

PRELIMINARY PAPER #124

CITIZEN GROUPS AND HAZARDOUS WASTE:
THEIR CAREERS AND CONDITIONS FOR EMERGENCE*

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1987

*This paper was prepared for presentation at the World Conference on Hazardous Waste in Budapest, Hungary, on October 28, 1987. Some of the research was supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF) grant #CEE-8113191, but all views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily of NSF.

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Introduction

Several years ago, the Disaster Research Center (DRC) initiated and undertook an extensive sociological study of community based citizen groups which emerged either to prepare for and/or recover from actual disasters and potential threats. The research extended over a four-year period and focused on local citizen groups who came into being outside of any immediate emergency period and who were oriented to a full range of hazards from floods and hurricanes to nuclear and chemical plants and hazardous waste sites. In-depth interviewing was undertaken of members of over 50 such groups around the United States. Local organizational and community statistical and documentary data were also collected to supplement the interview data. A telephone follow up survey of selected members was undertaken a year after the groups were first studied.

This paper reports on the DRC observations and findings on the local citizen groups studied which were organized with respect to hazardous waste sites (ten cases out of the total). Actually we found few differences among emergent citizen groups irrespective of the particular potential disaster agent with which they were concerned. In fact, we found little difference in the orientation to either technological or non-technological disaster agents, which some have speculated is an important distinction affecting the perception and behavior of individuals and groups. Such differences in human and group behavior as exist are related to other than the physical source of the potential risk (e.g. the perceived potential dangerousness of the threat, its perceived uncontrollability, etc.; for a general discussion of this see Quarantelli, forthcoming and 1985b, and also our earlier study of acute chemical emergencies and disasters, Quarantelli, 1984b).

In our research we studied the characteristics, the careers of, and the conditions for emergent citizen groups (for earlier reports on the study see Green and Ireland, 1982; Neal, 1982, 1983, 1984; Green, 1983, 1984; Quarantelli, 1984a, 1985a; Neal and McCabe, 1984; Green, Neal and Quarantelli, 1984; and Stallings and Quarantelli, 1985a). In this paper we primarily summarize our conclusions about the latter two, namely the appearance and institutionalization of citizen groups and the factors associated with their emergence. After stating the research findings about careers and specific conditions in propositional form (122 propositions), we present an explanatory analytical model about the general emergence of citizen groups. We conclude the paper with a statement about possible cross-societal differences in the phenomena.

Career Patterns

In this section of the paper we summarize, in propositional form, our major findings about the dynamics or longitudinal aspects of emergent citizen

groups (ECGs), namely their careers.

To avoid endless qualifications, propositional statements are presented in an "ideal type" format in the Max Weber sense, meaning that generalizations are advanced about the different phenomena as though the phenomena existed in pure form. Thus, while it is improbable that all of our observations would be found in every one of the empirical cases we actually studied, or in all ECGs, the depiction is as valid as we can make about an ideal type ECG, or ECGs in general. Similarly, we examined ECGs at different time periods of their development. Not all findings are equally applicable for all time periods; generally, we usually portray (unless otherwise specified) an ECG which has formed and has not yet institutionalized; that is, which has not developed routine and established behavior. Our research focus was on the emergent phase or stage of ECGs. Finally, all propositions are advanced independently of most others. In reality, of course, there are often interactional and synergistic effects among and between the behavioral aspects alluded to in each proposition, but for exposition purposes, these are not discussed in our presentation. The model presented later attempts to relate and integrate a number of the more important factors, which are individually set forth in this and the following section.

Origins

1. In the great majority of cases, ECGs do not have an identifiable date of origin; most groups develop out of informal conversations over extended periods of time.
2. Those most heavily involved in earlier conversations are very likely to become the core of the group when it emerges.
3. Initial conversations usually occur in the immediate neighborhood or locality of the perceived problem.
4. Mass media stories often provide the initial impetus for early conversations about a problem.
5. Initial participants usually do not see themselves as leaders in the activity. However, initiatives on their part influence others to expect them to continue to take the lead.
6. The development of a collective consciousness (among what will be the core members) that there is an unrecognized problem by others, is a crucial step in the emergence of ECGs.
7. The first time media personnel pay attention to the activities of the emerging group is also very important. It tends to confirm among the participants that what they are discussing is significant.
8. Some early participants in the first stages of development of ECGs often have some minor prior organizing experience; such persons, however, are not necessarily among the core members, nor are they present in all cases.

9. Prior social networks are crucial in the early stages of the development of ECGs since most interaction is with known others, often along primary group lines.
10. The rare, largely male peopled and led ECG seems to occur in situations where very specific occupational skills or experiences are perceived as crucial to early group development.
11. In the first stages of ECGs, there is much groping for structure and goals. There is often confusion over means to use as well as ends.
12. Many emergent groups work with the initial belief that if they indicate there is a problem, government officials will provide solutions. At first, groups do not look for acknowledgment of the problem; that is taken for granted, but one consequence is that, in the long run, public acknowledgement of the existence of a problem is eventually and frequently taken as a group victory.
13. ECGs often have substantial difficulty in initially establishing who has jurisdiction for their perceived problem or issue.
14. Little disagreement is evident in the preliminary stages of ECG formation because there is an absence of clarity of goals and means. Uncertainty of goals and means, rather than disagreements or conflicts, characterizes the early stages of internal group interaction.
15. There is a significant amount of goal redefinition in the early stages of ECGs; in fact, in many cases it might be more accurate to say that the first phases of many ECGs involves attempts to make their goals explicit.
16. In the early stages, even sophisticated and knowledgeable members of ECGs often do not know what organizations to contact and which individuals or officials to approach.
17. There is often a random or shotgun approach to seeking help by mail correspondence from local, state, and federal sources. Officials, ranging from township level officials to the President of the United States, are approached, usually with negligible response.
18. ECGs as they first develop, initially tend to consider who the group should approach and only then develop group goals.
19. There is a tendency for one core member eventually to keep and/or collect information about the origin of their ECG, but by that time almost all early written documents of any kind of a historical nature have been lost.

Changes in Stabilities

1. ECGs tend to grow to a certain size, subsequently leveling off at an early stage. The major growth occurs relatively soon after their initial formation.
2. Growth in size usually means later recruits are less committed to

group activities. The early joiners are more committed.

3. Growth in size reinforces the perceptions of ECG leaders that they are involved in a viable effort.
4. Organizational problems generated by membership growth are seldom considered in the early stages of group emergence.
5. In almost all cases, recruitment of new ECGs members is handled in an informal manner, is sporadic in appearance, and does not become more systematic over time.
6. Leadership is fairly stable in most ECGs, especially among informal leaders or members of the core.
7. Informal leaders almost always precede the emergence of formal leaders.
8. The relative composition of members of ECGs is fairly stable through the history of the group, but group stability seems independent of that composition.
9. Stability of leadership in most ECGs allows a cumulation of experiences that tends to make the group more sophisticated in its operation. However, this knowledge is of an oral kind, for relatively little is ever recorded or written down especially in the early careers of ECGs.
10. ECG stability is derived more from structure than from function.
11. Core members are far more aware of group changes than other members who tend to see greater ECG stability.
12. Outsiders have little awareness of changes in ECGs and tend to continue to react in terms of first impressions.
13. The more active the ECG, the more likely it is perceived as radical, but most ECGs make conscious efforts to avoid being labeled as radical.
14. Adoption of a name is an early group action which seems related to a perceived need for the outside world to have something upon which to focus.
15. Acronyms are consciously sought in most groups; outsiders often do not know the full name of the ECG.
16. The division of labor developed by ECGs usually results from early informal discussions among core members. The basic division of labor initially created remains the basis for later elaborations or modifications.
17. In the early stages of ECGs there is a closer relationship between the informal and formal structure than there is later. Because of "burnout," democratic procedures, and other internal factors, the group members occupying formal positions tend to change, leading to a greater discrepancy between the informal and the formal ECG structure.

18. ECGs that start out or quickly become conflict groups almost always maintain this posture.
19. Few ECGs develop in a linear fashion, either in terms of a greater division of labor or more formalization.
20. ECGs with single and fixed goals tend to have simple structures; those with multiple and changing goals tend to have more complex structures.
21. ECGs are not subject to being taken over by other groups so there are no problems of maintaining autonomy. In fact, intergroup interaction, because it involves time and effort, tends to result in less interaction over time.
22. If specific goal achievement is blocked, most ECGs will develop new goals. Thus, if a site cannot be prevented from being established, the next goal might be participation in the safety monitoring process.
23. Group activities increase and decrease in seasonal cycles, with summer being a low point of activities. Spring is the most active, followed by Fall. Winter does have some activity, but the holiday season breaks up the flow of activity.

The Formalization Process

1. Formalization of an ECG is seldom a thought-out-process. The implications of such a development are rarely considered.
2. Formalization apparently often reflects outside influences rather than internal group dynamics.
3. ECG formalization tends to occur relatively early in the group history, often soon after or concurrent with the adoption of a group name.
4. Formalization and incorporation seem to be encouraged by the involvement of ECGs in coalitions, or of core members in umbrella groups.
5. Formal incorporation is not always explicitly assessed. However, there are times when ECGs are incorporated because of perceived legal benefits (e.g., collection of money by a non-profit organization, less probability of personal libel suits, etc.
6. Core members, almost exclusively, are involved in the decision to incorporate; other ECG members are seldom consulted except in a nominal sense.
7. Lawyers are almost always brought into ECGs incorporation activities, but lawyers as lawyers are not generally salient or otherwise important in most group activities.
8. What incorporation involves is little understood outside of the core; in fact, non-core members usually do not know any details about the incorporation, and not infrequently are unaware that the group has incorporated.

9. The charters of most ECGs are relatively simple.
10. Extremely few ECG members know what the group charter actually states; many do not know one exists.
11. A major advantage of incorporation is the subsequent greater public visibility to the ECG, although that is seldom an intended objective.
12. Incorporation tends to create a greater formal division of labor in ECGs.
13. No disadvantages are perceived, either prospectively or retrospectively, from the incorporation of ECGs.
14. The incorporation process does appear to help an ECG crystallize in the sense of helping to create "we feelings", a group boundary, and an entity to which outsiders react to as a collectivity.
15. An often unintended consequence of incorporation is the generation of a hierarchy of formal officers.
16. A major advantage of formalization is that by giving corporate entity to an ECG, it gives more public visibility to the ECG which sometimes leads to an overestimation of size and activity.
17. Failure to incorporate appears related to factors such as small group size, lack of clarity of group goals, and uncertainty about group methods.
18. ECGs involved in non-controversial goals are unlikely to incorporate.
19. ECGs which cease to function do not formally dissolve the corporation.

Conflict Aspects

1. There are major differences between ECGs in conflict situations compared with ECGs in non-conflict situations.
2. While it is the rare ECG which starts out with a hostile relationship to others, there is a strong tendency for both task and community oriented ECGs to develop into conflict groups. Although not all ECGs become conflict groups, a majority do.
3. Being ignored or rebuffed is a very important factor in ECGs becoming conflict groups.
4. ECGs involved in conflict situations are subject to heavy criticism; response to this sometimes absorbs most of the group's time and effort: on occasion this also deflects the ECG from its external goals.
5. Especially in conflict oriented ECGs, outsiders tend to equate one core member with the group, and assume that person is fully representative of the ECG.
6. Except in conflict situations, ECGs seldom receive direct external criticisms.

7. Once publically visible, ECGs are often approached by outside interest groups or issue institutions. This tends to reinforce a conflict orientation.
8. In conflict situations, initial clashes tend to be with appointed officials, and only later with elected officials.
9. Elected officials do not ignore ECGs, even in conflict situations where the government officials disagree with the group. But this is not the perception of core members of ECGs.
10. The relationship between ECGs and community officials may develop into a "we-they" relationship, but some personal sympathy and support for the groups problems and goals frequently is present, although often unrecognized by the ECGs involved, in all sectors and all levels of the governmental structure.
11. The mass media play an important role regarding interaction between ECGs and other groups, especially in the case of conflict groups.
12. In conflict situations, opponents of ECGs are often perceived as operating unfairly, if not illegally.
13. In conflict situations, ECGs are frequently defined by outsiders as being uninformed.
14. Conflict relationships seldom turn into less conflictive ones as such, but the ECGs may disappear, or the controversy may be settled by some outside factor.
15. If anything, there is greater social distance and mutual misperceptions as the conflict evolves.
16. At times, the conflict between the ECGs and local officials may spread into other controversial community issues, but this is not a common outcome.
17. Some early participants in ECGs involved in conflict, tend to come from a background of prior political or organizing activity, but this also is an atypical rather than typical pattern.
18. ECGs members are less likely to accept a conflict relationship as "normal" than are community officials.
19. Conflict extremely seldom escalates to the point of any kind of individual or collective violence.
20. Violence of any kind is deemed inappropriate by the great majority of members of ECGs.

Specific Conditions

1. A significant turning point in the early stages of the emergence of ECGs is the collective consciousness that there is a perceived

problem which is not recognized or acknowledged by others, especially those in positions of governmental responsibility.

2. The unwillingness to answer questions to indicate sympathetic interest for the problems of ECGs by those organizations and officials approached is often perceived by the group leaders as an attempt to deny legitimate citizen concerns, or as a cover up of possibly inept, negligent, or illegal actions by the organizations approached.
3. Perceived inadequacy of response to group inquiries is a major factor in solidifying ECGs and determines many of their tactics and activities.
4. Definitions of the problem as a disaster (actual or possible) are more acceptable and understandable in some sections of the country than others.
5. Some communities have more of a history of non-disaster oriented citizen groups than others; those that do, appear to generate more disaster oriented ECGs.
6. Prior social networks are crucial in the early stages of ECGs since most interaction is with known others, often along primary group lines.
7. Three factors seem particularly important in the initiation and development of emergent groups. These are initiatives by core leaders, events which are defineable as threats, and supportive activities.
8. If group formation is to be successful, the early leadership has to take much initiative. However, initiative will not be enough to generate an ECG without a supporting social climate resulting from an event defined as a danger or a threat in some way.
9. There must be a defining event for an ECG to form, either in the form of an actual dangerous happening or an acceptable definition of a possible threat. This is a necessary catalyst in most cases.
10. Sometimes potential recruits resist a disaster perspective because they do not see how that perspective does or could affect them personally.
11. Particularly important is making the potential ECG members aware that there is no adequate response system for disaster preparedness or for handling disaster consequences.
12. Mass media stories about an actual or potential local threat or danger can serve as "precipitating factors" in the formation of ECGs.
13. Mass media attention serving to define the issue as a problem, is a necessary but not sufficient condition to lead to the emergence of ECGs.
14. While mass media attention is often important in the generation of ECGs, it is crucial in their development because it defines the issue, gives visibility to leaders, and often provides a focus.

15. The perceived legitimacy of ECGs and the issues they raise depend to a great extent on the quality and quantity of news accounts in the local mass media.
16. In conflict situations, some components of the local mass media often operating covertly frequently provide information, advise, and support to active core members. But sometime media personnel are manipulated by ECGs.
17. Very local mass media can be important; it can provide information on who to contact and also in drawing the attention of one local group to others.
18. When experts openly disagree on possible disaster outcome, this weakens the appeal of ECGs to potential members.
19. Public officials, as compared to their organizations, are sometimes favorably disposed and supportive of ECGs in conflict situations.
20. Any kind of response from elected or appointed officials tends to reinforce ECGs in to taking further action.
21. Responses from elected officials more than from appointed officials aid in giving ECGs legitimacy.
22. Elected public officials are publically more sensitive and responsive to ECGs than appointed bureaucrats, but some personal sympathy and support for ECGs problems and goals frequently exist in all sectors and all levels of the governmental structure.
23. Elected officials tend to be more responsive and supportive of ECGs than non-elected officials even though the emergence of a group in a local area frequently puts the local government in a poor light.
24. Support by lower level echelons and professionals in government agencies for emergent groups differs in different sections of the country.
25. Even the attention of researchers to ECGs is sometime taken as an indication of the legitimacy of ECGs.
26. Researchers are sometime seen by ECGs as a possible resource, that is, "someone on their side".
27. Core leaders who have pre-ECGs access to community or organizational power holders are important for the success of ECGs.
28. Local groups also learn from one another as the result of appearing at the same hearings or by being on talk or panel shows.
29. Sometime the approach to other groups precedes the actual formation of an ECG. The example of other ECGs may serve as a model for the formation of the ECG.

30. While ECGs often have knowledge of state and/or national level organizations; the higher order organizations are seldom important to the local emergent group.
31. There may be vertical interaction among the organizations, but from a functional perspective, this interaction often serves only as an indicator of legitimacy for the local ECG.
32. Extra local organizations seem to have little knowledge of local groups other than their possible existence. They tend to use local groups in counts to exaggerate their own numerical strength, and to try and affect legislation at state and national levels.
33. The supra community citizen groups and networks have little direct input and influence on local ECGs, but many local ECGs develop extensive horizontal networking.
34. National or public interest groups are seen as providing symbolic rather than actual help and are not that important in the early stages of ECGs.
35. ECGs are usually wary of letting national voluntary associations or public interest groups get closely involved or identified with the local situation.
36. Local ECGs in relating to national level organizations tend to be protective and attempt to have the locals do the work. There is a great reluctance to turning work over to outsiders.
37. Local branches of state and national level organizations often involve the same persons as members.
38. ECGs particularly get involved in conflict situations where there is disagreement among experts or where core members have a strong ideology.
39. Conflicts have their roots in the perceived existence of alternative solutions to the problems of ECGs.
40. Technological disaster agents appear to have more potential for generating conflicts in ECGs than do other kinds of disaster threats or dangers.

An Explanatory Analytical Model

In the preceding pages, we have advanced numerous empirical derived propositions about various aspects of ECGs. Although some of the statements were qualified, all were set forth as if they were independent of one another. In this part of our paper, we attempt to pull together the generalizations about the conditions associated with ECGs, and try to indicate how some of the factors might be generally related to one another. In other words, we present the outlines of an analytical model.

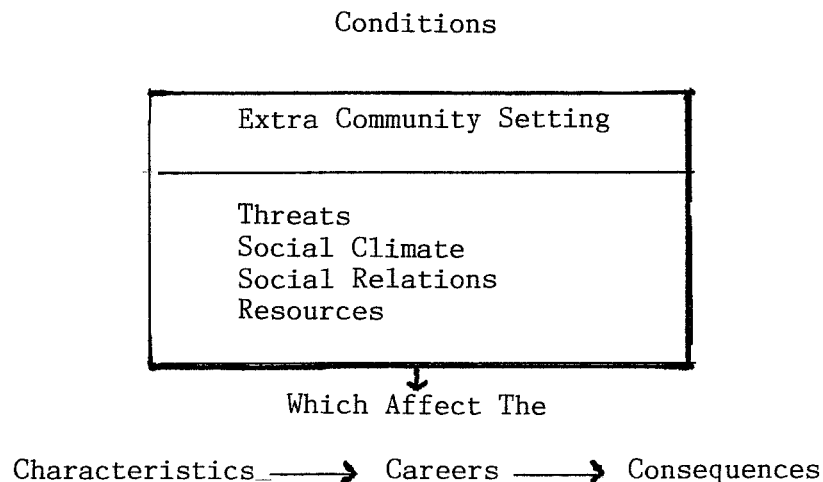
In this explanatory framework, five general conditions or factors appear to be significant:

a legitimizing social setting;
 a perceived threat;
 a supportive social climate;
 a facilitating set of social relations; and
 the availability of certain non-material resources.

Our explanatory model assumes that any given non-material resources always represent part of a larger extra-community setting. This setting affects all that goes on within a given locality. Particularly important are the supra-community groups and networks concerned with similar issues and problems. At the local community level, members of ECGs perceive certain threats, which can be thought of as the demands in the situation.

Demands always occur in a particular kind of social environment or social climate; the social climate being the relevant set of norms, values, and beliefs existing in the local community. Within that environment there exists certain patterns of social organization or social relations; this organization being the links and institutions which constitute the relevant pattern of social interaction in the community. Certain capabilities or resources are available within that community. Resources are human and material assets such as the personnel, knowledge, and access availability.

In graphic terms we can visualize these elements:



Some of the specific conditions which seem important are selectively illustrated in the following impressions:

A. Extra-Community Setting

Supra-community citizen groups and networks appear to have little direct input and influence on local ECGs. Indirectly, however, they affect the emergence, development, and survival of ECGs by indicating that telocally expressed concern must be legitimate because it is given attention elsewhere. General knowledge of state and/or national level organizations by ECGs may suggest the need for local political action which is not usually in the forefront of the formation of local ECGs. Also, ECGs are wary of letting national organizations or public interest groups get closely involved or identified with the local situation. However, the

existence of the non-local groups does frequently indicate to the ECGs that their local issue is part of a national problem.

B. Threat

There is a perceived threat that may or may not correspond to so-called objective reality (the perception socially given highest legitimacy). There must be a defining event to launch the ECG, either an actual dangerous event (i.e., a disaster) or an acceptable definition of a possible threat. The danger must be seen as threatening the home and the family of actual or potential victims. The perceived failure of the community, especially governmental officials, to acknowledge or recognize the threat is a significant factor in the early stages of the emergence of ECGs. The perceived inadequacy of responses to group inquiries about the perceived problem elicits a collective consciousness which helps to solidify ECGs.

C. Social Climate

Citizens believe that particular governmental agencies (and sometimes private corporations) have certain responsibilities for safety and health. Such organizations are expected to respond appropriately, especially if approached by citizens claiming their right to protection. It is implicitly assumed that women (with traditional concerns for health and safety problems which may directly affect their homes and children) are acting properly by taking the lead for official action. Inability to locate relevant decision makers quickly results not only in the "shotgun approach," but also a growing sense of outrage that officials are unwilling to act. Implicitly, there is often a conflict situation when the representative democracy ideas of elected and appointed officials clash with the participatory democracy ideas of members of ECGs. Concern about presenting a "radical" image (which varies with locality) constrains some ECGs, and not only are there attempts to use traditional means, but political activities are increasingly used to affect decisions and policies.

D. Social Relations

The emergence of ECGs is crucially dependent on prior social networks, as pre-formation and early group interaction takes place with known others, often along primary group lines. Involvement of mass media personnel, many of whom establish social ties with core members, often determines whether ECGs will crystallize and develop. While mass media attention is often important in the generation of ECSs, it is crucial in the development process because it defines the issue, gives visibility to leaders, and indicates group legitimacy. There is a strong tendency for ECGs to try and maintain autonomy and independence from any other groups, although horizontal networking with other local emergent groups often provides ideas of how to proceed and who to contact. Internally, the heavy involvement of core members sometimes strains their family relationships, especially if there is a different degree of participation on the part of the husband and wife.

E. Resources

Money is not necessary for the emergence, development, and survival of ECGs; however, some access to non-material (e.g., information, specialized knowledge), and non-monetary resources (e.g., sufficient space for an ECG meeting, etc.) is important. ECGs with members from the higher socio-economic levels who tend to have such resources or who can get them, tend to have an advantage in forming. Group size per se does not seem to be an important variable in the actual or perceived legitimacy or power of ECGs (as seen by outsiders) but some core members think numbers are important.

Cross-Societal Applicability

Our study was done in the United States. Thus, there is the question of how much our research findings are applicable in other societies. Studies of preparedness planning for and response managing of emergency time periods of disasters seem to indicate that there are both similarities and differences across societal lines (Quarantelli, 1986a, 1986b). There are some hints in the data that similarities are more likely at the human or individual level with differences becoming more significant at higher social levels, that is at the organizational, community and national levels (Quarantelli, 1986b). If these impressions are valid, and it is to be stressed that at present we primarily have untested hypotheses rather than empirically established propositions, we might expect the same picture with respect to ECGs organized around potential disaster threats. Put another way, we might anticipate both differences and similarities but more of the former than the latter.

For example, we might generally expect cross-societal similarities in perception of threats, but cross-societal differences in supportive social climates. Thus, we could hypothesize that in most societies there will be a perceived threat, a defining event, a personalization of the danger, a perceived failure of responsible authorities to act, and the development of a collective consciousness in core groups, involved in the generation of ECGs. However, it is doubtful that in all societies there will always be a supportive social setting (Sharp, 1984; Vedlitz, P. J. Dyer, R. Durand, 1980). Not all social systems in practice acknowledge the right of their citizens to organize publically to protest, much less allow the open formation of even informal groups attempting to bring political pressure to bear. Likewise, we could hypothesize that the role of the mass media system in helping the social networks involved in ECGs will not be supportive in all societies, but that higher socio-economic level members are always potentially available to become the core of such groups.

We could go on advancing other speculations, but our general point, of course, is that what is needed are empirical studies in a variety of different societies. Until those are undertaken we will not know how much of what we found can be generalized to other countries from the society in which it was found. We hope our presentation might encourage other social and behavioral scientists to move forward on this matter.

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