhood, but plat map descriptions and complex planning terms, while accurate, do not express a clear vision of potential consequences. Public policy decisions may seem uninteresting or irrelevant because the language used to articulate the issue is professionalized and inaccessible to the lay person. If the city does not seek public input through words that intentionally communicate, people may not know what is happening or what could occur despite printing on an agenda or mailing. Community council chairs possess a broad range of expertise. Some understand public administrative language and marketing better than others, and their agendas reflect that level of knowledge. Consequently, the way in which government transfers information to the community matters as well as does the actual topic.

Personalities and Cliques

Not only did perceived council topic irrelevance and tediousness influence participation, but also experiences of tension or conflict. People will not attend if they are uncomfortable in a given setting. Institutions are composed of people with individual temperaments and value sets. When personalities conflict and agreement on appropriate forms of behavior cannot be found, people retreat into their own private spaces and practice avoidance of political discussion (Eliasoph, 1998). One former elected official

added, “You get into situations where certain personalities dominate, and then everyone else has to suffer through them. Groups are made up of volunteers and they’re human beings with all of their stuff.” The small numbers of attendees exacerbated differences, and some interviewees suggested that if more people attended, individual conflictual personality traits could be tempered and not dominate the environment.

Three community people pointed out the difficulties of bringing in new ideas and new people into the community councils. “Change is difficult, especially as we get older.” One elected official characterized community councils as “closed system[s], and people don’t think about reaching out.” In most meetings I attended, it did seem that the majority of people knew each other or at least recognized each other. Community councils build community, or at least intend to, so it is good that people know each other, but it can be intimidating to those people attending for the first time or those who do not frequently contribute to discussions. When one meeting I observed concluded, a woman and regular attendee approached me and asked why I was there, and whether I “was spying on them.”

A few community interviewees characterized council participants as being “cliquey” and not welcoming to new attendees. Some community members thought that longtime members held a grip on leadership positions as well as informal authority. Elite interviewees and community council attendees commented on their perceptions of “in and out groups” within the community council organizations. According to three people in one community council, cliques impacted an election for a chair position. A relative newcomer to the council ran for leadership, won, and attempted to make changes in bylaws and fundraising for the group. There was pushback from the membership, and the

leader was reportedly told, “we don’t do that here” by the more established and older participants of the group. During the next round of elections, the in-crowd organized and brought people into vote who had allegedly never been to meetings before to change the leader to one who was friendly to the in-crowd. One person who didn’t appreciate this person’s leadership said “he made a whole bunch of changes” and “it wasn’t the same kind of love duty.” Because the unseated leader was new to the community council, at least one longtime member viewed his initiatives as primarily self-interested.

Bias

On multiple occasions, I witnessed incidents extending beyond a mere social “in-crowd” to indicate hostility/exclusion based on race-ethnicity and sexuality. Community councils are institutions and reflect through formal structures as well as informal norms the culture and values in which they are situated (Acker, 1990; Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Kenney, 1996; Markovits & Bickford, 2014; Schwartz-Shea, 1998). At times, these values are communicated as hostile indignities or judgement, also referred to as “microaggressions,” and these can have severe effects on who will and will not enter and participate in a given space (Sue, 2010).

In the first instance, a discussion ensued about maintaining the integrity of open space in an area and the damage that people were creating by not staying on trails or pavement. One of the community members indicated that more signage would be helpful “for the Japanese tourists that are breaking the law” about where they stray from the trails because “these people want to obey the law but the Tongan gangs won’t obey.” The specific comment related to Japanese tourists, a stereotype, being good and law abiding,

juxtaposed with the gang epithet used to stereotype Tongans as not law abiding. No one appeared to notice that this might be offensive, or at least no one said anything about the comment at the meeting or during my interviews.

On a second occasion and in a separate community council, two police department attendees provided information about city-wide public discussions about law enforcement use of force. The police officers asked for feedback from the meeting attendees and one apartment owner raised his concern about a recent, public, and controversial incident in which a police officer shot and killed a man who reportedly assaulted the officer with a snow shovel. She said that it was “hard to get day laborers to shovel snow now because people don’t want to be near” where the shooting occurred. The police department employee said that “there’s a lot of information out there” about the incident. He further indicated that situations can be de-escalated if people “just comply” with law enforcement. A member of the audience then raised his hand and spoke in favor of the police officer’s actions that resulted in the shooting of the man with the snow shovel. This audience member said that the officers are doing “exactly” what the community wanted and needed. He went on to say that protests occur in places like “Ferguson” and such protests just “get people excited” in other neighborhoods. His comment discounted the experiences of those who are frustrated with perceptions and realities of some law enforcement practices. The conversation was tense, and no one directly identified the racial issues that were being raised. In this instance, a community council board member did not overtly address the conflict but instead, redirected the conversation to neighborhood-related crime prevention tips such as the efficacy of security cameras.

Finally, in one council meeting in which candidate debates were being held, one candidate running for office mentioned during her speech that it was time for the entire community to be served, “not just the interests of a particular group.” The incumbent for this seat is openly gay. I interpreted the candidate’s comment to be antigay. I later confirmed this with the incumbent who indicated that the candidate’s phrasing was common “code” language used by those opposed to LGBTQIA equality. This microaggression was made by an individual who did not frequent the council meetings, but no one in the council drew attention to the comment or asked for clarification. Perhaps no one aside from myself and the incumbent recognized the candidate’s use of language as a microaggression or, perhaps if they did, they did not know how to confront the issue. Either way, the incident was uncomfortable and did not contribute to a setting in which members of the LGBTQIA community or allies would feel welcomed to enter and participate.

Unlike microaggressions surrounding race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, those involving gender stereotypes were publicly identified as being unacceptable by other group members. Despite the dearth of unprompted discussion regarding gender during interviews, these pushbacks surrounding gender stereotyping indicate that more awareness existed than was revealed during the interviews. One elite interviewee indicated that women in meetings were not “talked down to, or if they [were], then people [were] called on it.” I observed two incidents of this behavior. First, a male community member suggested that everyone see if their wives were teachers at a particular high school so that they could get tickets to a popular football game. One woman responded, “what if my husband is a teacher?” The man’s original assumption

was that women filled the teaching roles, but he was “corrected” by another member of the community. After the pushback, the man indicated that, of course, he meant that men could also be teachers. Second, in a different meeting, an elected official speaking drew attention to a painting on the wall of aged White men appearing to converse over the contents of a document. The elected official pointed to the artwork and noted that it was filled with “old White guys”; he then praised the two other elected officials in the room, both women, for their contributions to Utah even though they did not look like the people in the painting.

We cannot escape the humanness of democracy. Sustained community council participation requires more than neighbors possessing a penchant for public service and meeting scheduling on convenient days and times. People want to spend time learning and discussing issues that are relevant to their lives, and they want to be with people they like. Conflict and divergent personalities are not inviting. Even if the issues are relevant, the council is effective, and attendees appear to work well together, personal bias does seep into the council operations as evidenced by closed social cliques and microaggressions toward marginalized groups. When attendees challenge the hostilities, such as with those toward women, room is made for members of the group to participate and, perhaps, for those expressing the hostility to become aware of their biases and hopefully address them in a positive manner. When microaggressions and cliques are not challenged, the space intended for all of the community contracts into space for only a few. A potential open door into civic participation or even elected office shuts and inequities in our governmental system perpetuate.

Empowerment, or Not?

Evidence was gathered and organized based on Gutiérrez and Lewis' (1999) conceptualization of power—as discussed in Chapter 2—in order to better understand each interviewee's understanding of empowerment as well as the opportunities that were available through the act of participation. Specifically, I examined the degree to which individuals felt like community council participation (a) encouraged individual expression, (b) helped build skill sets for leadership or for navigating government processes to create change and, (c) facilitated participant's ability to work together with others to impact their communities. I inquired about families of origin and other details that might provide clues about what values and habits attendees carried with them into the community councils prior to attending. I also explored elected officials' motivations for initially running for office. My meeting observations, analysis of municipal documents, and interviews revealed some of the potential, the reality, and the barriers of community councils as a site for individual expression, skill building, and as a fulcrum for community change.

Personal Expression Among Community Members

Berry et al. (1993) provides empirical evidence that people who engage in varying frequencies of political participation view neighborhood governance meetings as “comfortable gatherings where residents can go and discuss the problems of their community” (p. 202). People do not want to walk into a combative environment, particular with neighbors who they have to see on a regular, sometimes daily, basis; they do not want to breach any law of hospitality related to politeness (Eliasoph, 1998).

Mansbridge (1998), however, informs us that a lack of conflict can also be indicative of the silencing of minority voices by a dominant group; this is not about “getting along” or agreeing, this is about power and domination. Women in particular act in far less assertive ways than men, especially in public meetings (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). Despite commonly held distaste for conflict, neighborhood settings may provide an environment in which community members more actively engage in dissent. Local public sector decision-making often impacts individuals and family in very tangible ways; this closeness to home often inspires political courage, persistence in the face of anxiety, or fear (Sparks, 1997).

Congruent with Berry et al. (1993), nearly all community council participants interviewed conceived of their meeting spaces as places where they could express their thoughts and desires about their neighborhoods. “Community council encourages us to be our best selves. When I say our best selves, I don’t mean a show for our neighbors. We are presenting what we want best for our community.” A few leaders even mentioned that they ensured people had their questions and comments heard, and some specifically dedicated space on their agendas that was for open conversation about items raised by participants that leadership had not thought to include on agendas.

Furthermore, several interviewees expressed that they themselves disliked conflict and that the community council discussions generally avoided turbulent disagreements. Again, these sentiments were consistent with evidence found in literature (Eliasoph, 1998). Traditional community council meeting norms, as a rule, reflect a culture of politeness. I observed people raising their hands to speak, clapping after presentations, and generally exhibiting graciousness even when they challenged information flowing

from those presented as the experts; typical confrontation is passive-aggressive (e.g., not clapping loudly, eye rolling, sighing). One woman, in describing the difference between a community council meeting and a Salt Lake City Council meeting, stated that “Salt Lake City Council meetings are more combative. Usually people who come to present at [them] are very upset about something.” In contrast, the neighborhood or community council “tried to create an example of how it can work effectively instead of creating discord.” Several members from one community council recalled an incident that supports this characterization. A local businessman attended via board invitation and one person in the audience verbally attacked the business representative regarding corporate practices. No one spoke positively of this incident. One man said, “I hate confrontation. I just want to crawl under the desk and hide, and I think that it detracts from everyone's experience.” A woman from a different neighborhood said of her most negative community council experience, “it was the worst because people yelled and screamed and said terrible things. It was contentious. It was awful. It's funny what people get upset about and parking is one of those things.”

One community council leader, a man, indicated that their community council executive committee works hard to make sure that everyone speaks in meetings. One way he indicated that his executive committee accomplishes this is to ask people to raise their hands. He felt like a lot of women were hesitant to speak up because “that's how their lives are lived.” He felt that when leaders asked people to raise their hands that encouraged women because they did not have to just “speak up.” A different interviewee indicated that many community council participants were members of the LDS church and that this connection influenced women to moderate their opinions in meetings so that

they would not contradict that of men's. Women "weren't without a voice," and would "state [their] opinion [s], but would defer" to the men.

In contrast, many interviewees characterized community council meetings as especially suitable for women to speak out; "the women are a big part of the community, a lot of us stay at home, we are out there every day, we see what's going on.....we have a lot of community pride, and [women] want their neighborhood to stay nice, raise children in a nice area, so they'll push the issue. They are the ones that are voicing their opinions in those areas more." One community council attendee expressed her view that children gave women more authority in terms of neighborhood issues. Similarly, another woman indicated that women's connections to their children reinforced women's authority about what was happening in the community; "children see what is going on in the neighborhoods, and they tell their mothers. Moms know about the community."

Interviews and observations not only supported empirical findings in literature connected to desires for politeness and discomfort with conflict but also provided empirical evidence of neighborhood settings acting as sites of political courage for women. Despite a few interviewees who framed women as passive in meetings, most articulated community councils as spaces inviting for women's active participation and as spaces in which women are often viewed with authority; some attributed this to a polite environment that encouraged participation by all, but others thought that women were highly regarded in this space because of what was thought of as a women's expertise and familiarity with family and neighborhood. Women acted confident in the setting and even personally and loudly challenged microaggressions involving gender stereotypes. I observed women and men nearly equally asking questions and voicing opinions in

meetings. No community member I interviewed expressed that they felt they had been silenced in a meeting. I am not certain, however, that one would readily admit that someone else had taken away their ability to speak if it had happened.

Community Expression to Government

Free expression not only meant between community neighbors but also had the challenge of communicating to public administration professionals and other government elites. Government actors who focus on effectiveness and efficiency and outcome measures grounded in scientific management promote a language of expertise. This speech often conflicts with language of lived experiences and experiential knowledge that may contain cultural nuances, or even silences when words are not available to accurately relay information about an event or series of events (DeVault, 1990; Stivers, 2000).

People in one community, for example, expressed frustration at Utah Transit Authority for a lack of bus service that helped night shift job holders. “We can’t get to work.” A government representative indicated that other services had expanded, so people would have other options besides buses to commute. He further indicated that transit authority officials had won awards and received bonuses because of all of their efforts. People responded with “We can’t get to work.” What the official totally and completely missed from the communication was that (a) many people in the community were employed in 3rd shift jobs because they needed to have an additional opportunities to work during the day in order to ensure that household bills were paid, (b) bus and train service was not offered during times night shift workers needed to get to their jobs on time, and (c) validating professional expertise by showcasing awards and large financial bonuses

accomplished little but to disenfranchise community members. To say one “works” or is a “working” person in that community generally means holding a job heavily focused on physical labor. Corporate type language did little to build trust.

In turn, frustrated elite interviewees frequently characterized community observations as “myopic” or “passionate” as opposed to being informative to the city’s decision-making processes, aware of technical variables associated with departmental work (e.g., traffic engineering), or knowledgeable about the citywide context in which many public sector decisions are made. During public meetings I observed, these tensions often materialized when community members questioned government official presentations. Elected officials and public administrators would frequently grow defensive and then would withdraw from the discussion.

Sometimes disagreements were even volatile. I observed two exceptions to this politeness norm and both were directed at Salt Lake City’s 2015 Administration. In the first instance, a Public Utilities Department representative presented information about a water pump project, and staff brought maps and flyers that they handed out. In the middle of the presentation, a man stood, without being recognized by the chair, and challenged the legitimacy of the project by claiming it conflicted with state law. Then another man stood up and yelled out a series of about five questions. He stated he lived about 50 feet from the project and was angry that no one notified him. When the city employee attempted to answer, the man interrupted him and challenged him some more. Several people called out that they were also not notified. “Can you stop all work until we meet?” A man yelled, “you need to hear us, you need to stop.” Another man loudly asked, “Why wasn’t anyone notified?” The city employee stated that his employees knocked on

neighborhood doors to inform people. A woman angrily responded that no one came to her door except a person who “wanted to do a co-op.” Despite his formal role, the chair just let people talk. He did not ask people to raise hands. Then, two members of the community council, both men, yelled out that they *had* received notice and they liked the city work. They thought it made the open space more attractive. At this point, the chair then reminded people that the meeting was on a schedule. The city employees offered to talk to people outside in the hallway. When they walked out, 11 people followed them.

The second incident I observed was when a previous mayor presented at another community council and residents also reacted strongly. This mayor typically did not attend these meetings, but instead sent a community liaison who would come to every other meeting. I was told by a board member that city mayors generally attended once per year but that this particular mayor only attended about every 2 years. The number of interruptions from the public attendees was frequent—with the vast majority of them originating from women. The group also appeared to be emboldened as each participant asked a question or interrupted. The mayor spoke for about 10 minutes, and then the council chair asked people to raise their hands if they wanted to be recognized to ask questions. One woman interrupted the chair and challenged the mayor about golf course closures. Another woman stood up and interrupted the first speaker and said she agreed with her. She told the mayor his arguments for course closure were not valid. When he began to speak again, the second speaker interrupted him yet again. At this point, the community council chair interjected and told the woman that she had had an opportunity to speak. He referred to her as ma’am. Still, the woman interrupted the mayor again, and this time, various members of the audience around the room turned to the woman and

said “Shhhhhh.” It was my impression that the group responded to her in this way not because she was interrupting the mayor but because they, too, wanted an opportunity to ask their questions. One board member shared my interpretation of the “shushing.”

At this same meeting, another, different woman asked the mayor about the Utah Transit Authority (UTA) and inquired about how the city was going to hold UTA accountable for expenditures and poor service. She referred to an article in the newspaper about UTA officials and their salaries. The mayor stated that facetiously that, of course, “the press never gets anything wrong” and, moreover, that UTA is recognized around the country for its (quality) work. Two different women laughed sarcastically at the mayor’s comment and, when he resumed talking, a new woman interrupted the mayor and agreed with the comment about poor service made earlier. Even as the mayor addressed additional areas of interest including the homeless population and bike riding, attendees kept interrupting him. Right before the chair announced that the mayor’s time was up, a woman shouted “do you even check your email?” The rowdy nature of the questioning was significant since the mayor is the highest level administrative branch official within Salt Lake City government and those doing the most questioning were women.

Tensions between government officials and community members seemed to most sharply arise when the officials and the community were not understanding each other or were not feeling heard. Neighbors would often actively dispute government assertions and confidence about neighborhood knowledge outweighed personal qualms of public speaking. Many community council female participants expressed their fears of publicly drawing attention to themselves or speaking out during interviews, but demonstrated in meetings and recounted in their interviews specific examples of willingness to not only

state their concerns and ideas but, also, to verbally challenge authority figures in the process. They exhibited political courage. As one woman stated, “If [I] feel strongly enough about [an issue] it can push me out of my comfort zone. I can find my voice in it.” Women expressed confidence in what they saw on their streets and actually lived on a day-to-day basis; they were frequently not impressed with statistics and spreadsheets when that information conflicted with their experiences. One woman related that when a previous mayor attended their community council, he tried to interrupt her account of neighborhood concerns, and she told him “I have the floor.”

Building Skill Sets

Empirical evidence supports the notion that participation within community councils help foster individual knowledge about public affairs and the ability to make change (Berry et al., 1993; Martin, 2002). According to community members themselves, sometimes participation did, sometimes it did not. Histories fell all along the spectrum so no common baseline of skill sets in place prior to participation existed. People wove their community council engagement in with their past experiences and learning as well as contemporary experiences in life to create the entirety of their abilities. Many attendees already came from families of origin that were involved in political efforts. For example, one interviewee indicated, “[my] parents were Chicano activists at an early age.” They talked politics around the dinner table, and his dad took him to walk on political campaigns. Other participants got their start in civic engagement through families devoted to community service. For example, one said that her parents were “real service oriented. We are people that help other people if they need it. A lot of times, we would go

without, my dad had his own gas station, and he would do things in trade. He wanted to make sure that people had a car and help them out." In contrast, in another family, there was minimum involvement, "Dad was a dairy farmer. No time. Cows were milked twice per day. You voted." Primarily, though, those interviewed came from families who were community-service minded and then, as adults, they continued along that particular trajectory of civic engagement.

In response to the topic of skill-building, those interviewed frequently drew a distinction between the community council as providing access to information versus demonstrating how to apply it. "People who attend have more information about tree removal, pet disturbances," and "they have handouts with the resources and different places you can call for property things or street things or different things like that." One man indicated, "as far as teaching people, it doesn't happen. You learn by observation and participation. It would be a good idea if you could help educate people to do that. There is an art to work through governments." There was one group of interviewees, however, who reported that attendance at community council was part of a multibranch path to political skill building. They sought out community participation and leadership skills through other avenues and, then, used the community council space to practice and apply these skills. The community council and the leadership institute (run by a separate local nonprofit one woman attended) were described as "intertwined." This particular interviewee learned about the institute by attending community council. The institute classes taught her that "community work is very systematic process, how to run a meeting, how to engage with leaders," and the community council meetings have given her the "experiences to gain more confidence."

Some government officials perceived a strong connection between participation and possession of a sophisticated skill set for impacting government; others did not. Others remarked that people who attended at least on a fairly regular basis were more skilled at influencing governmental decision-making due to knowledge of process and people. “People who participate have the connections to make the changes. They know who the players are.” In addition, “people who participate in community councils are less apprehensive about speaking in meetings or going in front of boards or commissions.” Others thought—“no, [skills are] totally person based,” “[it] depends on the community council,” or simply “sometimes.”

The meetings that I observed primarily offered attendees the opportunities to passively learn facts about government, nonprofit, and business programs and appropriate contact phone numbers, emails, or web addresses. Topic “experts” provided most of the information and on occasion, community members would express preferences through the raising of hand or verbally voting on proposed projects or services. Community discussion was less frequent; most information flowed through a chair or topic “expert” from the government, nonprofit, or business. When person-to-person idea sharing occurred, people engaged and appeared to enjoy building ideas as well as planning and executing projects together. One community council leader organized members into neighborhood subgroups and discuss among themselves opportunities and barriers to combatting property crime in the area. Subcommittees and leadership meetings may have provided opportunities to learn through more active discussion, project planning, and political strategizing. I did not personally witness this activity, but there was some evidence of this in reports that community members would provide their peers during the

council meetings

Interviewees articulated differing opinions regarding the degree to which community council participation actually cultivated knowledge or skills.

One person stated, “Community councils are a great place for women, at least as many women who are chairs or vice chairs as are men.....from my experience, women run this show more than men.” “After a couple years of being a board member, I asked for a leadership role of vice chair. I believe this has helped my self-confidence and support my vision on leadership.” Others, both men and women, stated that there was a lack of women in leadership and were very clear that they wanted more equality; “I wish we had more women in our council [board]. It needs to be balanced between all segments. Women play valuable role that they can give a valuable perspective that men are lacking. I wish we could get more women on the board for balance.”

My observations indicated that community council leadership ranged from 28% to 46% female. The council with leaders situated at the front of the room, and identified by name plate was composed of 30% women. The remaining community council leadership was not as visible in their rooms, with the exception of the council with a female chair, but board members could be identified on web sites with their names, and with one, names and photographs. On two of the boards, the Secretary position was held by a woman; in another, the secretarial position “has always been held by a woman, as far as I can think back.” This duty assignment, particularly long term, communicates that secretarial roles, traditionally held by women, continue to be a place for women. One male community member stated, “if a man is going to do this kind of work [chair], he needs a secretary to do it, and it's usually a woman, and if woman is going to lead, she is

just going to do it, of course it's learned.”

Three women specifically praised community councils for providing space to cultivate their leadership skills. “I had the skills and the knowledge, but I just didn’t have the opportunity [at work] to use it. People gave me great feedback from the leadership I gave.” Another woman stated, “I can only say that in jobs I’ve had I haven’t been listened to because I’m a female. I have to claw my way because I’m a female. I’ve never felt that way in the community council.” Finally, one woman stated that “when I moved into my own house, I examined my skills, and allowed myself to become part of community. I was not inhibited by my parents, or my employer, just myself. This revelation helped me expand what I wanted personally, and I asked to be part of the community council.”

Leadership opportunities, however, were also restricted by gender bias favoring men. During the first community council meeting she had ever attended, one woman came with her husband. At the meeting, she and her husband were standing together, and the chair “turned to [my] husband and said that they are always looking for people on the board....If that would happen now, today, [I] would have said something.” Another government official interviewed stressed that people invite who they know into specific spaces, and that this is true in all areas of organizing. If there is a man in leadership, he will look to other men to help build up that space.

Interviewers thoughts were mixed concerning skill building and these impressions were further complicated by the unique histories and experiences from which each participant originated. Some believed community council participation helped them, others did not, and some thought they did but only in combination with other current responsibilities they had. Government interviewees were also mixed in their impressions

of whether or not community council activism helped build participatory acumen.

Observations revealed a spectrum of learning opportunities from extraordinarily passive to those that intensely engaged community members in neighborhood activities.

Perceptions of leadership opportunities for women in community councils were additionally varied; some thought that there were robust possibilities, others not so much. I observed 30% of the community council leadership positions were held by women, but perhaps the lack of a title and formalized leadership position does not negatively influence a woman's opportunity for skill-building and subsequent empowerment. Martin (2002) asserts that her empirical findings demonstrate that women will still find opportunities for empowerment within neighborhood governance institutions, with or without the benefit of having a title. The challenge with Martin's conclusion, however, lies in the optics. Are women taking on all of the responsibility and yet not receiving credit and recognition? If so, this may have detrimental impacts on the empowerment benefits of providing role models to other women. Modeling leadership for other women is important in cultivating women's political ambition (Atkeson, 2003; Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006; Fox & Lawless, 2014). In addition, if women do not visibly fill positions of power, then negative stereotypes surrounding women's leadership capabilities cannot be challenged (Beaman et al., 2009).

Community Council Participation and Change Making

Empirical evidence indicates that neighborhood-based governance does impact public policy (Berry et al., 1993; Rabrenovic, 2010; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001).

Community members, however, want to be central to the action. Their participation needs

to be meaningful to the end result, be it a process, project, or budgetary allocation (Boyte, 2011; Fung, 2015; Mathews, 1994; Sharp, 2012). Community interviewees echoed these and most stated that they wanted their efforts to be rewarded with change in their community for the better, or a continuation of that which worked well. Many successes were proudly and enthusiastically mentioned including business construction redesign, an addition of a traffic light, saving a historical park, and combatting crime. One interviewee stated that shared projects provided people who could not regularly attend meetings an opportunity to contribute to community efforts. Nearly all community council participants interviewed proudly mentioned neighborhood improvements or projects on which they had participated as part of their community council service; frequently, the accomplishments were mentioned without prompting.

Community council participants additionally experienced fatigue and frustration at certain times when interacting with government; "We very rarely win. [The community] very rarely make[s] a change, and it gets old. You can only lose so many times." Sometimes, the fatigue originated from just working with other community members; "So many calls, so many neighbors calling and telling me that I need to fix things. I would tell people the process, I can't do it myself and that's not how this works." Different conceptions of role contributed to the negative impacts on participation. In the aforementioned example, the role confusion was situated between community members; some thought the council's job was to "fix" problems, while the council leader conceived of the council as a space in which neighbors worked together to find solutions together.

Seven community council interviewees, without any prompting from me, raised the issue of their community council's lack of power and ability to advocate for the issues

raised by community members, and the way in which this perceived unproductiveness related to attendance. One community council attendee who had participated for well over 20 years indicated that she stopped going to her meeting because “nothing in the area was being done that I could see.” People want to know that their efforts result in a return on their time investment. The mere issuing of government reports does not create an engaged community council (Mathews, 1994). Additionally, asking community council members for their opinions on trivial matters or not producing any sort of outcome does not inspire participation (Fung, 2015). Consistent with these interviewees’ experiences, I observed very little follow up from government elites who presented information or who listened to ideas and complaints at the meetings. It is possible that someone could have raised an issue related to crime, for example, and the individual raising the issue would have received information privately from the government elite after the meeting, but nothing was reported to the group subsequently. When information was exchanged between government elites and community council members, there was very little evidence from one meeting to the next that the information had led to some sort of governmental action. People will not invest time into activities that do not benefit them. If an individual’s main reason for attending community council is policy or service delivery action—and people do not feel like the council has the capacity to achieve anything—they will not attend in a sustained manner. Congruently, when government actors do not conceive of community councils as holding any legitimacy or power, they will not invest time and resources into supporting their efforts.

Community Council Experience and Running for Office

Civic engagement and candidate recruitment literature do not adequately attend to the impact neighborhood council participation has on a decision to run for political office, but they do offer some clues. Civic activism and organizational participation play key roles in decisions to run, particularly for women (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009). Research instruments, however, do not specifically mention institutions of neighborhood democracy, so it is unclear if whatever benefits one receives from organizational participation can be experienced in community councils. Recruitment groups are important for men and women deciding to run for public office (Lawless & Fox, 2012), and community councils could potentially fill that role. Finally, women are greatly motivated to participate in political activity when they are able to see other female political leaders (Fox & Lawless, 2014). Community councils frequently host government officials for public policy updates, and this creates opportunity for women to view other women serving in elected roles.

Did community council participation influence interviewees decisions to run for political office? For a few, yes. Nearly half of interviewees who ran for office reported that their personal community council participation was integral to their decision to put their name on a ballot— 6 women and 5 men out of a total of 23. Of those that did not attribute community council participation as being meaningful to that decision, again about half were women and half were men.

For the men and women who indicated community councils were relevant to their decision to run, their council experiences fostered issue interest, developed their political skill-set development, built their confidence building, and proved their capability. In the

council space, one woman recounted how she “became aware of issues and was more inclined to do something about them.” She learned “that others saw that I had leadership skills” One man mentioned that he “grew to like [being in the community council] and found he had the respect of people.” Another man indicated, “Now that I've got into this [community council] role, I've seen that I have the option to run. A lot clearer now on how I would get from A to B.” A woman commented, “I went [to community council] because it was a good way to get your voice heard. I decided to run [for city council] after 6 months. I came to realize even then that the community council can only do so much, so the attraction became to do more. If you were actually on the city council you could change ordinances so that inappropriate development wouldn't be allowed in the first place.” For at least one person who developed the desire to run for office as a child, the community council was a space to learn and demonstrate a skill set. “I decided when I was 7 years old that I was running for office. When Lee Martinez was sworn in [for Salt Lake City Council], I thought, ‘man, I gotta do that someday.’ Seeing him as the only person of color up there, really meant a lot to me.” The community council taught this interviewee about the city and provided “a chance to prove [my ability].”

For all but two interviewees who ran for office and identified the importance of community council participation in their decision, the community council component was mentioned in conjunction with other activities, revealing that council participation in and of itself may not be the most effective tool for influencing people to run. The other factors mentioned were family history of elected office, issue activism, and political party participation to create a full set of motivating factors. Six people—who currently served in office, were formally in office, or ran for office and lost—specifically mentioned

community council experience as being important in their decisions to run but its significance was tied, as mentioned above, to other experiences. One woman, for example, attended a nonprofit's leadership training class, and then used the community council meetings as a place to practice her skills, like public speaking. Another woman already felt that community involvement was important, but attending neighborhood council meetings helped "reignite" her interest. The two women who did not mention other activities or family history attributed running only to their community council experience.

Additional factors mentioned as solely influencing the decision to run for office included activism on social justice issues or frustrations in the public sector workforce in which a current elected official formally was employed. Most of the women began as issue advocates, but one former state elected male also attributed issue advocacy to his beginning. Two men specifically mentioned political party work and one woman indicated that the political party was a big component of her decision to run for office. Childhood norms were additionally important; most people had families who had dinner table conversation about politics or issues. Four interviewees originated from families with significant amounts of political energy including office holding, and one woman proudly exclaimed, "my grandmother was a suffragette!" One government elite stated that his early inspiration to run was not only his mother who ran for office on multiple occasions, but also the civics education he received as a young person. "We really need to start engaging our youth in elementary school, like where I got started."

Four people, three men and one woman, were asked to run by a person who was in elected office at the time. Two women benefited from meeting one of their current

state elected officials at their respective community council meetings. The elected official asked them both to run for office when she knew she was going to retire; neither women had ever considered putting their name on a ballot. One subsequently ran, and won; the other ran and lost.

Even when community councils did not play a meaningful role in an individual's decision to run for office, they were instrumental in nearly every political campaign run by interviewees. Community council visits were a large part of campaign strategies. One elected official stated, "these are the people who know what is going on in the neighborhood." Others mentioned that the attendees are the ones who are "engaged" or who possess extensive community networks. One former state level elected official indicated that "the people running [his] campaign suggested [he] attend to start building name recognition." In order to win an election, candidates need to capture votes, and there's a large return on investment on building a presence in many of the community councils, at least for local or state legislative offices having boundaries within the City of Salt Lake.

Of the women who had not run for office, about 1/3 of those interviewed indicated that they were comfortable and happy serving in the community council space and had no desire to run for elected political office. Another person stated, "Yes, [I thought about it] and then I talked myself out of it because it is a bad idea. I'm patient because it is my neighborhood but having to constantly deal with dumb ideas would drive me crazy." She cares about the community space and she knows "what is expected of me and I know what I expect of the neighbors as well." Time was an issue for some women. "I was working two jobs. Babysitters raised my kids. I think I would have tried, uh huh, if

I didn't have the time constraints. I look at some of them up there [at the Utah State Capitol] and think I could do that." One woman did not want her life thrown open publicly due to "skeletons." She liked working on a neighborhood level, "with the community [council] I am a change agent, there is no question."

For the community members who had not run for office, effectiveness, time constraints, and authenticity were mentioned as primary reasons for their lack of interest. One thought that grass roots involvement was far more effective than serving in office to help the neighborhoods. Both men and women interviewees offered family and work concerns about running for office as well – particularly time involvement; community councils were a vehicle to make change that was not as demanding as serving in elected office. In authentic space, people could add their voice in collaborative problem-solving with other neighbors. Political arenas are just contrived. One person stated, "I'm too blunt to run for office. When you hear reality, it's so harsh." Another commented, "I'm too opinionated. That's why I wouldn't be good." One community leader indicated that people who attend community councils "want information, not lobbying." Finally, a female elected official who had attempted to recruit another woman into running for office indicated that the potential candidate said, "I don't want to be with the people in suits, I want to be with the real people."

During interviews, current and former elected officials also identified separation between community space and overt political space. Political party activists, one elected official observed, do not attend the community council meetings – at least the Democratic Party activists. "I don't know that community councils are the catapult because there hasn't been a formal pathway to run for office with the community councils. So it's not

acknowledged. The institutional bridge isn't stated or clearly articulated." People, community members or guests, also frequently are corrected to not talk about political parties, or the conversation will abruptly shift to another topic when party politics are raised in meetings. "That's how you function in a neighborhood, you respect people's religions, parties." "Community councils are authorities on [nonpartisan] city elections." They push back on city elections when party affiliation is raised. From my own political experience (see Chapter 1), during partisan elections like for state office, party affiliation is typically raised during meetings, but only as part of an introductory biographical bullet point, not as a cornerstone of identity. Yet the parties are the groups that are the campaign machines. One elected official noted, "Parties know how to run campaigns. Campaigns are like running a small business." Parties can bring people "up to speed on neighborhood issues." "Neighborhood issues shouldn't be partisan. You have two people living next to each other, this would be a problem."

Community council participation influenced about half of those who ran for office in their decision to run for office. Women were overrepresented in comparison to their actual numbers holding elected office in a district including Salt Lake City. Community councils helped teach people about issues, recognize their own leadership skills, and fueled interest for more activism. Community council participation primarily operated in combination with other motivating factors such as family background, issue advocacy, and participating in political parties. For those that did not run for office, reasons such as work and family time commitments and perceived potential effectiveness were offered. The most surprising contributing factor of not wanting to run was the viewpoint that community council space was authentic and political space was not. There was no

institutional bridge clearly identified to build a cohesive pathway from one territory to another.

Chapter Summary

Individual histories, personalities, demographics, and neighborhood group culture influenced experiences with community councils in such a way that each individual's encounters were unique. People found out about councils in a myriad of ways, but most notable tended to be person-to-person contact about the meetings as opposed to a mailer or electronic notification. Issues of interest additionally inspired people to participate, and if people did not feel that their participation actually mattered to the government decision-making or neighborhood action, they would not continue their involvement long-term. Differences in meeting times, dates, and locations impacted how feasible it was to attend, and culture within the meeting including the personalities influenced the degree to which community members would engage, if at all.

All but two of those interviewed did not bring up the issue of gender, without prompt, as possessing any sort of impact on how one would engage with a community council members and operate within a council meeting structure. Yet when the issue was raised, all but two of the interviewees acknowledged that men and women could and had experienced the meetings in varying ways. Sometimes, interviewees characterized the space as being especially conducive to female participation because of the physical and issue proximity of community councils to homes and families – an area traditionally affiliated with female expertise. Women's knowledge and confidence of their experiences in the neighborhood setting materialized in three different community councils I observed

as political courage. Women challenged government official assertions that contradicted the women's understandings of neighborhood life.

Personalities also added a component to the desire to participate, *much more than was anticipated through the literature*. Some people just did not like others who attended or felt like they were not included as part of the in-crowd. Cultural preferences about who was acceptable and who was not were reinforced by microaggressions, particularly in terms of race or ethnicity as well as cliques. Gendered microaggressions, however, raised during meetings were publicly challenged; White women, despite being a minority, still were more welcome into the community council meetings than people of color. At the very least, community council members were more aware of actions and statements that might be discriminatory towards women.

For those community members that did attend, community councils did seem to empower them by building skill sets to navigate government, providing an opportunity to utilize their authentic voices, and offering them a venue and partnerships to create community change. For some men and women, the question of community council as a pathway to elected office was irrelevant; community councils were not perceived as political spaces, they were part of an authentic sphere of family, home, and neighbors and did not intersect with politics or elections—except to defend against intrusions into the community. Many enjoyed them because they were not about politics, and they intentionally chose to make their mark on the world in that way. About half of those who ran for office attributed community council participation as a necessary component in their decision to put their name on a ballot, *when this participation was coupled with other activities including participation in political parties or advocacy groups*.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Can taking part in Salt Lake City's community council system politically empower women? Can community council participation serve as an entry point or portion of a path for women to run for elected office? My research sought to understand how community councils are situated within Salt Lake City's political systems, and the way in which individuals were transformed through engagement with the councils. Under certain combinations of predilections and conditions, community council participation *does* politically empower women, and women who ran for political office were overrepresented in their incorporation of community council participation as a portion of their pathway to elected public service. Community councils as a resource for empowerment, however, are limited by confusion about their role, their perceived lack of representativeness, and conflicting attitudes about whether or not they generate the "right" type of participation. Community councils as a partial / contributing pathway to election office additionally falls short of their full potential due, in large part, to the perception that community council space is not "political" in nature. Chapter 7 explores these findings and then identifies the implications for theory and practice.

Findings

Role Confusion

Document review, interviews, and observations all support the finding that perceptions of Salt Lake City community council role differ among individuals who participate as well as between them and government actors. The ontological dilemma materialized as mainly two different perceptions of what community councils are 1) voluntary organizations separate from the government and designed to support the neighborhood through various independent social activities and to provide a check on government policy and action and 2) voluntary neighborhood institutions that exist as a type of extension of city government and designed to serve as a conduit for city government to provide information to the community and as a channel for neighborhood preferences to be communicated to city government. These perceptions were not mutually exclusive; occasionally perceptions would overlap and would morph over time.

Role confusion surfaced unexpectedly as an issue during the research. I understood that community council systems materialized uniquely in different cities, but I had also anticipated that, within a single locale, the set of community councils would be similarly focused. From one vantage point, flexibility in definition allows an institution to provide opportunities for participants possessing diverse expectations of what they would like to achieve through the act of engaging with the community council. This elasticity, however, does not always attract dependable municipal funding or build formidable political power, particularly since both elected officials and government employees need to account for spending and policy direction. If there are no clear goals, it is difficult for participants and other stakeholders to demonstrate that community councils are achieving

any sort of outcome.

Role confusion's germaneness to empowerment additionally surprised me. Without clear expectations, clear outcomes cannot be identified, much less measured. By identifying outcomes, one may be able to articulate a sense of efficacy, such that the personal efforts extended to attend meetings and participate in projects produce a return on one's time and energy investment. When individuals do not know what they should be doing, it is difficult to determine if meaningful opportunities for empowerment are provided.

Representativeness

Problems with representational legitimacy were also evident in document review, interviews, and observations. *Salt Lake City Code* communicates that community councils should be "representative," but the term is not defined. Interviews primarily communicated an expectation of community council as a mirror of the neighborhood in which it was situated. Meeting observations and interviews did not support attendance as meeting this expectation; the overwhelming majority of attendees were White, and all community member interviewees, with the exception of one 20-year-plus resident, revealed in interviews that they were property owners. Others, however, thought about representation in terms of possessing the capacity to communicate the values and preferences of the neighborhood, regardless of the demographics of the people who actually showed up; community leaders were thought to participate the most and would be knowledgeable about neighborhood perspectives. The degree to which community councils achieved representation is beyond the scope of my research.

Too Much or too Little Participation?

Contradictory understanding of community council nature and role fueled democratic tension between ideals of robust neighborhood engagement and the “wrong kind” or the “wrong degree” of participation. This tension manifested as perceptions that 1) community councils engaged in activities they should not (e.g., challenging government decision-making); and 2) community councils did not do something they should do (e.g., recruiting racially and ethnically diverse populations). These tensions and unfulfilled expectations contributed to the decreased funding for community councils and their diluted power in the Salt Lake City code when issue-based groups were formally recognized in addition to the place-based organizations.

Some empirical studies led me to anticipate public administrative and policy maker sentiments about the “wrong kind” of participation. Harwood (2007) revealed public officials’ frustrations when community members, for example, went to the media instead of working within governmental systems. However, I was surprised in this case, when frustrations produced punitive actions by some public administrators and elected officials: publically expressed community council disagreement with city policy may have contributed to an elimination of budgetary support for the system of community councils. Moreover, I did *not* expect community members to express notions about the “wrong kind” of participation by *public officials*; this occurred when public officials did not agree with community preferences.

In interviews, policy makers and participants frequently expressed some degree of normative beliefs regarding polite, reciprocal, objective, and predictable outcomes from the neighborhood groups; both the processes within the councils and the products of

participation were idealized. When participants argued or there were vocal, even mild, personality conflicts, attendees often grew uncomfortable and sometimes would not return to the group again. When councils disagreed with policy makers, the councils were characterized by governmental elites as being ungrateful or overly controlled by their emotions. Sometimes this led to resource cuts for community councils. When policy makers disagreed with councils, the councils thought that the policy makers were out of touch with neighborhood perspectives or simply were not doing their job. Cultivating more *positive* views about conflict—as part of the normal democratic process—and teaching participants tools for how to productively navigate conflict would be helpful in establishing more realistic views about policy making and creating a more welcoming environment in which people can engage with one another.

Civic Engagement

The civic engagement findings—specifically those about the quality, equality, and perceptions of the political nature of community council participation—were also supported by all three forms of evidence. Most people interviewed appreciated and recognized the contributions community council participation made to their own empowerment; they spoke out, learned about government processes and structure, and worked with others in their community to create change. Issue interest and personal connections to current attendees primarily got people to community council meetings, but a welcoming and convenient location, time, and space as well as efficacy and friendly personalities kept people participating. Personality conflicts played a much larger role in people’s decisions to continue to engage than was anticipated in the literature. Meetings

were generally polite, but when they were not, women were the ones I most often witnessed pushing back against authority figure assertions when these comments contradicted the experiential knowledge of neighbors. Despite empirical evidence in the literature of women silencing their voices out of fear of public speaking or to support a different goal of group cordiality, women found the political courage within the community council setting to dissent.

Gender was typically raised as impacting opportunities for civic engagement only after prompting during interviews. When interviewees were asked about gender, however, they all talked about it without pause or deliberation, as if it were something that had been thought about. Most believed that experiences within the community councils were influenced by one's gender, producing both negative and positive outcomes. Observations of meetings demonstrated that microaggressions related to gender role expectations were also clearly fought against by community members, whereas those of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation were not. This pushback indicates an awareness of gender, even if it was not spontaneously raised during interviews.

Community councils within Salt Lake City provided opportunities for populations of lower SES populations to civically participate. Typically, lower SES populations do not civically engage at the same level as high SES populations. Empirical evidence indicates that community governance institutions, when organized in a local government system of participatory institutions, provide robust opportunities for lower SES populations to engage in political participation (Berry et al., 1993). My observations for this research project were consistent with that research; among the Salt Lake City neighborhoods I researched, more people participated in community council meetings

situated in lower than in higher SES neighborhoods.

Community member interviewees overwhelmingly did not view participation in neighborhood councils as a political activity; they perceived it as 1) a social gathering; 2) group protection of the neighborhood against damaging governmental and private sector actions; 3) expressions of preferences about community appearance and governmental services; and 4) opportunities to learn about government, private sector, and nonprofit program offerings that might benefit or impact their neighborhoods. “Political” was largely viewed as disingenuous and stood in direct opposition to community work and values.

Pathways to Elected Office

Interviews provided evidence related to the question of whether or not community council participation could function as part of a pathway for any individual, but particularly women, to run for public office. The self-reported information provided in interviews was either retrospective for those who had already run and prospective for those who had not; both scenarios were fraught with difficulty for interviewees and for me as an analyst. When an individual recalls a series of events and the connected thoughts and feelings, the mind fills in memory gaps with narrative that may vary from past conduct. Often people are not mindful about the journey they are on and do not have a destination in mind and, thus, recollecting such a path is difficult. By its very nature, prospective speculation is difficult because one cannot know what will happen in the future. At any given time, events and state of mind can alter a course of action.

Nevertheless, about half of those interviewed who had run for public office or

who were planning on it attributed much of the motivation to do so to their community council participation, although the action within the neighborhood group was most frequently coupled with engagement in activist organizations or political parties. Since community councils were not typically thought of as stepping stones to elected office, most could not identify a clear and intentional connection between the two.

Implications for Theory

My research allowed me the opportunity to use multiple theoretical lenses to better understand how community members engage with neighborhood democracy. These differing perspectives helped me understand complex environments and behaviors and also afforded me the opportunity to offer suggestions for theoretical development. During my research, I discovered that the empowerment, civic engagement, and candidate recruitment lenses chosen offered insight into the nature of participation through community councils, but I also identified opportunities for theory building to better explain particular facets of nuanced realities and experiences.

Empowerment

Empowerment models found in the sociological and social work literature (e.g., Patricia Hill Collins) consistently assisted in determining the landscape of power structures within and among institutions. This literature is not typically consulted in studying neighborhood governance. Using this literature, however, to parse individual empowerment journeys proved difficult. People possess varying degrees of self-awareness during different points in their lives. Determining a point in time when one

acquires a skill set or gains confidence to act can be difficult. Further examination of these approaches and the creation of more nuanced versions of theoretical expectations would be helpful. A detailed life history methodology, for example, might reveal different kinds of information about patterns of influence that led to an individual's political involvement including the decision to run for elected office.

Civic Engagement

Despite scholarly attention to neighborhood levels of democracy, several puzzles still remain. Foundationally, clarity is needed on what, exactly, a community council is. Ontological meanings primarily vacillate between councils as activist groups and councils as “low barrier” arms of municipal government, and these definitions can change based on a context of issues. Explanations need to better account for this movement as well as the degree to which council characteristics and roles may be formally institutionalized in organizational documents and governmental code. More theoretical development is additionally needed to better understand the ways in which different groups interface with institutions of neighborhood governance and how realities of intersectional identities may influence these occurrences. Our humanity, specifically our individual histories and personalities, plays a distinct role in the experiences individuals have while engaging community councils and the subsequent functionality and outcomes generated by each council as well as the entirety of the system. Theory needs to be able to better account for this humanness present within our institutional systems.

The gendering of space additionally lacks consideration within civic engagement

models. Some interviewees designated neighborhood council spheres as “female” domains because 1) they lacked power, so men were subsequently not as present in the space such that women filled the participatory holes; and 2) they focused on finite neighborhood issues that were better known to women because home, children, and family were their areas of expertise. The unexpected observations of women vociferously challenging established authority figures were impressive and challenge passive theories of typical female engagement; yet if elected officials, political parties, municipal governments, and individual actors characterize community councils as nonpolitical, then the speech and action that occurs within those spaces function as powerless expressions. Somehow models of engagement need to be able to bridge this perceived dichotomy of space if low-barrier, community-situated institutions are to function as empowerment spaces, including areas for political office recruitment.

Candidate Recruitment

Research conducted on the ways in which candidates are recruited tends to draw from multiple theoretical perspectives, sociological, psychological, and rational choice. This research primarily focuses on the progression or “pipelines” of offices that individuals who seek higher office will often follow. People’s journeys to elected office are more accurately described as meandering pathways. Individual identities, histories, and group affiliations combine to influence these movements that result in decisions to run for office.

The spaces in which an individual’s recruitment occur need to be understood in terms of their gendering. For many, community councils are not deemed “political”

because they are neighborhood-focused and partisan issues are not welcomed. Political party strategies for partisan office do not typically include these spaces. Any subsequent empowerment opportunities for community council women vis-à-vis elected office then go unrealized. Much of the activity within the neighborhood council *is* political, however, insofar as people negotiate their ideals of good community life – a very necessary skill set for an elected official competing with colleagues to achieve public policy goals. Scholars and policy makers must be able to transform our typical expectations of spaces that engage in politics and the manner in which this behavior is expressed in order to provide opportunities for the underrepresented to meaningfully engage within our governmental systems.

Contributions to Public Governance

The research findings informed not only my understanding of the value and limitations of certain theoretical constructs but also identified potential prescriptive administrative practices that can facilitate community council capacity building and women's political empowerment. As an ideal, robust neighborhood council systems provide low barrier opportunities for community members to learn about government, to actively influence the identity and direction of their community, and to develop individualized skill sets that allow them to better navigate democracy and its institutions. Government, in turn, is better when a wider breadth of people are engaged in civic activities because policy outcomes better align with a shared vision for all members of society. Moreover, greater accountability of government decision-makers to councils builds trust and increases individual investment in group success.

Unfortunately, the current status of Salt Lake City's community council system largely lacks vigor and falls short of its potential to contribute to more equitable and vibrant government. Role confusion and perceived illegitimacy of the neighborhood councils as representative bodies contribute to these failings. Formal delineations in code should align with how community councils function in practice; councils act as *both* grass roots extensions of government and as separate watch dog groups on government behavior. Nuanced codified language can and should be crafted to adequately describe these entities and manage expectations about their roles and responsibilities, which, in turn, will assist with addressing the legitimacy challenge. Because government and community actors are conflicted over the community council definition, expectations surrounding the degree to which these neighborhood level organizations "represent" the hearts and minds of community members differ. Conceptualization of representation generally falls into one of two categories: 1) councils need to visibly mirror the population demographics within the organizational boundaries; or 2) council attendees, particularly leadership, no matter their demographic characteristics, need to be able to articulate the diverse experiences and needs present within the organization's boundaries. Ideally, representation should be cultivated from both of those perspectives. Even if community council membership exactly mirrored the demographics of an area, human needs and aspirations extend beyond those demographic characteristics. Community councils need to have an awareness of the multiplicity of people who live in their neighborhoods.

Educating community council members about how location, space, and operations impact breadth, quality, and equality of meeting attendance would assist them in outreach

and retention efforts. Education should be offered from multiple sources and with multiple methods so that a diverse group of people can connect with information, and so that city government provides tools for empowerment as opposed to venues for co-optation into current public practices and policy goals. Nonprofit entities such as the American Civil Liberties Union or the local community college could operate under government contract to provide instruction on various aspects of municipal governance, such as land use law and planning commission processes, or strategies for introducing and advocating changes to city code. In this approach, city government participates in the educational process through funding, but is distanced enough so as to not be in a position of co-opting participants such that they only act in ways “agreeable” to city policy makers.

Community council members volunteer their time and energy to participate in each neighborhood group, and each individual must balance this engagement with other life responsibilities such as work and family. Municipal financial and staffing resources, such as grants or governmental ombudsmen, should be examined for their potential to expand the capacity of each group to recruit participants with a wide variety of background, governmental knowledge, and of professional and personal obligations. If not, group participants will self-select to those who have the available time and stamina to engage, and opportunities will narrow for many potential members. Community organizations whose members already possess skill sets, time, and energy that allow them to more easily impact their neighborhoods will be at an advantage over others, and inequities between Salt Lake City neighborhoods will be perpetuated. A council membership largely composed of retired attorneys, for example, would have more

capacity to attend government hearings at multiple times of the day and would have potentially more experience at grant writing or soliciting sponsorship dollars from businesses within the council boundaries than would a council primarily filled by young working class families with small children.

Finally, intentional efforts need to be made to link community councils with other types of nonprofit, advocacy, and political organizations so that members may benefit from a multitude of connections and resources that compose Salt Lake City's civic landscape. These connections would enhance community council resiliency, generate opportunities to build strategic alliances to acquire resources and policy goals, and provide more venues through which an individual may be recruited or encouraged to potentially run for political office.

While important to the vibrancy of government and empowerment of individuals, community council revitalization is not a panacea. It is necessary to empowering communities to create clear citizen engagement strategies and processes *within* government so as to transform public opinion into policy decisions and action that benefit the entirety of the city, not just individual neighborhoods. In addition, if community councils are to be loci for expression of individual voice and participatory inspiration, then it is also necessary to change community expectations of agreement and dissent, and provide informational and skill-building tools for participants to comfortably and respectfully disagree. Finally, as citizens, we also need to demand from our policy-makers an understanding of, and functionality within, shared power settings so that they embrace independence and incongruity from within the councils. These public steward

skill sets will welcome new voices and new ideas from individuals within the council context and from the community council system.

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