

EMOTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE
Research, Theory, and Practice

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Owning Up or Opting Out: The Role of Emotions and Identities in Issue Ownership

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[T]here can be no concerted action between persons unless they have cognitively structured the given conditions in somewhat similar ways....But social action cannot get started on the basis of intellectual appreciation of such data alone; there must also be a degree of affective consensus with respect to the aims and needs of the participants (Asch, 1959: 375).

Organizations and members within them face a wide range of issues that are potential initiators of action. At any one point in time, there are far more potential issues (developments, events, or trends) that could capture members' attention, or engage their interest, than there is attention or interest available to give these issues. The research reported in this chapter seeks to answer basic questions in organizational studies: Why are some issues seen as "belonging" to organizational members while others are not? Why do some organizational members experience a strong connection and motivation to act on some issues yet not on others? Such questions are very pertinent to social issues because individuals' "possession" of and responses to such issues are discretionary or optional in many organizations. Social issues are defined very broadly as any event, development, or trend emanating from the organization's social or political environment that affects an organization's performance.

Social issues are sometimes recognized as important because they affect the organization's ability to acquire valued inputs. For example, education and child care are increasingly viewed as important social issues for organizations as characteristics of the U.S. labor force, making the attraction of qualified labor increasingly difficult (Goodstein, 1994; Johnston, 1987). Sometimes decision-makers confront social issues in the effective delivery of organizational outputs. For example, the concern with environmentalism, or "the value that is placed on the presentation and enhancement of the natural environment" (Hart, 1997; Shrivastava, 1995), has prompted organizational changes in product design to increase product acceptability. Finally, organizations may confront social issues in the conduct of their transformation process, where in the provision of a service, or the production of a product, a social issue directly impinges on the work of organizational members. For example,

decision-makers in organizations involved in the tourism and transportation industries are intensely concerned with the rising number of homeless persons seeking access to public space—a situation that industry members believe directly and indirectly affects their capacity to deliver quality service (e.g., Alderson, 1987). This chapter develops insight into how organizational members deal with social issues that affect their transformation process.

In particular, we focus on developing a deeper understanding of how members' emotional reactions to and interpretations of a social issue work in ways that promote or retard a sense of ownership. From a case analysis of a public library system's struggle with a social issue—the presence of homeless persons in their libraries—we build a framework for understanding the conditions that encourage issue ownership. Issue ownership is a concept that arose from our comparative theme analysis. It is a theme that captures very different ways that organizational members talked about the library's connection to an issue. On the one hand, members talked in terms that indicated feelings of possession with respect to some issues, while talking in ways that indicated feeling little or no ownership about others. When an issue is fully owned, there is motivation for individuals' actions. When it is not, there is little if any action by organizational members. In this study, the library system fails to fully own the homelessness issue.

In short, our analysis reveals how emotional responses (e.g., intensity and valence) as well as cognitive connections (or disconnections) between members' social identities for two different issues serve to either facilitate or hinder members' actions toward the issues. By better understanding issue ownership, we deepen understanding of how organizational members' connections with and reactions to issues may translate into members' responses on those issues.

THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT: SETTING THE STAGE

Our study builds directly on research on issue interpretation in organizations and its links to patterns of action. We made three major assumptions in framing this study. First, we assumed that understanding how individuals in organizations respond to issues requires understanding how organizational members interpret issues. Meyer's (1982) study of hospitals' responses to a doctors' strike; Milliken's (1990) study of college administrators' responses to a key demographic trend; Thomas, Clark, and Gioia's (1993) study of sensemaking, change, and performance in hospitals; Gioia and Thomas's (1996) study of sensemaking and change in universities and colleges; and Ginsberg and Venkatraman's (1992) studies of tax filing businesses' responses to new technological trends all suggest that interpretive processes are critical in determining when and how organizations respond to issues that emanate from their internal and external environments.

Second, based on previous research (e.g., Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Porac, Thomas & Baden-Fuller, 1989; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997), we assumed that social identities are an important cognitive reference point for understanding how members interpret and respond to issues that arise in organizational settings. Social identities are those aspects of an individual's self-concepts that are derived from group membership and social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Turner, 1987). Consistent with Weick (1995:18), we assume that interpretation is part of sensemaking, and that sensemaking is grounded in identity construction.

Finally, we assumed that social issues would evoke strong emotional reactions from organizational members. This expectation arose from Dutton and Dukerich's (1991) study of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's response to the

issue of homeless persons frequenting their operating facilities. While the Dutton and Dukerich study looked at how a single "hot" issue was processed over time in a single organization, this study utilizes a comparative framework to build theory. We assumed that social issues would be "hotter" than operational issues, where hotter meant that the issue evoked a stronger or more intense emotional reaction than a "cooler," less emotional issue. Ashford (1998) suggests that hot issues are more evaluatively charged, and how charged an issue is depends on the context. Our study explicitly compares the processing of a hotter and a cooler issue in a single context and uses the revealed differences to build theory.

Our research is intended to contribute to three veins of research in organizational behavior and theory. First, for theorists of organizational adaptation, the study was intended to open the black box that describes how members' issue interpretations contribute to potential action or nonaction within organizations. While previous research has contributed substantially to establishing that an empirical link exists, much work remains to be done to understand the what and the how of this empirical connection. We suggest that both emotion and cognition play key roles in the interpretation process. Second, and more specifically, our analysis contributes to the understanding of how emotions impact members' interpretive processes. While some treatments of the role of emotions in sensemaking processes exist (c.f., Weick, 1995), there have been relatively few empirical studies that examine how members' feelings impact how they see and understand their organizations (see Pratt & Barnett, 1997 as a notable exception). We propose that the intensity and clarity of emotions play a key role in members seeing issues as not belonging to an organization. Third, the research extends the theoretical and empirical work done on social identities in organizations and their links to sensemaking and organizational behavior (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989, 1996; Kramer, 1993; Pratt, 1998, 1999; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). In this study we elaborate the importance of several social identities (e.g., perceived organizational, ideal, and professional) in creating momentum for action on two issues.

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT: AN AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM

Only the public library provides an open and nonjudgmental environment in which individuals and their interests are brought together with the universe of ideas and information...Public libraries freely offer access to their collections and services to all members of the community without regard to race, citizenship, age, education level, economic status, or any other qualification or condition. Public libraries continue to be of enduring importance to the maintenance of our free democratic society. There is no comparable institution in American life (Public Library Principles Task Force, 1982).

We chose to examine libraries because they are organizations that frequently confront social issues, such as what to do about the persistent presence of homeless individuals, despite the fact that the employees who work there have not been trained or prepared to deal with these issues. This chapter explores how library members "see," "feel," and respond to the "homelessness issue" as a way to understand why certain issues are owned or disowned by organizations. The story is enriched by comparing this same process for another strikingly different issue—inadequate library space. To better understand the library system's struggle with these issues, however, it is helpful to understand the broader institutional context.

Libraries are theoretically interesting contexts because they are hybrid or "dual-identity" organizations (Albert & Whetten, 1985). On the one hand, they are organizations that fulfill the normative identity of being the people's university and guardian of society's wisdom. On the other hand, their utilitarian identity encourages them to become technically efficient distributors of knowledge. In this vein, American public libraries have traditionally served three societal functions: archiving knowledge, disseminating information, and educating the masses (McChesney, 1984; Reith, 1984; Rogers, 1984). A fourth function, social advocacy, has also been viewed as a library function, though this has been hotly debated (Reith, 1984; Rogers, 1984; Simmons, 1985). Many libraries and librarians prefer to see themselves as nonjudgmental disseminators of knowledge (Rogers, 1984; Woodrum, 1988). In our study, we see the conflict over the legitimacy of this last function evidenced in how library members struggle to understand and respond to the issue of homeless persons who frequent the library system's buildings.

As the quote opening this section suggests, the central orientation of libraries is service. Many librarians agree that the delivery of this service should be extended to all patrons regardless of gender, race, color, or creed (Greiner, 1989; Grof, 1984; Rogers, 1984; Schmitt, 1989; Simmons, 1985; Vocino, 1976). In order to be available to all possible patrons and to attract nonusers, libraries tend to be safe and inviting and have been described as "havens" or "refuges" (Greiner, 1989; Simmons, 1985; Spolar, 1989). This safe and nonjudgmental environment has made public libraries particularly attractive to the homeless, latchkey children, and other persons whom libraries often categorize as "problem patrons" (Brashear, Maloney & Thornton-Jarunge, 1981; Grotophorst, 1979; Kleberg, 1982; Rhodes, 1983; Simmons, 1985).

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: HOMELESSNESS AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES

In all issues you're dealing with human beings most of the time, but (with homeless) you're dealing with people in their worst light (Staff Member, Grace Libraries).

The issue of the presence of homeless persons has been particularly difficult for public service organizations such as libraries. With increasingly larger numbers of homeless seeking shelter in public libraries, libraries have been forced to confront this social issue as a part of their everyday service delivery (Grof, 1984; Hanley, 1992; Rhodes, 1983; Simmons, 1985; Woodrum, 1988). While some libraries have responded to the presence of homeless by expanding their services, many others refuse to take action, vehemently denying that they are social service agencies (Vocino, 1976). Public libraries, as we will argue, vary considerably in the degree to which they own or fail to own the issue of homeless persons. They also vary greatly in the magnitude and type of response to this issue. For example, Table 9.1 provides concrete examples of the broad range of responses that libraries have made to this issue as captured in accounts contained in librarians' professional journals. Where possible, the table cites examples of particular places that have taken specific actions.

Table 9.1 describes the range of library responses that vary both in the target of the response (internal or external to the library's premises) and in the major goals of the response (e.g., to contain the numbers of homeless, equipping librarians to deal with the issue, advocacy for the issue, and modification of the library's mission). Thus, at the time this study was conducted there were several different and widely known responses that libraries could elicit to the homelessness issue.

Table 9.1 Types of Library Responses to the Homelessness Issue

LOCUS OF SOLUTION			
		<i>Internal to Library</i>	<i>External to Library</i>
MAJOR GOALS IN THE RESPONSE	Contain the number of homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security guards who monitor and control problem patrons Limiting access to library spaces 	
	Equip librarians to deal with the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using mental health officials to train librarians to deal with problem patrons Instituting written policies for how to deal with "problem patrons" (e.g., Ann Arbor, MI; Morristown, NJ; Quincy, MA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train staff to deliver reading programs at shelters or day centers for homeless (e.g., San Francisco, CA; Milwaukee, WI)
	Advocacy for the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of a community room or legitimate space for homeless person (e.g., Haverhill, MA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate and coordinate community response to the issue (e.g., Tulsa, OK; Dallas, TX)
	Modify the mission of the library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redefine library as shelter for homeless during the day (e.g., New Britain, CT) 	

The current study, however, attempts to explain the response of one library system to the homelessness issue. Specifically, by examining how members interpreted the presence of homeless persons in their library system, we gain insights into the conditions that foster or hinder issue ownership.

METHODS

Our goal was to generate and build theory, making a case study methodology particularly appropriate (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1984). We sought information about the setting we examined, and collected data from multiple sources from within this context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Jick, 1979).

The Setting: The Grace Library System

The research setting is the Grace Library System, a district library system serving both the city and township of a small Midwestern city.¹ The library system has been growing fairly steadily at a rate of 10% growth in titles per year. The library system consists of a main library and one branch building. The main library is located in the city and occupies a renovated post office, which has been designated an historical landmark. The main library employs 13 full-time workers including the library director, and is spread out over two floors: circulation and reference

departments as well as staff offices are located on the main floor, while the children's library, audio-visual department, and staff lounge are located in the basement. Because of its physical location in the downtown area, the main library assumes many of the problems of the inner city, including a shortage of parking space for the patrons, as well as the persistent presence of homeless persons.

The branch library shares a building with a township fire department and is located near a residential neighborhood. The branch is very small, employing only three full-time workers and occupying only two rooms on a single floor. The larger library room contains staff desks and all of the books, while the smaller room doubles as a work area for staff and as a reading room for children. The branch is semiautonomous: while the head librarian is largely responsible for ordering books and overseeing daily operations, she still must consult with the director in the main library on budgets and other major decisions.

Employees described the Grace Libraries as being warm and friendly. Although members of the branch and the main libraries felt that they lacked the physical resources afforded other libraries, the staff was very proud of the service they provided and many considered their co-workers to be members of an extended family.

The Design: A Comparative Study of Two Issues at Grace Libraries

In this study, we were explicitly interested in organizational members' responses to social issues. We relied on pilot interviews with individuals who had differing perspectives on the library system—the library director, a newly elected board member, and two staff members—to determine which social issues were currently facing the library system. Our interviews revealed that the presence of homeless patrons in the library was by far the most salient social issue.

According to the library director, the presence of homeless² persons affected the libraries on almost a daily basis. At the time we conducted the study, two factors had intensified individuals' sense that the homelessness issue was "a problem." First, the issue was salient because there had been several recent incidents where individuals considered to be homeless were given money by the library director. Members seemed troubled about what this behavior meant for the library system's position on the issue. Second, the library system had purchased its first set of new furniture in 20 years. According to our informants, the addition of the new furniture heightened the visibility of the homelessness issue. As one staff member described this connection: "The new furniture is covered with cloth and there are very strong feelings from the staff that this is a terrible mistake because dirty, smelly people come into the library, and do unhygienic things in the chairs, and the chairs will be foul and will have to be thrown out."

As we have mentioned, we believed that social issues would be emotionally "hot" issues. Because we were concerned that reactions to social issues might be different than other "cooler" issue types, we decided to examine an operational issue that was salient but was very different from the homelessness issue. The addition of this contrasting case prevented us from "sampling along the dependent variable." If we had simply studied the social issue, we would not have been certain which interpretations were central and which were extraneous to owning or disowning issues.

As with the homelessness issue, the issue of space limitations was a dominant concern of library employees. The Grace Libraries were not only hampered by the lack of physical space, members also complained that much of the libraries' existing space was neither functional (due to cluttering) nor aesthetically pleasing (mostly

due to antiquated furniture and equipment). At the time of the interviews, the main library was renovating to both upgrade its children's library and to improve the library's appearance. The director estimated that the main library had one-sixth of the physical space they needed based on the population they served, and expansion options were limited due to the library's designation as an historical site.

The body of this chapter explains the differences in how members made sense of and responded to the issues of homeless patrons and inadequate space. Our central thesis is that the complex set of emotional and cognitive reactions to an issue makes it easier or more difficult for a member to own an issue.

Data Collection

Our data collection consisted of gathering primarily qualitative data and some quantitative data with regard to the library setting and the two issues. We utilized four major data sources.

1. *Semistructured Interviews.* The primary data sources were an exhaustive set of intensive, semistructured interviews conducted at the Grace Libraries over a period of six months. Informants included all full-time employees at the main and branch libraries ($n = 16$). Informants were primarily female: only the library director and two staff members were male. Informants' average tenure was seven years (the mode and median for tenure were both four years), though individuals were employed at the Grace Libraries from three months to 27 years.

The interview guide targeted five clusters of variables: (1) perceived attributes of the library profession; (2) perceived characteristics of the Grace Libraries context; (3) interpretations and actions on the homelessness issue; (4) interpretations and actions on the space issue; and (5) comparison of homeless and space issues. A sampling of actual wording of the questions in each of these clusters is contained in the Appendix at the end of the chapter. The time length of interviews typically ranged from one to two hours, with one researcher asking questions while the other took notes. All of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

2. *Unstructured Observations.* Throughout the study, both researchers conducted observations of the librarians and patrons. These observations helped us see the daily work done at the Grace Libraries, as well as facilitated our understanding of how each issue was perceived and handled. These observations typically followed interview sessions, and were conducted in an unobtrusive manner. Observation periods typically lasted between one half and one full hour. These observations were not coordinated with anyone at either library branch; however, some observations were made during the morning and some during afternoon library hours.

3. *Measurement Scales.* In addition to the semistructured interview questions, we used a quantitative measure to gauge issue intensity. Similar to the study conducted by Bourgeois and Eisenhardt (1988), this construct was identified prior to data gathering and was used to (a) provide a more accurate measurement of the construct; and (b) to establish firmer empirical grounding if the construct was found to be important (Eisenhardt, 1989: 536). We measured the construct of emotional intensity or felt hotness of an issue using a measure utilized by Dutton and Dukerich (1991). When discussing each issue we had members indicate the "hotness" of the issue using a thermometer that was drawn on a card and calibrated from 0 to 100 degrees. After making the judgment, we asked each informant explain his or her rating.

4. *Archival Data.* We also collected policies, brochures, newspaper articles, and other written documentation central to the Grace Libraries. These documents included

policies for handling "problem patrons," information brochures about the library system, as well as other written material about the library system and its history.

Data Analysis

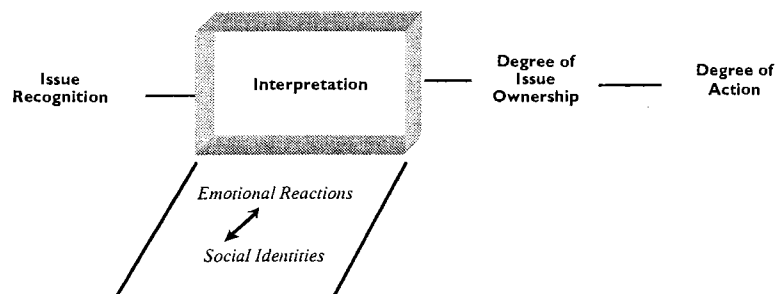
Data analysis is central to building theory from case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). Following the iterative process recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Miles and Huberman (1984), we traveled back and forth between the data and an emerging structure of theoretical arguments. This analysis utilized three major steps.

Step 1. Coding information using a contact summary form. Following the procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984), we used a contact summary form for recording the main themes revealed in each interview. We defined themes as recurrent topics of conversation and/or actions mentioned by the informants in an attempt to capture central ideas or relationships in and across interviews (Bjorkgren, 1989). To control for comprehensiveness in our theme analysis, one researcher (an author) would originate a contact summary form for each informant based on a reading of the interview transcript. Next, another researcher (the other author) would read through the transcript and check code it to make sure key points were included and classification of the themes was identical. If there were discrepancies in the coding of themes (which occurred less than 10% of the time), the researchers discussed the themes until they achieved agreement.

Step 2. Developing a complete theme list. The contact summary forms for the 16 interviews generated 28 general themes and numerous subthemes that we collapsed into six major groupings based on a very general classification of theme content. For example, "Staff Exposure to and Assessment of Homeless" was a general theme with three subthemes that were grouped under the general classification of "The Homelessness Issue." Themes were used for two purposes: (1) to identify commonalities in interpretation and action on the two issues among the libraries' informants; and (2) to suggest how issue interpretations and emotional reactions differed between the homelessness and space issues.

Step 3. Building a broad conceptual structure. Once themes were generated, we brainstormed alternative conceptual structures that described how these themes related to one another and to available organizational theory. Once we identified a possible structure, we reexamined the data in terms of their fit and misfit with the emergent framework (c.f., Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The structure described in this study was the one that explained the relationships among the themes in the clearest, most parsimonious manner. These findings are summarized in Figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1 Unpacking the "Black Box" of Interpretation



FINDINGS: EMOTIONS, IDENTITIES, AND ISSUE OWNERSHIP

Our findings, as illustrated in Figure 9.1, suggest a sensemaking process whereby issues, once noticed, are interpreted in light of salient social identities and strong emotional reactions. The heavy black lines around interpretations signify the black box that the study intends to open. These interpretations, in turn, lead to conditions of issue ownership (and ultimately, to individual action). The general framework is consistent with Blumer's (1971) insights about the construction of social problems, and on the sensemaking model identified by Daft and Weick (1984) and Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991). Moreover, similar to Weick (1995) our framework suggests that individuals' social identities are central to the sensemaking process. According to Weick (1995), all sensemaking is grounded in identity construction. To this basic model we add the idea of ownership which helps to connect sensemaking and identities to action. As individuals and organizations come to understand who they are, they become better able to understand what belongs to them (ownership) and what does not (a lack of ownership). We also posit that emotions and social identities work together in the interpretation process.

The bulk of the findings elaborate upon this model by showing how organizational members made sense of and ultimately owned the space issue, while at the same time never achieving full ownership of the homelessness issue. The comparisons serve to highlight the different emotional and cognitive reactions to these two very different issues. The case contrasts provide a descriptive basis for building a theory of how issues are owned or disowned in organizations. We begin by describing evidence of recognition, action, and ownership of the issues, then move to a more in-depth analysis of emotions and identity connections.

Recognition of the Issues

Issue recognition commonly precedes issue-related action (Blumer, 1971; Stern, 1984). Recognition of the issues by library members was a prerequisite for our study: in pilot interviews, informants identified both issues as salient for the Grace Libraries. These pilot interviews, however, did not assess the extent of recognition throughout the library system. As a result, we set out to determine how many employees were aware of each issue and the level of personal exposure to each issue.

The Homelessness Issue. Exposure to the homelessness issue was a common, almost everyday occurrence. Every person interviewed volunteered at least one incident with a homeless person taking place in the libraries and close to half told us that they dealt with the homeless on a regular basis. As one librarian recalled with regard to the prevalence of homeless patrons in their library: "A number of people who do come in here are obviously some kind of street people or people who are not fully competent and act strangely. You can tell by how they dress or by their actions. I consider it a pretty significant number...libraries are like magnets they drift to."

Staff at the main branch told vivid stories of how they had to deal with homeless individuals while working. These personal accounts were all unsolicited. Most often informants mentioned these encounters when responding to the question, "What does the homelessness issue mean to you personally?" All of these encounter stories illustrate that the majority of library staff recognized the issue personally and vividly.

The encounter stories could be classified into three types, each varying in degree of perceived threat experienced by the members: (1) encounters that were perceived as dangerous and frightening; (2) encounters that were annoying, and (3) encounters that were harmless but nevertheless problematic for a library's smooth functioning.

Table 9.2 presents sample quotes that illustrate the three encounter types. The encounter stories' contents illustrate the staff's acute awareness of the homelessness issue.

The Space Issue. Stories about exposure to the space issue in the library were also prevalent. When describing the space issue, informants declared "not enough"; and space conditions were often seen as "unattractive," "cramped," "cluttered," and "stifling." Most also mentioned that the lack of space made their work more difficult, and many saw it limiting the quality of the library system's services and programs. To illustrate: "It is just impossible right now [to get by with the current amount of space in the main library]. It's very frustrating for everybody concerned. You can just look around you. If you were in the Bookmobile office—you saw how tacky that looked with all the boxed piled upon boxes, piled upon boxes. There's no place to put them."

Table 9.2 Range of Personal Encounters with Homeless Patrons

<p>Frightening and Potentially Dangerous</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Mr. Touchy</i></p> <p>"We called him 'Mr. Touchy' because he liked to go like this [touch person on shoulder] and they finally arrested him in here with a gun and a knife. He liked me. He even brought me a box of candy one time ... but when things like that happen you get very cautious." <i>Wally</i> "I'm not in favor of [having to wear] name tags ... because I have had [bad] things happen to me. You know when a guy comes up and you don't want to talk with him anymore ... but he comes up and has your name on something he cut out somewhere and it has your name's biblical meaning on it, and there is some blood on it ... it kind of concerns you."</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Smoker</i></p> <p>"She was standing up front and then she looked at me and I said [again] 'you can't smoke' ... and she just took the cigarette and put it out in her hand."</p>
<p>Annoying</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Rita</i></p> <p>"Rita [one of our regulars] was in yesterday. I hadn't seen her around and she told me she was in prison and she just got out. She told me she was living on the street. My sister went to school with her. I know her personally. [She comes in the library] and will yell and scream at me ... she's caught me going out the door before. And she's caught me in the parking lot. I just tell her I don't have any money. I'll give her a cigarette."</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Larry and a "Regular"</i></p> <p>"Larry approached me on the way to the bank, and told me to give him money. I told him I don't have any and he goes 'Well I know when you get paid.' Even when I went down to the store that same day, someone else [who frequents the library] approached me ... she approached me at the store."</p>
<p>Harmless but Problematic</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Flipper</i></p> <p>"We have one lady who comes in ... we call her 'the flipper,' I don't even know her name. [We call her the flipper] because she takes a big stack of books and she simply flips through the pages—she doesn't read the books, she just flips through all the pages. She always says 'hello,' she is very nice, she does nothing to harm anyone—she just sits there and flips."</p>

As a result of physical limitations, space was seen as an extremely valuable (and possibly volatile) resource at Grace Libraries. As one informant told us: "People around here tend to guard their storage space like a she lion guards her cubs.... You don't infringe on somebody else's space."

Patterns of Issue Action

Despite recognition of both issues, we found that the library staff of Grace Library consistently acted only upon the space issue. Actions toward the homelessness issue, by contrast, were sporadic or nonexistent.

The Homelessness Issue. In our interviews and in our observations, we noticed that some individuals did, at times, act on behalf of the homeless patrons in limited ways. The director, for example, sometimes gave money to homeless patrons, while at other times asked them to leave. The circulation desk worker would sometimes call a social service agency, and at other times would call the police if a homeless patron was perceived as disturbing other patrons. Finally, librarians working on the first floor would sometimes wake homeless patrons if they fell asleep at a table, but not at other times. In all cases, however, informants talked about being inconsistent or sporadic in their actions. To illustrate, while the library had some general guidelines to deal with "problem patrons," the employees who knew these guidelines existed (several were unsure or unaware) felt that they were applied very inconsistently to homeless persons in the library. As one informant mentioned:

I believe that if you're going to lay down rules you should stick to it and not bend it. If you're going to bend one rule, you might as well bend them all. Why have rules if you're not going to live by them? Since I have been working here, we have had problems with the homeless people. Several have been banned from the library—not indefinitely, but 6 months at a time. [But one person was] kicked out at one time and the next day he was let back in here. He has threatened a staff member just before and he went and cried on somebody's shoulder and they let him in the next day. I don't believe in that. If you ban him from the library, let's stand and stick to it—at least until you see an improvement.

Whereas some staff acted sporadically toward the homeless, other staff members did not act at all. To illustrate, most of these latter informants said that they "ignored homeless patrons" or "let them be." In addition, none mentioned the homeless during staff meetings, or attempted to act upon the issue in their capacity as an organizational member.

The Space Issue. Most librarians spoke about taking concerted action toward finding a solution for the space issue. To begin, the space issue was a continuous topic of weekly staff meetings, and there were attempts made to document the extent of the issue. To illustrate, the director researched the amount of square feet that the current libraries should have based on the number of patrons in the area and used this statistic to build support from the board about plans for a new building. Moreover, staff members detailed their personal efforts to move boxes, books, and other materials around so that the library could better use their space. One talked about how they had to use part of her office for storage. She commented: "We have things pigeonholed in every place imaginable in the building.... We even borrowed space from next door—storage space.... You come in here and you look at my shelf [which is filled with boxes and papers] and my office even...it's just a matter of storage space."

Patterns of Issue Ownership

As noted, despite the recognition and perceived impact of both issues, organizational members consistently acted only upon the space issue. We attempt to explain this connection (or lack thereof) between recognition and action with the concept of issue ownership. Following Blumer (1971), Stern (1984), and Gusfield (1989) we define issue ownership within organizations as an individual's feelings that an issue "belongs" to an organization and is a legitimate focus for organizational attention and action. Issue ownership is consistent with organizational behavior researchers' (e.g., Dirks, Cummings & Pierce, 1996; Pierce, Cummings & Van Dyne, 1996), consumer researchers' (Belk, 1988, 1992), and psychologists' (e.g., Furby, 1991; James, 1890; Prelinger, 1959) insights that a state of psychological ownership describes a feeling of possession.

Ownership was used, instead of similar terms such as commitment, for two reasons. First, ownership is often described in emotional terms. One typically speaks of "feelings" of ownership rather than thoughts of ownership. Second, ownership is strongly linked to the idea of identity (cf., Pierce, Cummings & Van Dyne, 1996). According to Belk (1988, 1992), what one owns is a reflection of who one is. Ownership provides a means of extending one's identity to incorporate things outside of the physical body. Similarly, we argue that issue ownership provides a means of extending one's social identity (e.g., organizational identity) to encompass issues that may be outside of the organization's corporate "body." Thus, we chose ownership as the construct best suited to reflect new data because it seemed to best incorporate findings that both emotions and identity-related cognitions were integral to how members understood the issues facing their organization.

The Homelessness Issue. The degree of ownership of the homelessness issue was limited or nonexistent among library staff members. We have defined issue ownership as a member's belief that an issue "belongs" to an organization and is a legitimate focus for organizational action. Both components of the definition—attachment to the issue and a predisposition for action—were evidenced in some members' expressions of their orientation toward the issue.

For example, some librarians mentioned that homeless patrons "have just as much right to be in the library as any other patron." However, the homelessness issue only became "owned" when homeless patrons asked for help finding some material: "There are a few times that a homeless person will ask for some kind of material. Most times, they just come in and sit down and look at a magazine or just walk around the library mumbling to themselves. Unless they ask for a book or some kind of material...homelessness doesn't seem to be all that strongly connected to library needs [that librarians fulfill]."

Some staff also expressed some willingness to act on behalf of the homeless. However, staff members were careful to limit what actions they would perform for homeless patrons. To illustrate: "I really don't know what we could do because of the type of organization that we are. We are an information services organization around here. We can refer people to different organizations which Chris does quite frequently, to the United Way. But other than that, there's not really much we can do."

Whereas some informants took limited ownership of the issue, other staff members could be described as not owning the issue at all. For these staff members, the homelessness issue was seen as a community or national problem. Homelessness was simply not seen as a library issue, it belonged to someone else. Thus, when asked a simple question of what the homelessness issue meant to them, library staff would express the active disassociation of Grace Libraries from the issue. As one

informant summed up her feelings (and that of most of the Grace Libraries staff): "I don't see the homeless as a library issue. I mean, I don't think it is really up to us to have to deal with them or have to come up with solutions for their problems."

Second, the homelessness issue did seem to predispose these organizational members toward action. Dealing with the homelessness issue was seen as not being a legitimate focus for organizational action. As one staff member explained to us: "I don't really feel that I can get into making phone calls and that sort of thing for people, that takes up a tremendous amount of time, and I really don't think that that can be my job."

The Space Issue. In contrast, staff evidenced a strong sense of ownership for the space issue. We saw this in two data patterns. First, all staff members mentioned that the space issue was definitely a "library issue." In the words of one informant: "Well our space problem is probably our problem. It doesn't have anything to do with outside people. It's just our workspace, you know."

This attachment was also expressed when discussing the space issue in relation to organizational goals. In fact, increasing library space was the most frequently mentioned library goal.

Second, staff members indicated a predisposition to act on the space issue. All informants expressed a desire for the library to continue their efforts on behalf of the space issue, with many willing to volunteer their own labor to the cause. To illustrate, one informant felt that the staff needed to continue to push to increase public awareness of the space conditions in the library: "One thing [that] should be done [is] an intensive campaign. We do campaigns all of the time, but it is not enough! To create public awareness of the need for space, you start out with the board; then get the newspaper people in here to write articles on this and so on."

In sum, our data revealed divergent patterns of ownership: full ownership of the space issue, and limited or no ownership of the homelessness issue. The bulk of our findings attempt to "unpack" the interpretative process of our informants to explain how these patterns may have arisen.

EXPLAINING PATTERNS OF OWNERSHIP: EMOTIONAL REACTIONS AND CONNECTIONS TO SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Our analysis uncovered themes that related to similarities and differences in members' emotional responses to and interpretations of the homeless and space issues. We propose that the differences in their emotional reactions and differences in the way that the issues linked to the librarians' salient social identities explain differences in ownership of the homelessness and space issues. These different patterns of reactions are depicted in Table 9.3 and are explained below.

Differences in Emotional Reactions: Intensity, Valence, and Content of Emotions

They [the homeless and space issues] are both frustrations for providing library service to the community. But the intensity of the problem posed is radically different....The response to the homeless or related problems here with the staff is frequently an emotional situation where the response to the space issue is a more lower-level continued frustration....The homeless situation is usually a problem that can be addressed for that particular situation, then it dies down until the next time the situation arises (Interview with library director).

Table 9.3 A Summary of Findings

Imperative Dimensions						
Issues		Emotional Intensity	Emotional Valences	Content & Range of Emotions Evoked	Range of Social Identities Evoked	
		Homelessness	Warm-Cool Average 59°	Positive & Negative	Compassion & Sympathy to Hopelessness, Fear, Disgust, & Anger	Current Organizational/ Professional Identity* & Nonwork Identities*
		Space	Hot Average 83°	Positive & Negative	Hopefulness & Excitement to Annoyance & Frustration	Current Organizational/ Professional Identities & Ideal Organizational Identity

* These connections were true for only some informants. Thus, not all informants saw a connection between current organizational/professional identities and the homelessness issue, or between nonwork identities and this issue.

As the quote from the library director suggests, emotional reactions to the two issues varied greatly. These differences, summarized in Table 9.3, suggest that the two issues differed in emotional intensity, although the nature and degree of this difference surprised us. Moreover, Table 9.3 suggests that both issues elicited emotions with positive and negative valences, although the actual types of emotions evoked differed slightly.

Emotional Intensity

The Homelessness Issue. The emotional intensity of members' reactions to the issues was uncovered crudely by measuring informants' assessments of the "hotness" of the two issues using a thermometer that had a scale ranging from 0 to 100 degrees. The average temperature for the homelessness for the 16 informants was 59 degrees. The variation in individual responses was great ($SD = 26.3$), with temperature ratings ranging from as low as 23 degrees to as high as 100 degrees.

The Space Issue. We initially assumed that homelessness would be more personally involving than the space issue, and hence be experienced with greater emotional intensity. Our findings suggested the reverse to be true. The average range on the temperature scale for this issue was 83 degrees. Only one person registered a cold 30-degree temperature, while five persons topped the scale with 100 degrees. The standard deviation of the ratings was less than that of the homelessness issue ($SD = 17.6$).

Emotional Valence and Content

The Homelessness Issue. Our understanding of the valence and type of emotions evoked by the issues often came when informants were explaining their emotional intensity ratings, or explaining their reactions to the issues more generally.

Homelessness evoked emotions with both positive and negative valences. The content of these emotions varied widely and included compassion, sympathy, and empathy as well as anger, fear, and disgust. In addition, the homelessness issue was sometimes associated with feelings of hopelessness. As one librarian lamented, "the homeless will always be hopeless."

Most often, informants' accounts included simultaneous feelings of sympathy and fear, or sympathy and anger. The ambivalence in people's reactions is illustrated in one informant's struggle to explain her feelings: "I feel anger, and I feel sorry for these people because they are just wasting their lives. Life is so short. I feel sorry for these people yet I feel angry, because I know they can help themselves".

The Space Issue. The space issue also elicited emotions with both positive and negative valences. The specific content of these emotions varied slightly from the emotional reactions to the homelessness issue. In terms of negatively valenced emotions, the emotional content of staff's responses differed mostly in degree, ranging from "annoying" and "inconvenient" to "frustrating" and "demoralizing." As one informant graphically described to us:

[I] [the lack of space] impinges on you every time you breathe. We have people lining up and interfering with my secretary across the hall because we have a copier and computer in there. We have people tripping over one another and it makes people short due to the frustration. We have too much clutter in the offices....We have inadequate meeting space and it is very, very frustrating.

Positively valenced emotions involved mostly excitement and hope. It was the quality of hope that most clearly separated the two issues in the minds of some informants. To illustrate, as one staff member shared: "Well, as I have said before, it is in the hopes of correcting it. One's [the space issue] a hopeful and one's [the homelessness issue] a hopeless issue."

In sum, the biggest differences between the emotional reactions to the homelessness and the space issues concerned the intensity of the emotional reactions. There were also some differences in the range and content of emotions evoked, although both issues elicited positively and negatively valenced reactions.

Differences in Connections to Social Identities

Table 9.3 shows that the two issues varied in how they were perceived in relation to various social identities. Informants mentioned both work-related and nonwork-related social identities when discussing the two issues.

Issues and Work-Related Identities: Current Organizational/ Professional and Ideal

In our study, we asked informants about three types of work-related social identities: organizational, professional, and ideal. First, we asked individuals to describe the attributes that were central, unique, and enduring about their library as a means of surfacing the Grace Libraries' current organizational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985).³ When asking about the organizational identity, we found fairly strong consensus about two defining characteristics: (1) the library system has an excellent staff, expressed both in the way the staff gets along with one another, and in their level of technical expertise and excellence in service; and that (2) the main and

branch libraries are service-oriented. Description of these characteristics included many of the traditional roles of libraries and librarians mentioned earlier in the chapter. For example, informants clearly indicated that their mission is to serve everyone who comes into the library. However, they also saw their role as sometimes protecting "regular" library patrons from those who may be more problematic.

Second, when asked what was central, enduring, and distinctive about the library profession, staff members described the profession and its members as distinctive in having achieved a certain level of technical and social skills. As one might expect, one of the hallmarks of the library profession concerns a librarian's ability to give and find information for all who need it. Staff also explained that librarians were distinct in their ability to work with people, and to provide service to the patrons. As with the organizational identity, the librarians' sense of their professional identity included a component of high quality service. Given the overlap between the two identities, we have combined them here as the current organizational/professional identities.

Third, we asked informants to describe their ideal organizational identity. This ideal identity refers to a future-oriented vision of the organization toward which the organization is striving (cf., "mythical identity," Gioia & Thomas, 1991). Informants referred to the ideal identity when they described what a perfect library would be like.

The Homelessness Issue. As Table 9.3 illustrates, no staff member felt that the homelessness issue was connected to the ideal organizational identity. Moreover, the connection between this issue and the current organizational/professional identities revealed that homeless patrons in the library sometimes evoked competing and conflicting thoughts about what it meant to be a librarian (Festinger, 1957; Merton, 1976).

Members' ambivalence often surfaced in the Grace Libraries when patrons complained about the presence of homeless persons in the library.⁴ These incidents put the "democratic" librarian in the unenviable position of determining which patrons have more "rights" (Grof, 1984; Simmons, 1985; Vocino, 1976). As one informant explained, being put in the position of determining "who has more rights" causes discomfort, even when one "knows" how the conflict should be resolved:

One time somebody got upset because [a homeless patron] was turning the pages [of her books] too loudly.... Well, you know, I think that guy has a problem, not her...but I guess you could say that if I have to choose between a homeless person or anyone that is doing something that is upsetting the "general public," we have to go with the general public. We have to, we really don't have much choice...in this case, she had to flip a little more quietly.

The homelessness issue, therefore, made salient two different and contradictory images of what it meant to be in the library profession. On the one hand, libraries are viewed as "democratic institutions" with librarians acting as "servants to the public" (Grof, 1984; Rogers, 1984; Simmons, 1985; Vocino, 1976). On the other hand, libraries are also described as "sacred havens" of learning where librarians act as "guardians" to their "sanctuaries of knowledge" that may be "defiled" by the presence of visitors who look and smell "different" (odor of homeless patrons was a major complaint of the informants). When called upon to act on behalf of nonhomeless patrons who complained about the presence of homeless patrons, librarians often had to choose one aspect of their professional identity, the "guardians of the sanctuary", in favor of another, the "democratic public servants." Thus, the one aspect of the identity was enhanced and supported while the other was violated and denied. The result was an ambivalent connection between the homelessness issue and the organizational/professional identities.

This ambivalent connection, though, did not exist for all staff members. Rather, there were those who disconnected the homelessness issue from their organizational/professional identities by stating that dealing with the homeless was outside of the library's mission of providing information-related services. As one librarian summarized the attitudes of many of her colleagues: "The library is not a social agency... Obviously knowledge is the library's arena, and the retention of materials that would help people understand homelessness is important and so on. But the actual act of addressing the problem is outside the periphery of the library's mission."

Thus, the information gathering and disseminating function of the library delineates what the library is and is not. Many librarians were adamant that the library was not a "church" or a "social service agency" because these types of organizations provided different services to the public.

The Space Issue. For most organizational members, the space issue was seen as connected to the current organizational/professional identities because they believed that the space issue was directly inhibiting the organization's ability to achieve valued attributes of these identities, primarily through informants' perceptions of the space issue's link to service. For example, one respondent, in answering the question, "What does the space issue mean to people around here?" expressed the connection quite clearly: "The space issue means less service, actually. We could not get another person, even though we actually need another full-time librarian in the reference department and the youth department. You're never going to be able to get those because you don't have a place to put them."

Another respondent suggested the connection in her statement: "Space is very important. It provides us with the capacity to offer many more materials and have more capabilities than we have now."

Some specifically mentioned that the lack of space caused librarians' "tempers to flare," and thus decreased their effectiveness as professionals. Thus, the space issue was seen as an important but limiting factor in providing service.

For Grace Library members, the space issue was also connected to attributes that distinguished the organization's ideal identity. Nearly all of informants mentioned that the existence of adequate and attractive space was integral to their image of an ideal library. This pattern became apparent when members addressed the question, "If you could imagine an ideal library, what would it be like?" Informants' answers to this question were filled with concrete and specific accounts of a library that had distinctive space-related characteristics. For example, one member told us that an ideal library was "at least three stories tall. It would have three floors and lots of rooms." Space attributes were not only the most often mentioned attribute of an ideal library; they were also, at times, seen as one of the most critical. As another informant suggested: "First of all, the physical setting is important. There would be a quiet room, a good staff lounge and eating room—and, of course, the book selection would be very important."

And still another suggested: "[A perfect library would have] all the money it wants—to be able to do what it wants. It would be able to serve the community needs and have all the space it needs."

Given its centrality to an ideal library, space was seen as integrally connected to this ideal identity.

Issues and Nonwork-related Identities

While we did not explicitly seek information about members' lives beyond the confines of their organization and their profession, informants sometimes spoke of

how the homelessness issue evoked some "nonwork" identity such as religious or national identities. Specifically, mentions of the homelessness issue evoked a range of social identities for staff members that were not directly linked to the staff's professional or organizational identities.

The Homelessness Issue. Similar to its connection with organizational/professional identities, the homelessness issue tended to raise contradictions within, and even between, various nonwork identities for members of the library staff. As a result, the connections with these identities were ambivalent. To illustrate, a librarian mentioned how the homelessness issue evoked her Unitarian social identity: "I'm a humanist—Unitarian. So I was raised thinking [believing in] the caring for other people and wanting to improve their lives. Making life wonderful for people and stuff is life's most important goal, and it's very hard to turn away when you see people suffering."

However, her personal reaction to the homelessness issue was at odds with her religious beliefs, thus contributing to her expressed ambivalent thoughts and feelings. On the one hand, she believes that she should help alleviate suffering. On the other, she believes that she has a right to feel disdain toward homeless patrons. To illustrate the latter sentiment: "There's definitely a feeling for them [homeless] by us—an active dislike, which I think is hard to fight and I think a lot of times the feeling is not something to be fought. We have kind of a right to want these people out of here."

The homelessness issue evoked ambivalence within other individuals as well. For example, another informant told us about reactions to intoxicated homeless who enter the library:

I'm alcoholic too, but I do not drink—I know I can't. And I work every day. I get up every morning, go to work, pay my bills. And here you got people around here who don't care. Their whole day—their whole life—whatever, is drinking and I am really angry at them because they can do better with their life. Yet I feel sorry because of the helplessness. I know how it is not to have things. Yet I think you got to earn what you have. You have people handing it over to you all the time—you never know the thrill of earning stuff.

Here, the presence of homeless patrons brings up a multitude of conflicting beliefs and emotions. On the one hand, this library member knows (s)he should feel sympathy for homeless people, yet at the same time (s)he is angry with them because they should be earning their keep. This tension between wanting to help others in need while also believing that they should be doing more to improve their lives is a contradiction inherent in American culture. In the United States there are two very different theories about who is to blame for the societal issue surrounding the plight of homeless individuals.

Many scholars have noted a tendency for Americans to both blame the victim for their homelessness, as well as search for broader, social explanations (Lee, Jones & Lewis, 1990; Shinn & Weitzman, 1990). Simmons (1985), for example, has noted that ambivalence is a common reaction among many Americans who deal with issues involving poverty by attempting to differentiate among those who "choose" to be poor and homeless (i.e., are lazy), and those who do not (i.e., would rectify their situation if they could). Such differentiation is often difficult in practice, and attempts at differentiating often lead to conflicting feelings toward the encountered poor. It leaves the individual wondering, "Who is to blame for a person's misfortune?" This source of ambivalence was eloquently expressed by one of our informants when she described her reactions to homeless patrons: "You're confused.

You want to help these people but you don't want to be used by these people. You feel like 'How can I help someone who doesn't want to be helped?' It's really up to me....I have to clean up after these people and I know some of them can't help it. And the majority, they can do something with their lives" [emphasis ours].

The Space Issue. The space issue did not appear to evoke any nonwork-related identities from members of the Grace Libraries. At least in answering the interview questions, members did not offer explanations that suggested that the space issue connected to identities other than members' organizational and professional social identities.⁵

In sum, although both issues seemed to be strongly related to the current organizational/professional identities, the nature of this connection seemed somewhat different. Links to the space issue did not evoke the intense ambivalence that the homelessness issue did. Moreover, whereas the space issue was linked to the current ideal identity and not to any nonwork identities, the opposite was true for the homelessness issue.

Linking Emotions and Identities: Explaining Patterns of Ownership

Taken separately, the data linking emotions and identities to ownership give us some insight into the conditions conducive to ownership. They also raise some questions as well. To begin, while emotional intensity seems to differentiate issues that are fully owned from those that are not, the role of emotional content and valences remains less clear (see Table 9.3). Moreover, our findings regarding social identity suggest that the type of identity to which an issue is connected may make a difference regarding ownership. The space issue was unique in its connection to the ideal identity, and the homelessness issue was unique in its connection to nonwork identities. However, simply being connected to specific social identities was not enough to achieve ownership. Both issues were seen as relevant to the current organizational/professional identity for some Grace Library staff, yet only one was fully owned. Finally, none of the findings thus far help explain why the homelessness issue seemed to be owned in a limited way by some informants, and completely disowned by others.

These findings become clearer, however, when looking at emotions and identities together: that is, viewing which emotions were evoked when interpreting the issues through a specific "identity lens." These findings are illustrated in Table 9.4.

Table 9.4 illustrates the patterns of feelings and identity connections that lead to different levels or degrees of ownership: full ownership, limited ownership, and no ownership. Full ownership, such as that associated with the space issue, occurred when the issue was connected with work-related identities: current organizational/professional and ideal organizational. Moreover, we see here that the emotions evoked when viewed through the lens of each identity were consistent and clear: each identity was associated with a narrow range of emotions of the same valence. A review of our data revealed that negative emotions were consistently paired with the current organizational/professional identity, whereas feelings of hopefulness and excitement were paired with the ideal organizational identity. This clarity may account for the high average temperature ratings and low standard deviation among scores for this issue. In addition, the hopefulness and excitement associated with the ideal organizational identity may have overcome the negative emotions associated with current work-related identities and allowed ownership to be expressed (cf., Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal & Hunt, 1998; Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

Table 9.4 Ownership as an Interaction of Emotions and Identities

Interpretive Dimensions					
		Emotional Intensity	Emotion-Identity Pairings	Emotional Valence(s)	Degree of Ownership
Issues	Homelessness	Warm-Cool Average 59°	Compassion & Sympathy ↔ Current Organizational/Professional Identity to Fear, Disgust, Anger, & Hopelessness	Ambivalence	Limited Ownership
			Compassional & Sympathy ↔ Nonwork Identities to Fear, Disgust, Anger, & Hopelessness	Ambivalence	No Ownership
	Space	Hot Average 83°	Annoyance & Frustration ↔ Current Organizational/Professional Identity	Negative	Strong Ownership
			Hopefulness & Excitement ↔ Ideal Organizational Identity	Positive	

Conditions associated with *limited ownership*, by contrast, differed from those of full ownership in two important respects. First, there was no connection between the issue and the ideal organizational identity. Given that this issue was associated with feelings of "hopelessness," it is perhaps not surprising that staff members may have been reluctant to link the homeless with the ideal library. Second, and perhaps most important, when the issue was linked with current organizational/professional identities, inconsistencies within the identities were made clear. This connection may help explain why the emotions associated with the homelessness issue in the context of these identities were mixed in terms of valence. Connections with one aspect of the organizational/professional identities, librarian as "democratic servant," may have yielded positive emotions such as sympathy and compassion. Connections with another aspect of these identities, librarian as "guardians of the sanctuary," may have evoked negative emotions such as anger and frustration. These ambivalent responses may even explain the intensity scores associated with the homelessness issue. Ambivalence may have resulted in a wide variance in how members reported the hotness of the issue and thus the low to moderate average for, and the high standard deviation among, the intensity scores.

Finally, our analysis revealed that there were some staff members who did not see the homelessness issue as connected to either the ideal or the current organizational/professional identities, but did see connections between this issue and nonwork identities.⁶ This lack of connection to work-related identities may have contributed to this issue *not being owned* at all. The lack of ownership may also have been due to the issue's ambivalent connection with nonwork identities. A deeper analysis of each ownership pattern is discussed below.

UNDERSTANDING CONDITIONS OF OWNERSHIP

Our results suggest that members made sense of the homelessness issue in a different manner than they made sense of the space issue. These interpretations, we argue, help account for differences in extent of issue ownership. We have defined issue ownership as a concept that involves a feeling of possession of an issue, and a feeling that the issue is a legitimate action focus. The data from this study suggest that patterns of emotional reactions and connections and disconnections with salient social identities facilitate or retard a state of issue ownership.

Explaining Ownership

For the space issue, ownership can be explained in part to the issue's connection with salient, organizationally relevant, social identities. This connection meant that when library members described the space issue, they included in their descriptions their identities as professional librarians, as well as their identities as employees in both the current and ideal Grace Libraries. For all three identities, the existence of adequate space was seen as being central to "who they were" (e.g., as providers of good service). Thus, a tight connection between a social identity and an organizational issue allows members to feel connected, attached, and part of the issue. As Dirks, Cummings, and Pierce (1996) describe it, the fusion between the self (as captured in social identities) and the object (in this case the issue of inadequate space issue) permits a strong sense of psychological ownership. While Dirks and colleagues (1996) primarily consider ownership between members and their work organizations, we believe the construct of ownership is also well suited to capture the relationship between organizational members and potential organizational issues. In these kinds of conditions, there is a strong fusion between the self and the object.

Within Grace Libraries, the link between the organizational identities (current and ideal) and the space issue served as a cognitive reference point for linking the issue to a member's self-concept. Numerous social scientists have documented the importance of role identities or social identities in shaping an individual's self-concept (McCall & Simmons, 1968; Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Turner, 1987). Individuals' membership in organizations helps to locate them in their social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1985) and gives meaning to how individuals see themselves (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994; Foote, 1953; Pratt, 1998, 1999; Turner, 1987). A similar argument can be used for professional identities. To the degree that individuals perceive themselves as members of an organization or profession—as a social group—salient characteristics that are part of the groups become associated with how members define themselves. Building on these arguments, when meaningful social identities are strongly connected to the understanding of issues, members are drawn to possess and own these issues as natural identity extensions. Moreover, since issues are seen as being self-defining, the strong cognitive connections may also lead organizational members to perceive the issues as being more legitimate for action.

However, the connections with social identities alone could not fully explain the sense of ownership of the space issue given that the homelessness issue was connected to organizational identities for some informants as well. A more complete picture involves a look at how emotional reactions also facilitated ownership and subsequent action. To begin, the space issue elicited highly intense emotions. This intensity, combined with the specific identity-emotion connections associated with this issue, may have been conducive for ownership and subsequent action. Specifically, a strong negative valence associated with the space issue in the context of the current

organizational identity and a strong positive valence associated with the issue in the context of the future identity may have been highly motivating.

Markus and Nurius (1986), for example, would suggest that the positive affect associated with the ideal identity serves as a positive "possible self" that the individual might hope to achieve. Given that the current identity is associated with a negative valence, comparisons between the two identities create a strong motivational deficit. Reger, Gustafson, Demarie, and Mullane (1994) similarly suggest that the gap between current and ideal organizational identity motivates change. In Grace Libraries, the emotional responses are clear and provide impetus for action. Avoid or move away from the negative affect associated with the present state of space in the library, and move toward a hopeful future. Here, "emotions," whose Latin root, *emovere*, means "to move out or to stir up" (Hopfl & Linstead, 1993), may serve to facilitate the movement from ownership to action.

Explaining Limited or No Ownership

The strong but ambivalent connections between the homelessness issue and the organizational/professional and nonwork social identities may have hindered the development of ownership in at least two ways. First, in the case of no ownership, connections between this issue and nonwork identities may have hindered ownership by drawing attention away from the organizational context. For example, given the logic above, strong connections with religious identities may cause members to see the homelessness issue as "belonging to" religious organizations rather than being a "library issue." Moreover, because there was no fusion of self as organizational/professional member and issue, members were not inclined to own or act upon the issue.

Second, a wide range of literature suggests that by evoking positive and negative emotions within the context of a single identity, the homelessness issue created "approach-avoidance" dynamics that would likely decrease the chances that the issue would be owned (cf., Lewin, 1935). These dynamics may hinder (e.g., limit or eliminate) issue ownership in several different ways. To begin, approach-avoidance conflicts are often solved by temporarily turning away from the problem or "leaving the field" either physically or psychologically (Dworetzky, 1982; Lewin, 1935). In Grace Library, this was evidenced in staff members who did not own the homelessness issue and kept trying to "keep a low profile" with regard to homeless patrons. Moreover, ambivalence toward a group of people may lead to the degradation of that group (Katz, Glass & Cohen, 1973). At Grace Libraries, some informants frequently referred to homeless patrons as "bums." Neither the avoidance nor degradation responses associated with ambivalence are conducive to establishing a sense of ownership of the issue or effort to deal with it. Because degradation and avoidance tend to inhibit feelings of possession or belonging, they may also make the issue less legitimate for organizational action.

Our analysis suggests that members who did not feel that the homelessness issue was a library issue most often employed avoidance and degradation strategies. Those who believed that the homelessness patrons surfaced contradictions within their library identity reacted toward homeless patrons slightly differently. The situation that these informants found themselves in is analogous to the one described by Merton (1976) and others (cf., Coser, 1979) where professionals are faced with conflicting demands and emotions stem from the same role identity or role set (cf., intra-role conflict, see Biddle, 1986 for review). Here, ambivalence decreases the potential for individual action as members vacillate between competing demands (Coser, 1979; Merton, 1976; Weigert & Franks, 1989). We found this pattern in Grace

Library. For example, we noted that if homeless patrons fell asleep at a table, sometimes they were awakened, while at other times, they were allowed to sleep. This vacillation may have impeded issue ownership and ultimately, action by continually reminding the librarian of competing sets of values associated with her (his) various social identities.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The research described in this chapter attempts to help organizational scholars better understand the conditions conducive to issue ownership in organizations. It takes several steps toward this end. First, this chapter contributes to theory building by extending and elaborating upon a concept only briefly touched upon in the social problems literature: that of issue ownership. While others have mentioned the importance of ownership in the life cycle of social issues (e.g., Blumer, 1971; Gusfield, 1989; Stern, 1984), little work has been done to elaborate definitions of the construct or to identify factors contributing to its development. In our study, different patterns of emotional reactions and social identity connections affected whether staff members felt a sense of legitimate attachment to an issue.

While the exact nature of the emotion-identity interactions underlying these patterns is not yet clear, it does seem that both emotion and identity are necessary for ownership. It may be that by providing a cognitive reference point for members (McCall & Simmons, 1968; Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Turner, 1987), social identities ensure that the potential exists for ownership. If there is no connection between self and issue, then it seems unlikely that ownership will be attained. In this organization, issues were only owned by organizational members (as organizational members) when issues were linked to organizational identities. *Thus, identity helps ensure that identity can be owned.*

Emotions, by contrast, may help signal to the individual whether or not the issue *should* be owned. To illustrate, negative emotions associated with the current organizational/professional identities and positive emotions associated with the ideal identity helped ensure that ownership would occur. If, however, positive emotions were associated with the current identities and negative emotions were associated with the ideal organizational identity, then it is not clear that ownership would occur, since the motivation to own would be low (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In both cases, the issue would be connected to the same identities, but the valence of the emotions would impact the level of ownership. Thus, emotions may provide an evaluative assessment (cf., Tajfel, 1981) that contributes to feelings of ownership. This use of emotion may also explain why the creation of ambivalent emotions might hinder ownership. Here, the emotions would fail to provide a clear evaluative stance. In short, conceptualizations of ownership should include not only the connections of an issue to a social identity, but also what emotions such connections evoke.

Second, by showing that emotional reactions (e.g., intensity and valence) matter in determining ownership is also an important correction to current models of how issues are diagnosed in organizations. Typically, models of issue diagnosis have underplayed the role of emotion in explaining how members interpret or react to issues (e.g., Dutton, Fahey & Narayanan, 1983) or they have depicted emotional reactions in very simplistic terms (e.g., as threat or opportunity or effect valence—Ginsberg & Venkatraman, 1992; Jackson & Dutton, 1988). However, our study encourages a more careful delineation of how emotions evoked in response to an issue prohibit or encourage issue ownership. At the same time, there is considerable work to do to better capture empirically and theoretically how feelings, especially

conflicting feelings experienced in dealing with organizational issues (cf., Pratt, 1994; Pratt & Barnett, 1997), contribute to or detract from issue ownership. We have depicted ownership as involving a feeling state that can be described as being evoked by a particular issue in the context of a social identity. Conceptual work on feelings, however, suggests that these assumptions may be overly simplistic (Sandelands, 1988). Future work should uncover the more dynamic processes involved as individuals make an issue their own.

Similarly, this chapter adds to extant work on how organizations diagnose and respond to *social* issues. For example, if we compare the results of this study with the findings from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's (the PA) and its struggle over time with the issue of homelessness, we see how the library case builds and extends theory on how organizations respond to social issues. Unlike in the PA story (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991) which focused on a single issue over time, in this study we compare how multiple social identities (current organizational/professional, ideal, nonwork) connect to varying degrees to two different issues. We also show how emotional reactions pair with specific social identities to achieve ownership. Our study, therefore, helps to explain the achievement of full ownership with one (space) and not with the other (homelessness).

Moreover, in the case of the PA and the homelessness issue, the real change in what we have identified as "ownership" of the issue seemed to occur when homeless people began to appear in the World Trade Center, which was seen as the flagship of the Port Authority facilities. Using the findings from this study, we can reinterpret this change in terms of specific identity connections and emotional responses. It was at this juncture in the ongoing interpretation of the issue when the connection between the organizational identity (probably current and ideal, although the study did not distinguish between the two) and the issue of homelessness strengthened: PA members saw and felt a strong connection between the issue and themselves as organizational members (as technical experts, as altruistic public servants, and providers of high-quality service). In addition, emotional reactions to the issue intensified and became more consistent. Thus, in the PA the conditions were "right" for issue ownership. While we saw these same conditions present for Grace Libraries and the space issue, they were not present for the issue of homelessness.

When compared to the PA study, therefore, this study makes several clear contributions. First, it makes clear the cognitive (i.e., identity-related) and emotional reactions that encourage issue ownership within an organization. We show how examining either identities or emotions alone does not provide as clear a picture as when both are viewed together. Second, by examining multiple social identities, it shows how the nature and quality of issue-identity-emotion connections are important in members' interpretive responses. Finally, the advantage of our comparative study is that it allows us to consider how the same social identities can enable ownership of one issue, yet deny or partially inhibit ownership of another.

Third, our work contributes more generally to models of sensemaking in organizations. To begin, our study suggests that emotions play a more central role in sensemaking processes than previously thought. Instead of acting simply as initiators of sensemaking by serving to signal an "interruption" in continuing organizational action (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995), we suggest that emotions also facilitate the ongoing sensemaking process by becoming linked to the interpretation of issues via identities. Thus, making sense of the world involves more than simply "seeing" the world in a particular way, it also involves "feeling." To illustrate, when emotions were clear and intense, such as when members felt frustrated about the current state of the space issue but hopeful about its future, members interpreted the issue as

being owned. However, when conflicting emotions were experienced simultaneously, as with the homelessness issue, ownership was hindered.

In addition to elaborating on the role of emotions in sensemaking, we can also see how understanding whether or not organizations will respond to issues is aided by understanding an issue's connections to salient social identities for organizational members. As Weick reminds us, "It is this very associating and disassociating with what come to be seen as threats to images as well as identities...that affects a person's view of what is out there and what it means" (1995: 21). Weick contends that the sensemaking that contributes to a sense of ownership is always dynamic and changing, meaning that issues that were disowned at one point in time may become fervently owned at another point in time as different aspects of organizational identities become salient or as the organization's identity itself is modified. Thus, information about the social identity of an organization can facilitate how members make sense of and ultimately respond to social issues (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton & Penner, 1993; Fiol & Huff, 1992; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Thomas et al., 1993).

Fourth, at a practical level, our study suggests how members may facilitate action on a variety of issues—such as social issues—facing an organization. We believe that when issues can be "sold" (Dutton & Ashford, 1993) to members as being relevant to salient work-related identities, then ownership and action are more likely to follow (given that the emotional conditions are right as well). Vocino (1976: 415), for example, proposed that "once we defined our role as librarians, we could better cope with the problem patron and deal more effectively with the situations she or he creates." Thus, librarians must first examine their professional identity, and how it links to the issue of homelessness and other "problem patrons," before constructive action can be taken. The role of identity in issue ownership also supports a claim made by social problems theorists that values are resources that members use to define issues (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987). Thus leaders, practitioners, or other organizational members who want to spur action on an issue may consider framing their petitions in terms that connect the issue clearly to current organizational or professional identities.

Finally and more broadly, our study underlines the importance of the organizational context in predicting responses to organizational issues. However, we assume that the context matters for more than the resources, values, or information that it provides to members; rather, we see that the context also matters for the role it plays in shaping how individuals see and emotionally respond to issues. The organizational context nurtures certain social identities that individuals use (organizational, ideal, and professional) to assess the value and significance of certain issues, as well as the degree to which members can envision taking action on them. The context can provide outlets for creating and/or reconciling ambivalent emotional responses to issues. Thus, from a prescriptive point of view, the management of social issues—and organizational issues more broadly—must consider the management of the organizational context that encourages or destroys the conditions for issue ownership.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research will need to address several other unexplored insights and unanswered questions raised in this study. First, while we have identified three identity-emotion patterns conducive to ownership, there may be other patterns as well. For example, ownership may be likely to occur when there are strong and clear

positive emotions associated with current organizational or professional identities *and* with ideal organizational identities.

Second, further work needs to be done on how the *content* of an emotion evoked by an issue might impact issue ownership. In this study, we have examined how *valences* associated with specific emotions may impact ownership, rather than the actual content of the emotion itself. Thus, it may be that emotions such as anger and sadness, while both negatively valenced emotions, may influence ownership differently.

Third, additional work is needed to untangle the relationship between ownership and action. Social problem theorists often assume that ownership precedes action (e.g., Blumer, 1971; Stern, 1984). While our results certainly suggest a link between ownership and action, we did not have sufficient data to thoroughly examine this link. It may be, however, that the relationship between issue ownership and action may be reciprocal.

Finally, we believe that the model we have depicted here is not yet fully specified. That is, we do not claim that our framework is entirely "self-contained." There may be a host of moderating variables (e.g., firm strategy, financial and human resources, external constraints, and so on) that may affect the relationships between and among emotions, identities, issue ownership, and issue action. Thus, while we believe that emotion-identity linkages are central to the ownership process and to issue action, we also believe that the elaboration of other potentially relevant factors in the model may prove to be a fruitful area of research.

In conclusion, the story of how the staff at the Grace Library System interpreted and reacted to two different issues offers new theoretical bridges for organizational scholars to traverse and examine. Serving as the cornerstone of these bridges, and as the heart of the story, is the concept of issue ownership. Our findings emphasize that patterns of emotional reactions and social identities play a role in the ownership process. Moreover, they suggest that ownership has consequences for action. Thus, deciding whether an issue legitimately "belongs" to an organizational member may be central in determining whether or how he or she responds to the issue. Given that responses to issues, especially social issues, within organizations are often discretionary, it is vital to know under what conditions members will decide to fully "own up" rather than partially or completely "opting out."

NOTES

We appreciate the funding support and comments from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Organizational Studies, Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, University of Michigan. We also appreciate the support of Peter Foreman, Elaine Didier, Kate Pittsley, and Jo Ann Sokkar at an early stage of this project. We thank Gelaye Debebe, Bill Foraker, and Craig Fleisher for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, and Blake Ashforth for his comments on the current version. We also appreciate the input of faculty and students at Indiana University, Northwestern University, Texas A and M University, Tulane University, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Bologna (Italy), and, University of St. Gallen (Switzerland).

1. We use the name the Grace Library System (or Grace Libraries) to protect the identity of the library system that served as our research site. Likewise, we have changed the names of any informants who appear in this study.

2. We use the term "homelessness" quite generally. Several of the informants were hesitant to label patrons as "homeless" and instead referred to them as "street people."

3. Our questions about identity differentiated the branch from the main library. That is, we asked members what was central, enduring, and distinct about the library (main or branch)

where they worked. Our data revealed that there was no difference in the identities of each library location; rather, all members saw the main and branch libraries as being part of the same organization. To avoid confusion, we therefore talk about single organizational identities (ideal and current), and not about main library and branch library identities.

4. Similar to the Dutton and Dukerich (1991) study of the NY/NJ Port Authority, pressure from constituents was important in deciding whether an organization decided to act or not. In the Port Authority, the homelessness issue damaged their image and spurred action. Here, homelessness raised contradictions within members' organizational/professional identities and impaired the potential for action.

5. It is conceivable to think that an issue, such as space, could affect nonwork identities. In countries (e.g., Japan) or in some areas of the United States (e.g., downtown New York City) where the amount of space available to live and work is severely limited, the issue of space may evoke social and personal beliefs about the self (e.g., an "urban identity").

6. Not all informants who viewed the homelessness issue as being connected to nonwork identities also failed to connect this issue with work-related identities. However, for the sake of simplicity, this section only addresses those individuals who found connections between the homelessness issue and nonwork identities. We included any informant who had linked this issue with the current organizational/professional identities in the previous section.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Illustrative Questions of Five Clusters Targeted

1. *Attributes of the library profession*

What is the best thing about being a librarian? What is the worst thing about being a librarian? What are the skills that a librarian needs to do his or her work?

2. *Characteristics of the library context*

Describe the attributes of a perfect library. How does this library differ from your ideal? What do you see as distinct, central, and enduring characteristics of this library? How does this library compare with other libraries? (How do you see it as similar, how do you see it as different?) In general, how do you believe the patrons view the library? Has the image of the library, in the minds of patrons, improved, deteriorated or remained the same over the last two years?

3. *Interpretations and actions on the homelessness issue*

When you think about the homelessness issue, what five adjectives come to mind? Imagine there was a thermometer you could use to gauge the "hotness" of the issue for Grace Library, indicate how hot you believe this issue is for the library. (Please explain.) In what ways is the homelessness issue similar to other issues facing Grace Library? In what ways is it different? What does homelessness mean to people around here? How important is this issue to the overall goals of the library? (Explain.) How important is the issue to you personally? (Explain.) If you had to describe the actions that Grace Library has taken on this issue, what would they be? Do you think that the library should be doing more or less on this issue? (Explain.)

4. *Interpretations and actions on the space issue*

Same as 3 (above) but relating to space instead of homelessness.

5. *Comparison of the space and homelessness issues*

In what ways do you see the homelessness and space issues as similar? In what ways do you see these issues as different? In what ways do you see the library's actions on the two issues as similar? In what ways do you see the library's actions on these two issues as different?