

VEHICLES OF CHANGE: CONTEXT AND PARTICIPATION IN POWER-BASED  
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

by

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## CHAPTER I

### VEHICLES

On the evening of June 15, 2004, 450 Kansas City, Missouri residents crowded the sanctuary of St. Therese Little Flower Catholic Church in the Blue Hills neighborhood<sup>1</sup>. Then Mayor Kay Barnes was specifically invited to the public meeting, along with other local public officials. The meeting was not sponsored by the city, or by a membership organization such as the Chamber of Commerce; it was convened by a group that is now called Communities Creating Opportunity (CCO)<sup>2</sup>. CCO introduced itself as a community organizing group representing the families composing over twenty faith-based institutions. For many in attendance, the organization needed no introduction since it had been active in local and state politics for nearly thirty years. Members of CCO, everyday Kansas City residents – not experts or housing professionals – took center-stage to explain that the city had housing problems.

The purpose of this large meeting was for those involved in the organizing effort to directly engage the public, and the leadership of their local government, on the issues of housing and community development, which had surfaced during their organizing process. In the words of one CCO leader “The housing issue in the city was the number

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<sup>1</sup> Like many inner-city U.S. neighborhoods, Blue Hills in Kansas City, MO is a neighborhood that experienced disinvestment, blight, and increasing racial segregation for decades (see Gotham, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> At the time, the acronym CCO stood for Church Community Organization.

one [issue] because of all the vacant lots, the blighted areas, the absentee landlords, the vacant lots that are in land trusts and don't get taken care of.”<sup>3</sup>

Participants informed those assembled that the organized residents had five goals. The members of CCO were dedicated to 1. An accountable city government, 2. A working program for the repair of homes, 3. A way to hold absentee landlords accountable, 4. Protection from predatory mortgage lenders, and 5. A focus on building communities – not just homes. This set of goals, members explained, was in disharmony with the actions of the Kansas City Department of Housing and Community Development, which was under investigation for mismanagement of federal funds. The group went on to point out that the \$18 million in funds which flow annually through the city housing agency were spent in a haphazard and nontransparent way. New infill homes were sometimes unoccupied because they were being placed in neighborhoods with abandoned houses or outdated infrastructure. A member of CCO addressed the crowd, “Without addressing the broader need of communities in a comprehensive manner, the construction of new infill housing in older neighborhoods does not make sense” (Horsley, 2004, p. B1).

The members of CCO also used the action to make a specific policy proposal: that a \$5 million fund be established for minor home-repair in Kansas City neighborhoods where the existing housing stock was strained. This proposed fund would be an expansion to the existing \$1 million allocated to minor home-repairs. Mayor Kay Barnes was given the opportunity to respond to the concerns raised by the group. She expressed

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<sup>3</sup> Quotes are from a series of interviews conducted 2001-2005 as part of the Skipper Initiative for Community Organizing. For more information on data collection, see Chapter 5. Analysis of qualitative data for this chapter was performed using DevonThink Pro, Edition 1.5.2.

confidence in the city manager, Wayne Cauthen, who was in the process of hiring a new housing director. Cauthen was also in attendance, and was given a chance to speak to the crowd. He said he hoped to have a new housing director hired in a few months, and promised to appoint a housing task force. He acknowledged that the city's housing department needed to become more publicly responsive.

Only several weeks after this CCO action, the city manager made a much bigger announcement. The existing staff of Kansas City's Housing and Community Development Department were to be reassigned to other city departments – fundamentally altering the structure of a major department within the city's government. The city manager explained that he had come to the conclusion that the decisions of the department were too often being driven by outside interests, and that the department should be rebuilt from the ground up. The city manager did not mention the names of specific outside interests in his speech. The implication, though, was that organizations like the Housing and Economic Development Financial Corp. (HEDFC), which had been exposed for squandering public money, were going to be cut out of decision-making on the flow of public funds. A joint audit by the city and the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had exposed the inadequacy of the monitoring of housing and community development funds flowing through HEDFC.

The HEDFC project that had captured the most public attention had been incongruously large amounts of money purportedly spent on renovating two small bungalows on Tracy Avenue in south Kansas City (2518 and 2523 Tracy). Later, in 2006, HEDFC would be used as a case study in the ineffective use of Community Development

Block Grant funding in the testimony of the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to committees of the U.S. Senate. Under the heading “Lack of policy or adequate management” (Donohue, 2006, p. 6), the testimony cites examples of HEDFC failing to repay a \$600,000 loan and spending \$900,000 more than it was authorized to spend on a neighborhood project.

The 2004 audit of the city’s housing programs had criticized the lack of monitoring of sub-recipients like HEDFC. These nonprofit sub-recipients received funding through the HOME and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs, and other funding streams administered by Kansas City’s Housing and Community Development Department. Yet, they were often not required to demonstrate their qualifications to perform the work – and were not required to report the specifics of their expenditures to the public. The former directors of the Department had habitually deflected criticisms of these monitoring failures by pointing to accomplishments, such as the total number of housing units that had been produced over several years. However, these numbers were relatively meaningless without context or details, and some in city government and the press had been pushing for greater transparency (“Audit Confirms Serious Problems”, 2001). By the time of CCO’s 2004 Housing Action, the public, the press, and members of the city council had known about irregularities and problems within the Housing and Community Development Department for years. Yet, the problems had persisted, in some part due to the difficulties of ousting entrenched bureaucrats and tackling structural arrangements within government (Abouhalkah, 2005).

The fact that the 2004 CCO Action was held only two weeks preceding the city manager's announcement that there was to be a restructuring of the Housing and Community Development Department is no coincidence. The action of the organizing group helped to provide the necessary pressure to create change in the structure of the local government. One CCO leader explained, "We had this window of opportunity with a new city manager, and there have been a series of audits, but there was a new audit that was being released in June. So it was kind of this confluence of events." When the city manager broke up the Housing Department, he said, "We're breaking it out to rebuilt it" (Horsley, 2004b, p. A1). In response to the government shakeup, a CCO organizer is quoted in the same article. "I'm less concerned about structure than results" says the organizer. While recognizing the accomplishment that the structural changes represented, the organizer's quote reflects the fact that the problems would remain until the services to low and moderate income residents of Kansas City were improved. This position is reflective of the pragmatic nonpartisan stance that CCO maintains in public dealings. The leaders and members of CCO were not concerned with who was publicly credited with making these changes. They were not setting out to make permanent enemies, and they were not necessarily making permanent allies. They remained focused on the goals that they outlined in the introduction of the action at St. Therese Little Flower.

Organizing processes like the one carried out by CCO do not only impact local political discourses and the distribution of resources – they also have an impact on individual participants. Reflecting on the experience of the research, planning, and the final execution of the housing action, one CCO leader remarked, "I thought – I'm like, oh

this is it. This is powerful. This is how it works. This is how you change things.” The power-based organizing model is intentional about building relationships between individuals who participate, and empowering individuals – through relationships – to understand and operate with power.

This approach, carried out over several decades, is what has established CCO as a highly reputable force in Kansas City politics. An editorial shortly after their 2004 Housing Action praised the organizing group: “The group doesn’t just show up to complain at City Hall. Its members are out in the neighborhoods, talking to residents about their housing needs, block by block” (“Good Ideas to Improve”, 2004). Using what is sometimes called a bottom-up or grassroots approach, this organizing group with an annual budget of only several hundred thousand dollars had influenced change in the allocation of tens of millions of federal dollars for low-income housing and community development. Shortly afterward, on February 7th, 2005, the Mayor and City Manager pledged to help create the \$5 million minor home-repair program that had been proposed by the CCO leaders in the 2004 Housing Action (Horsley, 2005); and the rhetoric used in the CCO action “building communities – not just houses” began turning up both in speeches by the mayor, and in policy documents being produced by city agencies. In the words of one leader, “I tell you, when CCO’s name gets mentioned, it carries a lot weight.”

Most groups doing local advocacy work do not have the impact that CCO had on local housing policy; and, this is even more impressive considering that CCO is not a group solely dedicated to housing advocacy – it is a multi-issue organization. How did

CCO become such a force in Kansas City politics? In 1977, the Kansas City Organizing Project (KCOP) was formed in response to mounting problems in inner Kansas City. Organizing neighborhoods to take on local issues, the KCOP was affiliated with a newly established network of community organizations called the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO). In the mid-1980's, it adopted the model of institutional (primarily congregation-based) community organizing that was spreading throughout the PICO Network. It changed its name to the Kansas City Church Community Organization (CCO)<sup>4</sup>. Unlike the political activities of the religious right, faith-based community organizing groups like CCO push for progressive change at the local level – primarily on issues of importance to low-income residents.

The push to base community organizing out of faith-based institutions began in southwest Texas when several organizers (including Ernesto Cortes and Jose Carrasco) began identifying churches as among the most durable institutions in low-income neighborhoods whose other institutions were endangered by the concentration of disadvantages that many urban neighborhoods had accrued (Wilson, 1990). The work of community organizers pushing progressive policy from within federations of local faith-based institutions has been accomplished, in part, by innovative cultural and theological work (Wood, 1994). This work has grown primarily out of the Judeo-Christian traditions, but has placed an emphasis on collaboration that transcends difference – whether denominational, socioeconomic, racial, or religious. Additionally, the model of power-based organizing through faith-based institutions (sometimes called congregation-based

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<sup>4</sup> In 2007, retaining the acronym, CCO changed its name again to Communities Creating Opportunity, to more accurately reflect its stance as a multi-faith organizing group.

community organizing or (CBCO) or faith-based community organizing (FBCO)) draws on roots in several progressive movements, including the social settlement movement, the community center movement, and the urban community organizing of Saul Alinsky (Fisher, 1994). The interweaving of cultural threads has produced a model of faith-based civic activism that is focused on using power to combat social injustices, rather than the more typical approach of faith-based groups taking action on social problems: charity. The relative stability of the religious institutions using this evolving model of organizing has produced uncommonly versatile and durable community organizations like CCO.

In the 1990s, for instance, CCO engaged the city government on issues related to neighborhood quality. Their relational work with residents had surfaced the issue of outdated and insufficient infrastructure. Streetlights, sewer systems and sidewalks needed upkeep and repair; and lax codes inspections in inner-city neighborhoods had allowed vacant and abandoned housing to deteriorate and become not only eyesores, but havens for criminal activity. After surfacing the issue, CCO asked for increases in expenditures – a request that would provoke a series of conflicts within the political machinery of Kansas City. After the initial request by CCO, the increase in expenditures for neighborhood quality by city government was a modest \$200,000. The group demonstrated their ability to persist by holding a series of meetings drawing public attention to the issue, and securing commitments for support for additional funding for neighborhood improvement from city council members. Their work resulted in secured commitments from eight of twelve council-persons for a \$9.5 million in infrastructural improvements and services to under-served low-income neighborhoods. The city



manager attempted to pass a budget that did not include this increase, and the council vetoed the budget three times. This episode of political theater ended with the city manager's resignation and the passage of a budget that included the increase requested by the members of CCO.

Another CCO campaign resulted in the passage of statewide legislation restricting the practices of payday lenders. Virtually unregulated by state law, payday lenders had been able to charge interest rates of over 400 percent APR to borrowers with poor credit or a pressing need for cash. The lenders were able to roll these loans over indefinitely, charging exorbitant fees for each rollover, quickly trapping their clients in spiraling debt. The anti-predatory lending legislation, which passed in the Missouri House in 2002 by a vote of 119-2, restricted lenders to six such rollovers, and limited the fees they could charge for these rollovers. While the terms of the specific regulations were less than leaders of CCO would have liked, it demonstrated the ability of the local organizing group from Kansas City to address issues at the level of the state (Wenske, 2002). The group has recently taken up this issues again, and begun pushing to further limit predatory lending practices. Concurrently with these campaigns on neighborhood quality, housing, and payday lending, the leaders and organizers of CCO have acted on a number of other issues. They have pressed and won additional programmed recreational activities for inner-city youth. They have worked to coordinate the work of the police and codes enforcement to close down drug houses. They have worked, and are currently working on improving access to health insurance.

These issues surface and are moved by an indigenous local leadership, whose capacities to exercise political power are developed through the organizing process. Both the decision-making and public representation of the organization are taken on by volunteer leaders, who often describe being empowered by the process. A leader explained the experience of preparing for the 2004 CCO Housing Action, “It’s really been a wonderful learning experience for us to kind of see how you gear up for an action, how you become knowledgeable, how you know what to ask for.” The organizers and director of the organization facilitate this process, but typically take a backseat to these leaders. Organizers train leaders, and serve as experienced guides to action. One leader, speaking about the CCO organizers, said, “They are particularly good at projecting what’s going to be political... which is the beauty of this organization, because they have all this institutional knowledge that we don’t all have to learn the hard way every time.”

Now over thirty years old, some of the power of CCO is derived from its ability to persist in its activities. A decentralized organization, it is the federation of different local organizing committees (LOCs), which are each engaged in a process that is described in greater detail in Chapter Three: *the power-based organizing process*. The process involves everyday citizens in the democratic production of social change. Most LOCs are based out of congregations, parishes, synagogues, mosques, or other faith-based institutions<sup>5</sup>. Unlike similar groups organizing through neighborhoods, relying on individual membership dues, CCO has established a relatively stable funding base

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<sup>5</sup> The actual religious diversity of faith-based community organizing groups nationally is discussed in the second section of this chapter

through the collection of a small percentage of the annual budgets of the institutions that it organizes.

Individual LOCs will often begin working on issues of concern independently. For example, housing and neighborhood quality had previously surfaced as issues in the work of several of the local committees, prior to the housing action of 2004. The St. Matthews LOC had been working with the Kansas City Housing and Community Development Department to get housing repairs in the Ruskin neighborhood since 2001. The group had committed volunteer labor, including the organization of neighborhood cleanups. The LOC had delivered on its promises; but the city housing agency left its promises unkept. On October 28, 2002, the St. Matthews LOC held a local action to publicly address these unkept promises. Over one hundred individuals attended the action, including the mayor, several city council members, and the director of the Housing and Community Development Department.

At this 2002 St. Matthews local action meeting, the director of the Housing and Community Development Department announced that the department had completed the rehabilitation work on six houses in the Ruskin neighborhood. The participants in the organizing effort doubted his claim, and began follow-up research work. Their work revealed the falsity of the Housing director's claim, and then exposed the broken promises and misrepresentations to the local media. They also discovered \$5.7 million in federal funds that had not been drawn down due to neglect within the department. These stories about poor management and broken promises undoubtedly contributed to the eventual ouster of the Housing director in 2003 (Abouhalkah, 2005). The ongoing

pressure, culminating in the 2004 Housing Action at St. Therese Little Flower described at the beginning of this chapter. That action involved all the LOCs in CCO (called a federated action), and provided the public pressure necessary for the dismantling of the Housing and Community Development Department (“Housing Accountability”, 2004). A leader of one LOC said afterward that the federated action “made me see the effectiveness of the larger organization.”

After the large action and the subsequent shakeup of the housing department, the city manager held his promise to form a Task Force to develop new housing policy. Two members of CCO were appointed to the Task Force. The group held a series of meetings during the summer and fall of 2004. In November, they presented their recommendations, which were subsequently incorporated into official Kansas City housing policy, and used for the rebuilding of the functions of housing and community development. These recommendations included a more competitive bidding process for sub-recipients, performance measures for any contract work, cooperation with local community organizations, and targeting of resources to the neighborhoods with the greatest need. By 2006, housing and community development projects using federal housing dollars were back underway, but with a different cast of characters. The neighborhood which contains the two bungalows on Tracy Avenue that became synonymous with the abuse of public money in the Kansas City housing system saw redevelopment work begin again – this time, without the involvement or services of HEDFC (Horsley, 2006).

A more efficient, more sophisticated, and less corrupt Department of Housing and Community Development is no small accomplishment in Kansas City, MO: a city of almost half a million residents, anchoring a metro area of around two million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006); and CCO – an organization involving several thousand people<sup>6</sup> – played a crucial role in the chain of events that gave rise to this accomplishment. However, specific and verifiable victories are relatively rare in the practice of local power-based community organizing. Many organizations play less prominent roles in change at the local level. The impact of the organizing, however, is not limited to the changes in housing policy. Speaking about the connections that are formed with members of other faith-based institutions through CCO’s organizing, one leader said that it is “good in that it gives you – if you keep up these types of networking relationships, later on down the road when your group needs help or... you have an issue in your line of work, you think oh this guy from CCO... does this type of work; I can call him.”

The power-based organizing process explicitly encourages spanning gaps in social networks. A CCO leader described the types of relationships that develop through organizing: “I have networked with people outside of [my LOC]. Not intimately, but I have established that, and our group has.” The formation of public relationships among participants in the organizing process is built into the model that groups like CCO employ. Organizing develops leaders who are adept in the development of new social networks and spanning gaps between existing social networks. It also develops

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<sup>6</sup> One estimate of the reach of the group can be attained through the data from sign-in sheets, described in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6. Using sign-in data over a four year time period from 2002 to 2005, CCO drew 2538 unique individuals out to meetings.

individual capacities and civic skills. Leaders learn to focus on power and relationships – and become students of effective uses of power.

Variations of a power-based organizing model are applied by different networks of local groups. The PICO model, in particular, stresses that the organizing process not be driven by staff or a few leaders. Instead, volunteer leaders make major decisions on issues and strategies as a group, and rotate responsibilities, including providing the public face of the organization. A culture of accountability and contestation is developed with a simultaneous focus on compassion and human dignity. This model provides a rare example of grassroots participation, and includes organizational practices which emphasize capacity building and relationships. As a result, some organizing groups avoid the tendency of political organizations to end up with a concentrated power structure – the ‘iron law’ of oligarchy (Fox & Hernandez, 1989; Michels, 1915)<sup>7</sup>.

The practice of local community has been steadily spreading during years when many types of voluntary activity have been in decline. As local organizing groups have proliferated, they have garnered greater attention from social researchers and theorists. The process has been explored as one of the most promising mechanisms for countering widespread declines in social capital (e.g. Warren, 2001; Smock, 2004), and has recently been studied as a model for movements (e.g. Swarts, 2008), teaching (e.g. Sandro, 2002), practice in public health (e.g. Minkler, 2004), civic education (e.g. Boyte, 2003), business

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<sup>7</sup> Osterman (2006) studies the Southwest IAF – a well-known success in regional organizing – and concludes that though the group has developed an oligarchic structure, it does not suffer from many of the negative consequences of oligarchy in some other political organizations and social movement organizations.

and public administration (e.g. Osterman, 2006), and community programs (e.g. Foster-Fishman, et al., 2006).

### Scope of Community Organizing

*“Once such a vehicle [a community organizing group] is formed, it holds the power to make politicians, agencies and corporations more responsive to community needs. Equally important, it enables people to break their crippling isolation from each other, to reshape their mutual values and expectations and rediscover the possibilities of acting collaboratively”* (Obama, 1990; pg. 38).

Groups like CCO that utilize a power-based community organizing approach through faith-based institutions have proliferated in cities and regions across the United States since the 1970s. The combined effect of this growth is that power-based organizing groups today are numerically one of the broadest initiatives in contemporary public life (Wood & Warren, 2002). By the 1990s, most metropolitan regions in the United States had at least one group that sought to employ the power-based community organizing model primarily through faith-based institutions. In 1999, there were 133 such groups in operation, encompassing around 4000 affiliates (roughly 3500 of which were religious institutions). Of these groups, 71% have been founded since 1990. Only five years prior, a study reported just 90 such federations in existence across the country (Hart, 1994). An estimate of the reach of the activities of power-based community organizing occurring through faith-based institutions is that over one percent of congregations are now participating in power-based community organizing, involving

between one and three million US residents (Wood & Warren, 2002). Additionally, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) employs a somewhat similar organizing model to organize local neighborhoods through local groups in 85 cities. As of 2006, five networks (PICO, IAF, Gamaliel, DART, and ACORN) had a combined total of 267 local organizing federations (Swarts, 2008) in the US and a few other countries<sup>8</sup>.

A study conducted for Interfaith Funders (see Wood & Warren, 2002) reports that the issues that are most commonly pursued by local organizing groups involve public school quality, economic issues (such as living wages, immigrant rights and economic development), safety issues (such as policing, drug and violence prevention, and anti-gang policies), and housing (affordable, low-income, or senior housing, immigrant housing quality). As can be seen in this chapter's discussion of the campaigns waged by CCO, it is often difficult to determine the precise impact of the activities of these local community organizing groups, as they tend to cooperate with other groups to push initiatives or policies – and because they sometimes intentionally downplay their own role, letting politicians or other local leaders claim credit once an issue has been addressed. This is what leads Swarts (2008) to call these groups “invisible actors in American urban politics” (p. xiv).

The diversity that is encompassed by many power-based organizing groups also differentiates them from many contemporary institutions and movements. Nationally, around a third of the religious affiliates of local faith-based organizing federations are

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<sup>8</sup> Including the UK, Canada, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Peru, Germany, South Africa, and Rwanda.



Catholic, while the majority of the rest are mainline traditionally white Protestant denominations, and traditionally black Protestant denominations. Jewish, Unitarian Universalist, and other non-Christian religious groups make up around five percent of the congregations. Importantly, the local federations tend to be composed of a diversity of groups, meaning that the multi-faith orientation of organizing is truly in operation at the local level. Of the institutions involved in organizing, 36% reported that a majority of their membership was white, 35% reported a majority of black members, and 21% reported a majority of Latino members. A majority of local groups incorporate substantial racial and ethnic diversity within their membership (Wood & Warren, 2002).

While they are not often in the national headlines, local power-based organizing groups have an increasingly impressive list of instrumental achievements. For example, a power-based organizing group in Baltimore (affiliated with the IAF) led the country's first successful living wage campaign, and other groups have since led similar successful campaigns. Another IAF group in Brooklyn has co-sponsored two new high schools, and constructed around three thousand units of affordable housing, along with two new primary health care centers (Gecan, 2002). The Texas IAF pushed legislation that increased funding to poor schools by 2.8 billion dollars (Warren, 2001), and the PICO California Project pushed legislation that funded new school construction and repairs to schools at 9.2 billion dollars (Wood, 2002).

ACORN has led a nationwide campaign to end predatory tax preparation practices by H&R Block, and established local tax preparation centers in cities across the country for low-income taxpayers (Fisher, Brooks & Russell, 2007). It has also led local and

statewide battles for minimum wage increases, and living wage ordinances, established housing trust funds, negotiated loan products and programs for low-income homebuyers, secured financing to prevent foreclosures, participated in the passage of anti-predatory lending legislation, rehabilitated vacant and abandoned housing, registered new voters, fielded new candidates in local elections, established charter schools and prevented privatization of public schools, and facilitated advocacy for low-income survivors of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (Swarts, 2008). Similarly long lists of local achievements have been produced by the organizing activities of local groups affiliated with the the Gamaliel Foundation, and the PICO Network – of which CCO and the other groups in this study are a part – and other national and regional organizing networks and training centers (see Appendix A).

These instrumental successes are accomplished within multi-issue organizations that are concurrently pushing several issues at any given time. The groups mentioned above for their notable accomplishments are often simultaneously engaged in efforts to prevent crime, increase voter registration, improve public facilities and neighborhoods, get funding for after-school programs, senior services, or job training programs, reduce racism and environmental destruction, and improve access to health care or fair loans for poor and working-class families. These issues are interrelated, and pure or final victories are difficult to attain. For this reason, organizers often focus on building a series of small wins that will keep members energized and engaged in the process of making change (Mondros & Wilson, 1994).

## Overview

This phenomenon of engaged volunteer participants in progressive change at the local level is the topic of this dissertation. Organizing groups provide something rare in U.S. society: large, powerful, and diverse groups of citizens actively promoting social change and justice. This chapter has provided an introduction to the work of a single organization, CCO, and reviewed the scope and growth of the field of organizing, as well as some noteworthy accomplishments of policy and community change by groups across different organizing networks.

Chapter II situates the practice of power-based community organizing within the larger topics of civic engagement and participation in community life. As participation, social capital, and civic engagement have gained attention in recent years from many in the academic, philanthropic, and political realms, community organizing has sometimes been highlighted as an important mechanism for reversing declining involvement in civil society and individual isolation. I argue in Chapter II that participation in community organizing can be understood as production, relative to many other forms of participation and engagement, which are oriented to the participant as consumer. Chapter II explores typologies of organizing, traces the historical roots of contemporary community organizing, and then explicitly discusses power as both a distinguishing characteristic of organizing compared to other forms of participation and engagement, and as a lens for viewing the work of organizing.

Chapter III investigates the power-based organizing model through the internal processes of organizing groups, beginning with a foundation of organizing: the one-to-

one relationship. Public relationships, as defined and built through the organizing process, are contrasted with more familiar private relationships. The group-level processes of assessment, research, action, and reflection are presented as a cycle of power-based community organizing. The chapter includes a discussion of the people involved in community organizing: leaders, organizers, and new participants. Finally, the limitations of local organizing as a strategy for social change are discussed.

Chapter IV reviews relevant literature and sets up the hypotheses for the empirical portion of the dissertation. Individual future participation is introduced as a longitudinal dependent variable, and aspects of the context are situated in theoretical relation to participation. These aspects of context can be understood according to the following grouping: *neighborhoods*, *networks*, and *settings*. Local federations are also discussed as descriptive units of analysis.

Chapter V presents information on the data collection processes and analytical methods employed for this study. Longitudinal growth modeling is introduced as relevant to the analyses. Data were collected on participants from five local federations, including CCO, for five years as part of the Skipper Initiative for Community Organizing (see Speer, 2006). The data are conceptualized according to a nested model: events within individuals, within affiliates (LOCs), within local organizing federations. The processes of managing the data and construction of variables are described.

Chapter VI reports the results of the study. It begins with exploratory and graphical analyses of participation in the community organizing process by members of the five PICO groups. Then, the results from growth models are presented.

Chapter VII discusses these results in a series of broadening contexts. First, the direct relevance to the practice of PICO organizing is explored. Second, the findings are examined with regard to the general practice of local organizing. Third, the relevance to participation and engagement in community life is considered. Fourth, both the findings from this dissertation and the study of organizing are reviewed in several disciplinary contexts. Finally, directions for future research that builds on this study are described.

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## CHAPTER II

### PARTICIPATION

*“Power is the very essence, the dynamo of life. It is the power of the heart pumping blood and sustaining life in the body. It is the power of active citizen participation pulsing upward, providing a unified strength for a common purpose”* (Alinsky, 1971; p. 51).

#### Isolation

The rearrangements of work, family and community life that have accompanied the growth of advanced industrial society – even while enabling connections through technology – have left individuals unprecedentedly mentally isolated (Durkheim, 1893; Marcuse, 1964; Lerner, 1999). The themes of isolation and decline in social and political participation have been prominent in recent research (see Stolle & Hooghe, 2004). Declining levels of involvement in the democratic process and declining levels of social and voluntary activity have been reported (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999; Putnam, 1995), as well as declines in traditional mechanisms of citizen resistance, such as labor unions (Clawson & Clawson, 1999). These declines have occurred during a time when the functions of the institutions of the social welfare state – many of which were created to promote egalitarian social structures – have been dramatically reduced (Harvey, 2007). Applied researchers in community psychology, public health, and social work have studied ways to deal with symptoms of these declines (i.e. Holohan & Moos, 1990), or,



in some cases, to work to change the systems leading that lead to these symptoms (i.e. Foster-Fishman & Behrens, 2007; Tseng & Seidman, 2007).

In a representative democracy, the most visible expression of citizenship is participation in the electoral process as a voter. In the United States, and in other established democracies, there has been a long trend toward lower voter turnout (Levine & Lopez, 2002). However, voter turnout is only one of the ways in which citizens participate in community life. Broader measures of civic engagement include other politically oriented activities, such as attendance at meetings, contacting public officials, donating money, and volunteering (Greenberg, 2001; Hall, 2002; Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Broader still, the concept of social capital encompasses political activities, social activities, and attitudes. Measures of social capital include, for instance, belonging to clubs, and reporting high levels of interpersonal trust (Coleman, 1988; Brehm & Rahn, 1997).

With some exceptions (e.g. Ladd, 1999), the research literature points to the fact that, as a public, we have become more isolated and less social, less engaged in community life. Why is this a cause for concern? Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) suggest that engagement ‘matters’ for three categories of reasons: participation in community life develops individual capacity, it creates community, and it promotes equal protection of interests. Other research and writing echoes this assertion, pointing to engagement’s role in the promotion of democracy (Boyte, 2003), citizenship, good governance (Ray, 2002) and trust (Levi & Stoker, 2000). Engagement is reported to lead to increased tolerance (Hooghe, 2003), socioeconomic development (Tolbert, Lyson &

Irwin, 1998; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993), more empowered communities, and reductions in crime (McCarthy et al. 2002; Saegert, Winkel & Swartz, 2002). Findings also indicate that engagement promotes self-sufficiency and individual well-being (Wollebæk & Selle, 2002).

To a community organizer using a power-based approach, individual isolation is the starting point in ‘the world as it is’ (a phrase used often by Alinsky when he was encouraging realistic assessments). Isolated individuals, an organizer would suggest, cannot act with power. The process of power-based community organizing reconnects individuals with each other so that they can exercise collective power and be empowered as individuals (Mondros & Wilson, 1994). Moving forward from the observations of increasing societal isolation, this chapter introduces a framework for understanding various types of participation in community life established through the metaphor of production and consumption. Participation in organizing is identified within the array of activities that constitute engagement. Then, power-based community organizing is distinguished from other types of community organizing. Following the quote by Alinsky at the beginning of this chapter, participation in power-based community organizing is considered as a proximal effect for power – defined as the ability to act and create change.

### Consumption and Production of Change

In April of 2008, George W. Bush was finishing out his second term facing a number of difficulties. The public largely disapproved of his work, with only around

27% (Pew Research Center, 2008) of polled respondents stating that they approved of the job he was doing as president. On April 29, Bush appeared in the Rose Garden for a press conference focused on the stagnant economy. He discussed rising gas prices, and argued again for new drilling in the Arctic, expanding domestic nuclear power production, and building new oil refineries. Six paragraphs into his initial statement, he expressed frustration with Congressional opposition, “many of the same people in Congress who complain about high energy costs support legislation that would make energy even more expensive for our consumers and small businesses” (White House, 2008).

The phrase ‘our consumers’ (as opposed to ‘our citizens’) turns up frequently in Bush’s rhetoric, seemingly most frequently when he is discussing energy policy. Perhaps the phrase ‘our consumers’ is simply a holdover from Bush’s years as an oil company executive, resurfacing as he discusses national energy policy. Alternatively, it may be reflective of an understanding of shifts taking place in American political-economy. As the U.S. and other early industrialist nations have transitioned from sites of primary production of goods to services, technological innovation and international economic deregulation have allowed production to locate where labor is cheapest and taxes are low. This process – globalization – has been both lauded and lamented as it has provided many with more goods and income, yet left many with less security and power than they had before. While resources and processes of production have flowed to some countries previously referred to as the ‘third world’, a disproportionate share of wealth has remained concentrated within the countries with advanced industrial economies. Many

residents of such places lead lives saturated with mediated experiences of spectatorship, entertainment, and other increasingly diverse opportunities for consumption.

Part of the transition to a consumer economy has involved the increasing importance placed on individual selection of goods and services. Consumption is part of identity formation and communication. Choice of clothing, television programming, food, and household items define individuals not only in terms of social class in the traditional sense, but in terms of fine-grained differentiated categories within levels of social class. This reality is reflected in the availability of marketing tools such as the Community Tapestry™ data-driven segmentation system (ESRI, 2007), which allows paying users to access demographic profiles of geographic areas according to 65 groupings composed of categories (*LifeModes*) such as *Salt of the Earth*, *City Lights*, and *Suburban Splendor*. Descriptions in the advertising material for the segmentation system enumerate characteristics for each social segment such as ‘own/lease Nissan’ and ‘go dancing’ for the type *Inner City Tenants*, and ‘own/lease Buick’ and ‘DIY home improvement’ for *Rustbelt Retirees*.

A look to contemporary urban development policy lets us see the degree to which we have transitioned from an economy of industrial production to an economy of service and consumption. Cities losing the battle for economic expansion through industry or manufacturing now seek to attract members of a certain social grouping deemed by some sociologists to be the key to economic growth in a globalizing economy. In an article subtitled, “Why cities without gays and rock bands are losing the economic development race”, Florida (2002) describes a *creative class* that is purported to drive economic

growth by creating an artistic atmosphere that attracts other consumers to the area. The associated creative city rankings have civic leaders across the U.S. seeking to develop key lifestyle-oriented amenities to attract and retain these individuals deemed to have cultural capital which is believed to catalyze economic capital.

With individual identity increasingly understood and communicated through consumption<sup>9</sup>, people are also seeking to participate in social change through consumption. Some theorists (e.g. Scammell, 2000) argue that this consumer activism at least partially compensates for the declines that have been witnessed in more traditional forms of citizen participation (see Putnam, 1995). According to this view, as corporate powers build on their ability to escape the political systems that formerly constrained them, the consumer becomes more influential than the citizen. The fact that consumers are making choices according to personal politics is pointed out. Examples of consumerist activism include the purchase of products oriented toward reducing one's carbon footprint or products that claim to involve fair trade with producers. However, consumption is a highly problematic substitute for citizenship. It is not equally representational (Jubas, 2007). In contrast to the understanding of civic engagement and community functioning advanced by the practice of community organizing, many emerging forms of consumer activism represent an atomistic and passive conception of participation in politics and change.

Lifestyle politics and conscientious consumption serve as an outlet for political energy (Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005). This energy is generated by the sense that

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<sup>9</sup> Baudrillard (1985) casts doubt on our ability, in the present era, to make meaningful distinctions between representations and reality in consumer society through an exploration of the role of mediated images, or symbols, in shaping identities.

the world is not as it ought to be. This prevalent belief can be easily observed. For example, much of the population of the US is aware of global economic injustices, and the fact that the natural environment is being degraded. Many witness and lament various symptoms of the decline of the social welfare state. This awareness is sometimes developed through personal or family crises. Even in instances when these crises can be weathered or averted by individuals or families, the tension remains between the world as it is and the world as it ought to be. In the world as it is, everyday experience is so dominated by the marketplace that we look to it for answers on how to change the world. What it readily provides are opportunities to purchase additional products that, in some cases, do make a difference, but largely serve to add yet another layer to the socially differentiated consumer identity we have purchased so far.

Although our instincts for social differentiation are parts of the human adaptive skill for survival in social systems, market forces prey on our desire to communicate status and belonging and provide ever more avenues for socially differentiating consumption. Every time we make a purchase that is marketed to us as a member of a particular social grouping, we reinforce our identity as a member of a certain imagined community – and reinforce our differentiation from others<sup>10</sup>. As the number of products and forms of entertainment has multiplied, so have we developed the ability to see ourselves as different from a larger and larger percentage of the population. As consumerism increases, so do the distances between the ways we conceive of ourselves,

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<sup>10</sup> While this process of reinforcing our identity through purchases results in enhancing our affinity with other consumers making similar choices, the existence of that perceived closeness implies a differentiation from the majority or ‘mainstream’ society. Dunn (2000) explores this as “the relationship between cultural commodification and the attenuation of self and social relations” (p. 110).

and the ways we conceive of those from whom we are differentiated through consumption. Isolation increases with consumerism.

In an ideological sense, much of what we consume serves as reinforcement of a false sense of individual agency. Rarely does the action of an isolated individual create change in a community or society. Yet, the history and the mythology of popular culture would seem to indicate otherwise. The heroic, independent individual is an omnipresent theme in cultural discourse. In this mythology, superheroes and vigilantes rectify the wrongs of society. History, as it is taught, highlights changes in systems that are ushered in by individual actors (e.g. Gandhi, Rosa Parks). Understandings of the difficult and complex process of building and sustaining an organization or movement are rarely conveyed. Instead, the symbolic actions of individuals are decontextualized and treated as causal mechanisms of change. These representations of individualism and the power to change mesh with highly individualized consumer identities – leaving us with delusions about individual capability to change society<sup>11</sup>.

When these delusions of our own ability to create change are confronted by the realities of a system in which it is highly improbable that an isolated individual can make change, the result is often disillusionment and alienation. A paradox emerges in which naivete and cynicism, ostensibly opposites, are two sides of the same coin. Cultural messages and the rhetoric of psychotherapy equip us with tools to internalize our individual failures when our efforts to change the world fall short. Even in the context of some of the most successful social movements, there is a tendency to have unrealistic

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<sup>11</sup> Popular media imagery often reinforces mythology of individual power to create change. For extension of these ideas of the social construction images of individual social power, see, for example, feminist cultural scholarship on superheroes (e.g. Inness, 2004)

expectations of how easily change can be achieved, and then to embrace a sense of defeat and personal inadequacy when systems do not change completely (see Lerner, 1999).

This individualist bias has also impacted the way that community researchers conceptualize the ability to make change. The study of empowerment has typically been at the individual, psychological, level of analysis (see Riger, 1993). Alternatives have been proposed that look at organizational empowerment (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004), referring to empowering organizations which lead to psychological empowerment among members, and empowered organizations which are capable of changing systems (Maton, 2008). The methodological push toward organizational or setting-level empowerment is important not only so that the study of empowerment becomes less individualistic, but because even psychologically empowered individuals are, themselves, powerless to create systems change when they operate in isolation. Systems change occurs simultaneously at multiple levels of analysis in a transactional way between systems and inhabitants (Altman & Rogoff, 1987).

Following this metaphor of production and consumption into the realm of more traditional political activity, it becomes apparent that the consumer identity pervades here, as well. As voters, members, volunteers, contributors, and consumers of political news, we are given choices between alternatives, nearly all of which place the citizen in the familiar role of the consumer<sup>12</sup>. It is exceedingly rare for an everyday person to actually *produce* something new in the political realm, even at the local level. The

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth acknowledging that having these choices certainly beats having no choice. In this respect, being a political ‘consumer’ is a reflection of the existence of the basic structure of representative democracy. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the role of economic rather than democratic impulses that drive these choices.



economic transition from a focus on production to a focus on consumption serves as a useful parallel to the mechanisms available to citizens who would attempt to make change in a system. This isomorphism is illustrated in Figure 2.1.



*Figure 2.1. Consumerism in the marketplace and in the polity.*

Choice and the individual rational consumer form the ideological bedrock on which free-market capitalism is built. Leaving aside a discussion of how well that ideology functions in the economic realm (for which it was intended), it has obvious deficiencies as a model for collective action. If we rely on consumer activism, we must trust that enough of us will simultaneously take the same political cues in the marketplace in order to exert coherent influence. Indeed, those who engage most in political consumerism have higher trust in fellow citizens – and lower trust in governmental structures (see Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005). This trust is risky because of how susceptible we, and our fellow citizens, are to influence and manipulation by interests utilizing mass-media. . Whether we hope for others to vote as we do, or to consume the same socially responsible products, reliance on consumerist orientations to social change can quickly result in disappointment and cynicism when our fellow citizens do not behave according to these hopes.

Through existing personal relationships, we may encourage others to conform to our political-consumerist behaviors and preferences. Sometimes this is accomplished

through subtle consumer-identity cues, sometimes through more explicit means (e.g. bumper stickers), and sometimes entirely unsubtly through self-righteous tirades<sup>13 14</sup>. Meanwhile, our collective weakness is continually exploited by those with the capability of producing real change in the political realm. This group holds economic productive power, as well. They roughly correspond to the group that Tocqueville worried would usurp democracy in the US (Bellah et al., 1985), and what Eisenhower termed the military-industrial complex (Eisenhower, 1961) – and similarly saw as the greatest threat facing contemporary US society. A tendency among aspiring agents to systems change has been to embrace totalizing views regarding solutions to this imbalance of power. The all-or-nothing mentality of revolution from the working classes often serves to dismiss more modest attempts at social change (Lerner, 1999).

In the political arena, the amalgamation of producer power is difficult to locate and understand, much less combat<sup>15</sup>. Yet, it remains evident that citizens want change, and are open to taking action in some circumstances (see Vasi & Macy, 2003). There are simply very few effective means of action on the market, so to speak. Many organizations or movements promise more than they can deliver to lure in new participants. Participants promised quick change get burned out and cynical. They become wary of participation in any form of action that has an element of personal risk.

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<sup>13</sup> Eliasoph (1998) finds through systematic observation of participants in voluntary activity that broadminded political conversation tends to arise more often in smaller, private conversations – and that political topics are eschewed in larger venues.

<sup>14</sup> Political blogs have become increasingly relevant forms of communication, primarily between like-minded, highly educated members who are not part of the traditional media elite (MacDougall, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> This difficulty is exacerbated by campaign finance laws which view limitations on private funding of political campaigns as infringements on the free speech rights of donors.

Just as savvy consumers avoid low-quality products, potential participants avoid many forms of voluntary activity for social change. The problem is, with regard to options for legitimate production of social change, the marketplace, the government, and nonprofit sector do not deliver many high-quality options.

Grappling with the failures of well-intentioned and sophisticated approaches to social change showcases the degree to which systems and individuals are indivisible. Even when critically conscious of the problems of society, groups that are formed to create change often reproduce similar dynamics within themselves (Lerner, 1999). This tendency demonstrates the flaws in conceptions of individuals and social systems that treat the two as fundamentally distinct entities. It is easy to understand that systems are composed of individuals. It is more difficult to understand the ways in which individual identities are shaped by systems – and how they must change when systems change. Systems change efforts too frequently focus only on systems change to the exclusion of individual change. And, reflecting the same bias toward abstracting individuals from systems – attempts at individual change too frequently focus only on individuals. Attempts at systems change should operate with an understanding that individuals and systems must change in concert (Christens, Hanlin & Speer, 2007).

A survey of the landscape of groups that encourage participation shows a multitude soliciting voluntary involvement, providing services, making policy recommendations, and taking social or political action. Many such activities have their genesis within the public sector. For example, most government agencies hold public meetings to solicit input on their activities. Elected officials hold forums and sometimes

have offices that organize neighborhoods. Agencies and branches of government responsible for schools, parks, transportation, housing, community development, social services, public safety and planning request community involvement to varying degrees. This type of activity tends to be based on processes mandated by law or attached to funding mechanisms. It may also be accomplished through non-governmental groups closely linked to public entities. Social workers, community psychologists, public health practitioners and other professionals in community practice are frequently involved in activities around organizing and development activity in the community (Rothman, 1974) – and may be funded by government, foundations, universities, medical centers, or nonprofit organizations.

Voluntary activity solicited by the non-profit, non-governmental sector can take many different forms, as well. Issue-based groups may solicit participation in rallies and protests in support or opposition of particular concerns ranging from national politics to human rights to environmentalism to local economic development or historic preservation. Faith-based groups galvanize charity work and direct human service provision, such as service at homeless shelters or soup kitchens; or community development work, such as new home construction. Neighborhood and block groups have a variety of activities, often including clean-ups and activities geared toward improving public safety. School-based groups, including PTAs, encourage voluntary activity. Labor unions, workers guilds, and community development organizations provide opportunities for participation. Additionally, new media formats have provided

settings for voluntary participation such as weblogs and list-servs. Innumerable other associations are formed based on shared interests.

In much of the the scholarship on participation, there is little effort to distinguish between the different types of activities and different types of organizations. Indeed, the prominence of social science literature on social capital and civic engagement owes something to this. If all forms of civic engagement are treated as roughly equally valuable, this glosses over the political dimensions of the relative differences between types of engagement – creating a non-controversial body of scholarship. While rubrics and taxonomies of participation have been provided (e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Checkoway, 1995), there is little agreement across disciplines or areas of study regarding how to classify various activities. This study does not seek to provide such a total taxonomy, but does make some distinctions between types of engagement. Figure 2.2 presents a conceptual model for locating different types of civic engagement according to two continua: maintenance-oriented, or more expressive activities versus instrumentally and change-oriented activities, and consumer-oriented activities versus those oriented to the participant as producer.

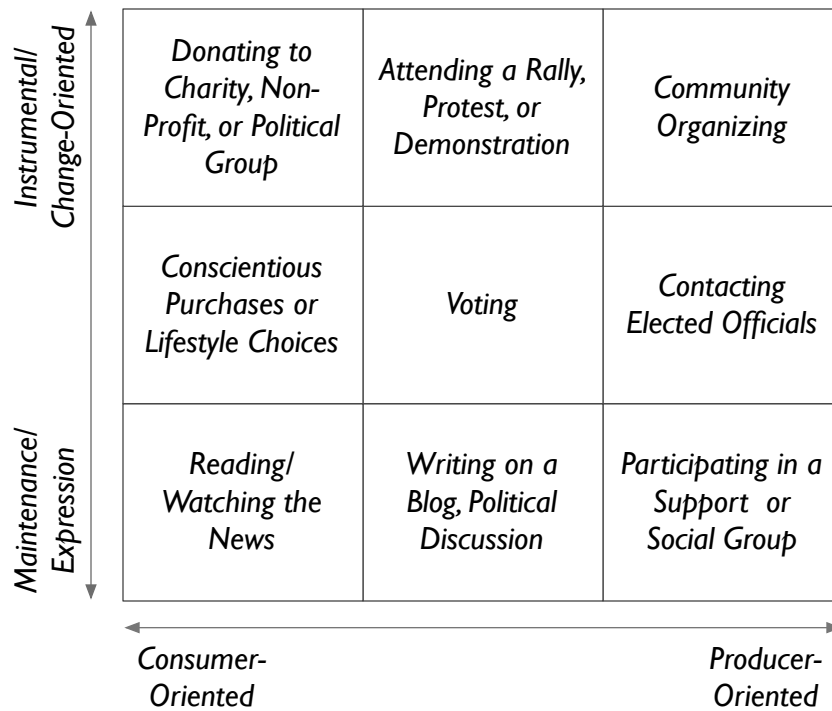


Figure 2.2 Conceptual model: Forms of participation/engagement.

As Figure 2.2 illustrates, activities in line with a consumer mentality involve relatively atomistic or passive steps toward change. At the producer end, activities involve more connection with others and potential for personal risk. Maintenance oriented forms of participation tend to emphasize personalities and individual expression, while the more instrumental or change-oriented forms of participation tend to be more focused on systems. Power-based community organizing can be located within the spectrum of forms of civic engagement as relatively change and producer-oriented. With this understanding in hand, the next section zooms in on the upper right quadrant of this figure and examines types of community organizing. Specifically, what are the various types of community organizing? How have they been categorized?

## Types

*“‘A citizens power organization’ ... it would be easier to explain to any curious person or inquiring reader that we are a housing organization, an education reform coalition, or a faith-based group. We would then fit more neatly in to the current map of the world” (Gecan, 2002; p. 7).*

Following the last section’s presentation of a broad understanding of engagement in civic and community life, this section reviews works that distinguish between the groups and activities referred to as community organizing. An inherent difficulty with this task lies in the fact that no two organizing processes are identical in terms of ideological or tactical approaches . However, some notable classificatory rubrics and heuristic devices have been devised.

One model (Rothman, 1996) breaks community interventions into three modalities: locality development, social planning, and social action. In their most basic forms, these approaches take on distinguishable characteristics. The locality development approach seeks to catalyze communication across groups in hopes of consensus-building. It attempts to build toward collaboration on issues of common interest within a community that is typically defined geographically. The social planning or social policy approach seeks to gather data and analyze community problems in order to better advise organizations on effective courses of action. This approach is more likely to have its impetus from within the government and often results in recommendations for the provision of services. The social action approach seeks to alter the flow of basic resources by public actions directed at the local power structure. It

seeks equality and justice for underrepresented groups and takes on issues involving both shared and conflicting interests.

This neat rubric does not accurately capture the activities of many groups, and the point is made in Rothman (1996) that groups adhering to a single non-hybridized modality are in the minority. This category defiance is demonstrated particularly when organizations are examined longitudinally. Rothman addresses the interstices between modes, which are interwoven as bimodal composites: action/planning, planning/development, and development/action. Development/action is exemplified by feminist or liberation oriented organizing - both of which seek to achieve change in more fundamental societal structures but most often employ collaborative strategies in line with a locality development approach. Examples of action/planning include national organizations engaged in local study and advocacy or local issue organizations working in governmental/ non-governmental partnerships. Additions and counterpoints to the Rothman model are put forward in Hyde (1996), from a feminist perspective. Hyde suggests that feminist organizing exists in forms that would fall into all of the primary modalities and the bimodal composites explicated by Rothman. Hyde also points to the neglect of ideology in Rothman's typology - as well as the conflating of ideology and strategy. Other issues raised include a lack of clarity on definitions of community, and a lack of engagement with social movement literature.

Another typology of community organizing groups is provided by Smock (2004). Power-based organizing groups like local projects of PICO and the IAF are compared with groups utilizing a transformative model, a community-building model, a civic



model and a women-centered model. The transformative model seeks structural change around issues of justice and develops a far-reaching critique of systems that produce inequality and injustice. The women-centered model seeks the re-characterization of private household and family issues as public issues and seeks to provide support for women to collaboratively address these issues in a public way. The community-building model seeks to build inter-institutional relationships for collaboration toward mutually beneficial ends. The civic model seeks to reduce social disorder by creating both formal and informal venues for socialization and contact, as well as interactions with local government.

In contrast, the power-based organizing model seeks to build a disciplined and extensive network of organizations that are capable of waging and winning public fights in support of grassroots community demands. The approach of the power-based model is more prone to conflict with other powerful interests – governments and corporations – than the other models, with the exception of the transformative model, which often seeks more fundamental changes to the very systems which advantage the powerful. The power-based organizing model operates under the premise that these systems are both beyond the scope of their local organizing, and capable of being utilized to their advantage for local wins.

Differing from the typologies above, which focus on the methods that an organizing group employs, Kahn (1982) classifies organizing approaches according to their memberships or constituencies. Distinguished according to membership base, Kahn identifies four types of groups: union or workplace, communities defined by geographic

area, constituencies based on individual characteristics, and issue-based groups.

Similarly, Staples (2004) identifies four arenas for organizing: turf, issue, identity, and workplace. Speer et al., (1995) add a fifth type of group – membership that is based on institutions which may be religious, service-oriented, or educational in nature. This fifth type more accurately captures the model that is practiced by PICO, the IAF, and other power-based organizing groups. Although, this work is also referred to as faith-based community organizing (Wood & Warren, 2002).

Although human service providers tend toward conservative, institutionalized solutions and often disapprove of organizing clients (Rothman, 1974), there is some organizing that occurs from within or alongside professional social work practice (Johnson, 1994) and community development practice (Stoecker, 2003). Even when professionals support activism, they tend to strongly prefer consensus-based approaches to action, relying on professional channels for political activity (Rothman, 1974). Using existing rubrics to classify and differentiate among approaches to organizing demonstrates the ambiguity that is currently present in the field. Even within disciplines, variations on vocabulary for classifications include types, settings, approaches, dimensions, mechanisms, frameworks, orientations, modalities, strategies, arenas, and models. It is clear that many researchers struggle with these ambiguities in characterizing the groups with whom they collaborate to their readership. The development of a clear and comprehensive system for differentiating among groups and methods that they employ is a needed undertaking in future research on community organizing. For present purposes, the term *power-based community organizing* is

adopted to describe the approach of the five PICO federations that provided data for this study.

## Roots

From a historical perspective, what can be said about the etiology of the power-based community organizing model? Its development has been a diffuse process drawing on the work of many organizers in different cities, operating in different venues (campuses, labor groups, ethnic or racial groups, rural areas, urban neighborhoods, etc.). But there has never been a single centralized group deploying organizers and facilitating organizing. Consequently, there have been a number of trends and mixtures of methods that have produced varying results at different times, in different places. This makes tracing the roots of today's power-based community organizing complex.

The methods used by today's grassroots community organizations often trace their lineage to tactics used during the US revolution (Honey, 2006). Drawing on more recent history, roots of organizing have been identified in a number of community welfare planning councils and organizations involved in community planning or social work in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries in US cities. Jesse Steiner was an early social worker focused on organizing in North Carolina (Austin & Betten, 1990). Steiner argued against the focus on isolated issues or arbitrary distinctions. To Steiner, specialized agencies working on only one or several issues brought attention to the specialization of the agencies themselves, while a focus on wider problems brought attention back to the community (Steiner, 1924). The work Steiner and his collaborators

can thus be viewed as one predecessor to the multi-issue organizing groups of today. The settlement house movement, and particularly the work of Jane Addams, had an influence on early organizers, although there were philosophical differences that were highlighted by the 1960s (see Tobin, 1988).

Bessie McClenahan wrote manuals in the 1920s on the practicalities of organizing. For example, she suggested that organizers begin with small or uncomplicated initial projects in order to demonstrate success and build confidence (Austin & Betten, 1990). Edith Terry Bremer headed over 50 International Institutes through the YWCA by the 1920s which pioneered immigrant organizing which both encouraged consciousness and pride in ethnic heritages and worked toward some instrumental goals in the communities (Mohl & Betten, 1990). Many of the early grassroots organizing processes which were successful became institutionalized as social service agencies (Fisher, 1990).

In the early part of the 20th Century, urban areas crowded with new immigrants seeking work and security sometimes gave rise to powerful local political bosses who explicitly traded jobs and other material favors for votes. Although corrupt, these political bosses created organizations that built relationships and pushed instrumental issues in working class communities in some of the same ways as power-based community organizing (Betten & Hershey, 1990). And, while the comparison is unsettling, the use of similar organizing methods has been employed by racist white supremacist organizations in their efforts to stop the advancement of other races (McMillen, 1981).

It is safe to say that the one individual who has had the most influence on the forms of power-based organizing that are practiced today is Saul Alinsky. In fact, many agree that his influence is overstated – perhaps because of his colorful self-promotional style. Regardless of how much is based on legend and anecdotes, the people with whom Alinsky worked, and his writings on organizing, continue to strongly influence organizing as it practiced today. Alinsky brought a complex mix of influences to the practice of community organizing. He had studied sociology at the University of Chicago with Ernest Burgess, Clifford Shaw and Robert Park – all of whom had been influenced by the pragmatic philosophy of another University of Chicago professor, John Dewey (Engel, 2002).

In graduate field work at the University of Chicago and the Institute for Juvenile Research, Alinsky did ethnographic research on gangs and organized crime (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987a). He concentrated on gaining detailed knowledge of the community, and gained personal access to notorious Chicago mob leaders in the process (Horwitt, 1992). And, he worked with, and deeply admired, the prominent labor organizer John L. Lewis. Lewis, tough and iconoclastic, embodied many of the attributes that Alinsky himself would later become known for (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987a). Through Alinsky, the power-based organizing models of today are rooted in the immigrant and labor organizing tactics and civic actions of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and Farmer-Labor Parties: unlike the communist organizing that took place in that era, which argued for reform of culture and tradition, these approaches worked within the cultures of the

constituencies they organized to form horizontal relationships, build understanding, and pursue collective action (Boyte, 2003).

Alinsky's first attempt at community organizing began in 1938 in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, which gained notoriety through Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* (1906). A community built around a slaughterhouse, it was the worst slum that Alinsky had ever seen (Alinsky, 1971). Along with local leaders, Alinsky formed the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council; a multi-issue, multi-ethnic community organization dedicated to improving the lives of residents. Alinsky and his allies won the crucial support of the local Catholic church by contrasting themselves to the labor union, which the priests discouraged parishoners from joining because they feared that the leadership of the labor unions were communists. Alinsky used the connections and legitimacy of the church to his great advantage in navigating the high tensions among different ethnic groups in the neighborhood (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987a).

The breadth of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, and its grassroots approach allowed it to become the primary vehicle for citizen participation in the neighborhood. The organization was effective, very quickly gaining financial support, securing street signs and a jobs program, creating a weekly newspaper, and rerouting garbage pickups (Alinsky, 1941). Interestingly, the organization is still in existence today<sup>16</sup>, although the state of the neighborhood is vastly improved, and the organization functions differently. Many of the principles employed by today's power-based community organizing groups were developed in the early organizing efforts in the Back

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<sup>16</sup> web address: <http://www.bync.org/site/>

of the Yards. For example, the organization pursued small instrumental wins, using conflict when necessary (Alinsky 1971).

Alinsky went on to organize in other Chicago neighborhoods, such as the Woodlawn community on Chicago's southside. He also helped organizing efforts in other cities. For example, he traveled to Rochester, NY to participate in organizing a group called FIGHT which targeted Eastman-Kodak. Along with his writing, one of Alinsky's most enduring projects was the founding, along with Bishop Bernard Sheil and Marshall Field III of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in 1940 (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987a). The IAF trained organizers through an institute, and supported new community organizations in several cities across the country.

The power-based community groups of PICO, the IAF, Gamaliel, and others continue to gain attention as some of the most innovative vehicles for citizen action in the US public sphere (Osterman, 2002; Wood & Warren, 2002). Many of the leaders of the current organizing networks worked directly with Alinsky. Organizers such as Tom Gaudette, Ed Chambers, Caesar Chavez, John Baumann, Fred Ross, Ernesto Cortez and Scott Reed trace their professional lineage to Alinsky's organizations, and many worked directly with Alinsky. An IAF organizer in Brooklyn, Gecan (2002; p. 9) claims to still receive phone calls from people "wondering where they can find that SOB Alinsky", before he can explain that Alinsky has died.

John Baumann began his organizing career after interrupting his studies for the priesthood to work with an Alinsky organization in Chicago in 1967, where he worked with Tom Gaudette (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987a). Gaudette had been a Chicago

neighborhood leader before he was hired by Alinsky in the early 1960's. Baumann returned to California, finished school, and then started Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) with a fellow student and organizer Jerry Helfrich. OCO grew into a large and successful local project, and developed an affiliated Oakland Training Institute, which changed names in 1976 to reflect the focus on a broader area than just Oakland – the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO). OCO was the first of many groups which would become affiliated with the PICO National Network. PICO has developed an organizing network and model that remains rooted in the Alinsky tradition (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987a), yet has shifted toward a primary focus on organizing through congregations (Wood, 2002).

Tom Gaudette remained influential in the PICO network, and several organizers trained by him, Scott Reed and Bill Masterson, became PICO organizers and then staff with the national network. Gaudette lacked Alinsky's self-promotional flair, and his contributions remain understated in the organizing literature (Medellin, 1997). In the 1980s, PICO engaged in a self-critique of its organizing process, out of which emerged the current PICO model. This process of refinement was strongly influenced by Jose Carrasco, who had worked in neighborhood organizing and church-based organizing in California and Texas. Carrasco saw PICO moving toward a more developmental approach to organizing when compared to other training centers. In the field at that time, a pervasive mentality was that organizers and leaders are either born with innate organizing abilities or they were not. PICO was teaching people to organize in a way that did not emphasize trial by fire, and emphasized values such as the importance of



family (Medellin, 1997). Carrasco began to work with PICO, and encouraged the network to work toward greater grassroots leadership development, and a congregation-based model of community organizing.

Along with the shift to an institution-based approach that worked primarily through congregations, the shift in the organizing model employed by PICO in the 1980s involved a focus on empowerment. The new model emphasized the development of a person-focused approach that moved the process toward more inclusive and democratic practices, drawing on multiple faith traditions (Medellin, 1997). This was a departure from the Alinsky model which relied more heavily on a central charismatic leader. The PICO network (which today stands for People Improving Communities through Organizing), has continued its steady growth, adding over ten local federations in the last ten years. As of 2008, the PICO network is composed of 58 local federations in 18 states and three countries (Baumann, 2008).

Power-based community organizing today is also frequently referred to as faith-based community organizing (Wood & Warren, 2002; Christens, Jones & Speer, 2008), highlighting the shift toward organizing primarily through faith-based institutions that has occurred across much of the field. The term *faith-based* is politically contentious as conservative religious activism has played a prominent role in electoral politics and social issues, and as the Federal government has channelled resources for social programs through religious organizations. To be sure, the actions of local power-based community organizing groups present a strong contrast to this conservative activism – even if the religious organizations that provide the institutional backing are similar in

many ways. From the standpoint of sociology of religion, the more effective institutions for community organizing tend to be less vivid or dogmatic in their representation of dualities such as good/evil, us/them, and they tend to be more focused on lived realities and social analysis rather than transcendence and intense worship (Wood, 1999).

The practice of power-based organizing has been theologically absorbed in the Christian tradition by drawing on stories of justice in that heritage. Jacobsen (2001) contextualizes his experience of organizing with the Gamaliel network in biblical terms, drawing on the stories of Moses and the Israelites, Jesus, and the apostle Paul. While organizers are not always religious individuals, they aim to establish symbiotic relationships with the congregations, and it appears that they are successful in doing so from the perspective of religious leaders who have been involved in organizing (Slessarev-Jamir, 2004).

## Power

*“Change comes from power, and power comes from organization. In order to act, people must get together.”* (Alinsky, 1971, p. 113).

By proposing power as the antidote to common social problems, organizing has an inherent diagnosis for these problems – that they result from a lack of power. Reflecting a societal individualist bias, problems, especially problems facing the poor, such as housing, education, health care, and community development are often attributed to problems with individuals (Marwell, 2007). Organizing rejects this individualist

viewpoint by countering that if there are problems with individuals, they can be traced, ultimately, to power issues. If individuals are performing poorly in school or committing crimes, this is, at bottom, an issue of power. There is also an implied level of intervention in this analysis. If, for instance, individuals are addicted to illegal drugs, organizing groups tend not to intervene at the individual level by working with particular individuals to halt their addictions. Rather, they would look to intervene at the level of the system by taking actions to limit the supply of drugs in schools and neighborhoods.

Power-based organizing seeks to alter the way that power operates at the local level. Organizing takes large groups of everyday people and alters the relational power within the group. It creates new settings which open up discussion, friction, and debate. Power, according to Alinsky (1971) is the “ability, whether physical, mental, or moral, to act” (p. 50). As conceptualized in the power-based organizing model, power is value-neutral. It can be used for both morally beneficial ends and destructive ends. Organizers understand and teach that power is not something to be feared (Reed, 2008). Part of the training process for participants in the community organizing process is to understand power, and acknowledge the possession of power and the intent to use it. This is in contrast to social cues prevalent in American society which discourage taking public political action (Eliasoph, 1998).

Alinsky’s treatment of power is elegant in its simplicity, and is useful for many purposes. For present purposes, an understanding of the ways power works in power-based organizing is enhanced by also examining the process according to the three dimensional model that Lukes (1974) provides (see Speer, 2008). Lukes’ first dimension

of power can be understood as the ability to reward and punish – this is the most visible and familiar dimension of power. Bribes, blackmail, and favors among actors exemplify the workings of the power structure along this first dimension. The second dimension of power determines who gets to even be at the table when decisions are being made. This dimension, somewhat more difficult to detect, involves who is invited, who gets a chance to express views, and how those views are treated in the discourse. Luke's third dimension of power is the shaping of ideology and myths – and the consciousness of those involved in the power relationships. This third dimension of power is the most difficult to observe, because it is so entwined with both cultures and individual identities. The third dimension of power is what causes people to avoid questioning their oppressive circumstances – to consider their circumstances as natural occurring or unavoidable.

The power-based organizing model, when applied well, can operate with intentionality across all three dimensions of power. In the first dimension, organizing groups engage in the power relationships that allocate resources and reward and punish. They can develop the power to demand change from powerful persons and agencies, and hold them accountable. In this regard, much of the power of the organizing process flows from the ability of the groups to persist over time. A group may take up an issue and have a small victory, or even a loss. The issue may die down and some time may pass. As opposed to a scattered protest or a single-issue group, the successful power-based organizing group is busy building relationships when it is out of the public eye. This allows it to resurface and reapply pressure when necessary. This longevity and persistence reinforces the power of the group at the local level.

Another source of power is the discipline that the successfully applied organizing process brings to an issue. By reflecting, researching, and carefully planning each step of the process, organizers and participants can chart a course that is not impulsive or haphazard. Points of leverage and contradiction may be identified and pressure can be applied consciously in a disciplined way. Organizing groups may demand a seat at the table when negotiations are taking place, and may either gain or be denied access. Other times, organizing groups host events on their own turf and carefully choose who is invited to attend these meetings. These are examples of the ways that organizing operates in the second dimension of power.

Considering Lukes' third dimension of power, an additional way that the organizing process builds power is by changing the understandings of individual identities and social systems. The activity of community organizing pushes individuals to continually expand their identities and recognize their shared self-interest, and break their isolation. Since these individuals are active in their communities through the vehicle of a power-based organization that they actively co-produce, this transformation of individual identities is not just individual-level change; at its best, it is systems change. As individuals push their understanding of systems and power-relations, the systems and power relations change.

Morality and representation of what is moral or immoral are shaped by the third dimension of power. Machiavellian power politics ignores morality as a component of power. In contrast, Alinsky states, "moral rationalization is indispensable at all times of action whether to justify the selection or the use of ends or means" (Alinsky 1971, pg.

43). While Machiavelli dismissed morality as irrelevant to power; Alinsky saw morality as a necessary but subservient concomitant. “*All effective actions require the passport of morality*” (pg. 44<sup>17</sup>). When organizing challenges new leaders to examine the power relationships and systems in which they reside, it pushes them to come to terms with injustice. It pushes them, in many cases, to realize their own complicity in systems of injustice, many times acting contrary to their own self-interest.

Through these developments, the organizational capacity to operate within the third dimension of power connects to individual empowerment. According to Carrasco, empowerment is “the restructuring of power and authority so that the powerless come to understand for themselves the need to, and ability to, influence given structures” (cited in Medellin, 1997, pp 133-134). Power-based community organizing groups employ a strategy that allows them to function as both empowered settings and empowering settings as they simultaneously seek to alter power relations and empower individuals (Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Speer & Hughey, 1995; Maton, 2008) through participation. The next chapter examines the relationships, process, and people involved in power-based community organizing.

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<sup>17</sup> Emphasis in original.

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## CHAPTER III

### CHANGE

*“You don’t.”* - Steve Jobs, 2004, in response to the question: “How do you systematize innovation?” (Business Week, 2004).

Change in systems that directly impact the day-to-day lives of community members is the overarching goal of power-based community organizing. This chapter details the innovative approach to community organizing that is practiced by leaders and organizers in the PICO National Network and other similar power-based organizing networks. Along with literature from the broader field of organizing, the content of this chapter draws on knowledge acquired through participation in PICO organizing activities, conversations and interviews with leaders and organizers from the federations involved in the Skipper Initiative, and participation in National Leadership Training with the PICO Network.

#### Relationships

*“The present generation wants to go right into the third act, skipping the first two, in which case there is no play, nothing but confrontation for confrontation’s sake – a flare up and back to darkness. To build a power organization takes time. It is tedious, but that’s the way the game is played – if you want to play and not just yell, “Kill the umpire.””* (Alinsky, 1971; pg. xx).

In order for a new power-based community organizing group to get started there first needs to be a core group of local people interested in starting a group. This core group may have encountered community organizing in another city, or simply have heard of it. To whatever extent they have been exposed to organizing, this group believes that it represents a promising direction for addressing concerns of residents in their city. This group is typically composed of clergy and other civic leaders. They work with the organizing network to form a sponsoring committee. The sponsoring committee hosts trainings by organizers or leaders from the national network, incorporates itself as a legal entity, a 501c(3), and eventually hires staff for the federation. Much of the funding for a local project comes in the form of institutional commitments to contribute a small percentage of their budget to the organizing effort. Additionally, local organizing projects seek private donations and funding in the form of grants from foundations. The total annual budget of a local group is relatively small (often several hundred thousand dollars). Funding typically remains a key concern as the organization develops.

As the local federation begins, at least one organizer is hired. The immediate tasks for this organizer, who may be new to the community, include making contacts within institutions, and soliciting one-to-one meetings. In these one-to-one meetings, the organizer will ask to hear the personal stories of other people. After having many of these conversations, they can begin to understand the range of problems faced by a community. These meetings, commonly known as *one-to-ones*, form the bedrock of the relational approach to organizing that is employed by PICO and other power-based groups. As the organizing process unfolds, one-to-ones continue through every phase,

and are held not only between organizers and residents or leaders, but between participants and other new participants, as well as between veterans in the process with established relationships.

The focus on building relationships is central to what allows power-based organizing to work as a vehicle for both individual and collective empowerment (Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Warren, 2001). As a diverse multi-issue organization, it is the building of relationships which allows the organization to persist over many years. By raising public issues, organizing groups often provoke conflict and face difficult decisions. It is the relationships that allow the group to stick together in the face of such challenges. And, it is through relationships that individuals are able to realize their shared self-interest – the ways that their private troubles connect to public issues (see Mills, 1959). The relational organizing process pushes individuals to break out of consumerist ways of understanding and participating, and encourages them to become co-producers of a democratic process (Boyte, 2003).

Networks of groups (e.g. Gamaliel, the IAF, PICO) employing a power-based organizing approach grew from many of the same roots, and they continue to cross-fertilize today as innovations spread both within and across networks. Nevertheless, the networks and local federations which use ostensibly similar approaches to organizing manifest pronounced differences. In most cases, the differences can be found in the relative emphases that different networks place on components of the organizing process. Compared to the larger field of power-based organizing, PICO places emphasis on relationships, and on leadership development (see Keddy, 2001; Medellin, 1997).



PICO's approach to leadership development posits leadership as a transformative process – and the potential for leadership is purported to lie within all people. Leadership development is a central goal of the organizers as they begin to form local organizing committees (LOCs), typically through congregations or other religious groups. A leader, as understood in the organizing process, is someone who has a network, or has followers. The primary barrier to leadership development is isolation; so the relational work is seen as key to leadership development.

PICO teaches organizers and leaders that isolation prevents people from understanding their shared self-interest with others – it keeps their problems private and personal. The problems that people regularly face (e.g. physical and mental health problems, crime or lack of safety, lack of education, debt, divorce, unemployment, job dissatisfaction, death, incarceration, and community deterioration) are typically experienced as private pain. In describing this phenomenon, Reed (2008) suggests that society fosters the privatization of pain. As long as pain is privatized, consumers are isolated in their experience of hardship – and they are isolated in their attempts to make systems change – they cannot operate with power.

The PICO organizing model and other similar power-based organizing models put forward a mechanism of empowerment and power for social change (Mondros & Wilson, 1994). The process of building *public relationships* is part of this organizing process. One key to this process that is emphasized in the power-based organizing model is the one-to-one. A typical one-to-one begins with a credentialing process in which an organizer or leader shares information about the organization and themselves, and sets the

stage for a conversation to last around 45 minutes. A central goal of the conversation for the organizer or leader is listening the other person's story. In this context, understanding a person's story means the emergence of three basic elements. First, what is the person's history, what were their formative experiences? Second, what is their present situation? How do they deal with work, education, health, family, faith, passions, and threats? Third, what do think about their future? What are their hopes and dreams, and what are the future threats they perceive? The one-to-one meeting ends when the organizer asks the participant if he/she thinks that there are other people they should meet. Would they be willing to serve as a reference for for others? This system of referrals is crucial to the organizer's exploration of pre-existing social networks (Reed, 2008).

Notably, in this conceptualization of a story, threats can exist both in the present or in the future. Experience suggests that for more middle-class individuals, threats tend to reside in the future – as opposed to the poor, for whom threats tend to be more present (Reed, 2008). The one-to-one conversations that take place as part of the community organizing process provide a venue for a particular sort of conversation to take place. In some ways, the one-to-one is reminiscent of a therapeutic approach. It involves the same techniques of reflective listening that are taught to psychotherapists. And, the one-to-one shares many of the goals of psychotherapy, including human development. Unlike most therapy, however, the goal is not to find an individual essence, or true inner self. Traditional therapy often revolves around attempts to remove context and external influences from the picture (such as parents, bosses, spouses), so that individuals can gain

more understanding of themselves – as conceptualized by a discipline built on the idea of the isolated individual (Bellah et al., 1985).

PICO leaders sometimes call the practice of conducting one-to-ones ‘social therapy’. When a one-to-one is conducted according to the organizing model, it creates a context geared toward several relational and developmental goals. As mentioned, unlike traditional therapeutic settings, the social therapy of a one-to-one does not encourage a person to view themselves in isolation. Rather, it seeks to connect their self-interest to larger social realities, to push them to embrace both human dignity, and power as a part of a larger social whole. The relational context of the one-to-one is intended to function as a key component of what Medellin (1997) calls a transformation to leadership. Empowerment is stressed as a developmental process. Power and relationship are themes of the relational work of organizing.

Further, unlike therapeutic settings, the one-to-one does not encourage an introspective focus of self-improvement. It is focused on the development of a relationship that advances understandings of the ways in which self-interests connect. In an organizing one-to-one that is done effectively, the individual and the relationship that is being formed are valued above any instrumental or organizational gains that might flow from this meeting. The experienced participant in one-to-one meetings knows that their role is not to promise immediate fixes for the issues that the participant is facing, but to push back on their conversational counterpart – asking them what they are going to do to improve the situation in their neighborhood. This approach does not sell organizing. It

builds a network, shares information, and seeks to affirm the human dignity of the participants (Keddy, 2001).

Organizing emphasizes relating to people on the basis of their own experience. A skilled organizer learns how to communicate with people based on what little understanding the organizer may have of the other person's experience. This type of communication veers away from nebulous social issues, and toward experiences more tangible to everyday people. Connecting a problem to an issue is the process of making the elements of the problem tangible in terms of the lived experience of the people involved. "They [issues taken up by community organizing groups] cannot be generalities like sin or immorality or the good life or morals. They must be *this* slum landlord with *this* slum tenement where *these* people suffer (Alinsky, 1971, p. 97). By staying within the experience of the people with whom they are working, organizers and leaders also appeal directly to the self-interest of the participants in the process. Critical for building a broad-based organization, this focus on tangible local issues avoids ideological entanglements and allows power-based organizing groups to remain basically 'non-partisan' within the highly mediated polarization of national political debate.

Self-interest is an operative concept in the practice of organizing. Through the one-to-ones, and other parts of the organizing process, leaders are pushed to identify their self-interest and relate it back to the work that they are doing. This promotes reflective practice and ownership of the organizing work. Boyte points out that "exploring self-interest means recognizing that one's concepts of 'self' and 'interest' are dynamic, changing over time" (1993; pg. 765). When pressed to examine self-interest, it is not

uncommon that individuals begin to understand ways in which they are colluding in their own domination by powerful interests. Practices learned through family and within the world of work are often built around the interests of the powerful, and often press individuals to adopt viewpoints that are contrary to their self-interest. Whether it is women doing unrecognized household work and raising children in the background, racial minorities working disproportionately in low-income jobs, living in neighborhoods with multiple social issues, or professional white men feeling discontent and isolated in the world of consumerism and success, such contradictions can be identified. Boyte claims that, “Such discontents hold explosive democratic potential” (p. 8).

Indeed, there is evidence that organizing is a transformative process at the individual level, with research pointing to elevated levels of psychological empowerment (Speer & Hughey, 1996) and sense of community (Hughey & Speer, 2002) among participants in organizing. The relational work of the power-based organizing group is one of its most distinguishing factors, especially when the diversity of the organizations across races, ethnicities, religions, social classes, and age groups is considered.

According to Reed, “The relational work is the single most radical thing we do” (2008)<sup>18</sup>.

The relationships that are built through the power-based organizing process differ from the types of relationships that are typical among friends and families. To describe this difference, organizers distinguish public relationships – such as those built through the organizing process – from private relationships. Public relationships are characterized by accountability and respect. They are not based on intimacy, but on the

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<sup>18</sup> March, 2008 at PICO National Training in Malvern, PA.

respect that is built over time through action that works to serve converging self-interest. Describing the initial phases of developing such a relationship, Gecan (2002) writes, “You try to gauge whether or not you and the other can build the kind of public relationship that is mutual and respectful and capable of withstanding the tension that all healthy relating tends to generate over time. You challenge them in a way that you can only do effectively when you are face to face, one to one” (pg. 25). Accountability is emphasized in the relationships that are built between participants. By developing the types of relationships that can withstand challenge and criticism, leaders also develop skills that are useful for publicly challenging authority.

One paradox of public relationships in organizing is that relationships which are treated as ends in themselves are better means to other ends. Put differently, organizers and leaders in the power-based organizing process learn about how to engage each other as humans with dignity (Keddy, 2001), and this provides the organizational foundation for instrumental wins. This knowledge and the web of relationships that is created in the process is what allows participants to be successful at producing social change. As public relationships develop, participants in the organizing process produce something that is increasingly rare in a consumer culture which breeds isolation.

*“In a culture of quick encounters and multiple contacts, of instant access and empty photo-ops, there are fewer and fewer public relationships of this depth and quality. The absence of these relationships creates great gaps in our society – where alienated people become more detached, where lost and damaged people spin out of control, where the apathetic and the enraged drift further away from a human center”* (Gecan, 2002; p. 32).

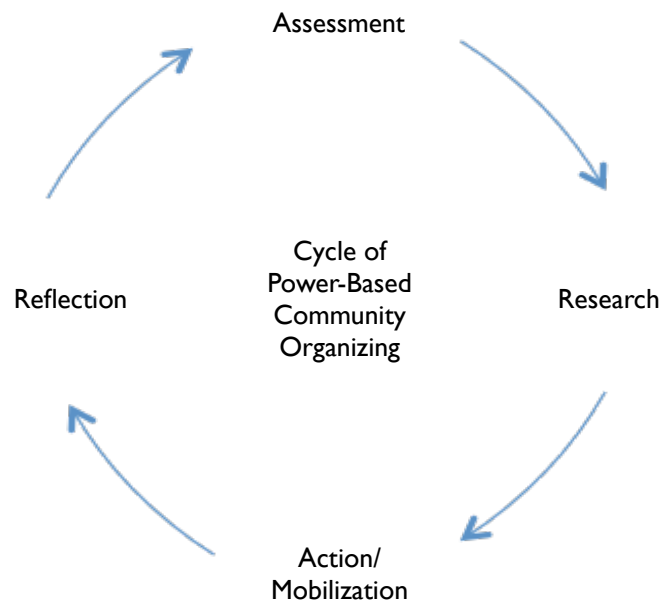
Having a broad network of public relationships advances people’s understandings of social systems. By forming connections across perceived difference, people gain an

understanding of how they, and others, fit into and interact with local government, the marketplace, organizations and various social systems. In addition to the relational components of organizing, the attempts to make systems change enhance this understanding. As Keddy (2001) writes, “Through participation in public life, they [participants in power-based organizing] expand their own identity, and develop a public self, which in turn transforms their private self”.

### Process

The process of power-based community organizing is not formulaic. It is different every time that it occurs. Alinsky, a pragmatist, felt deeply that no strategy for organizing could be a permanent solution – and that the best strategies came from democratic decision making. Alinsky described the fundamental ideology of the organizer: “In the end, he has one conviction – a belief that if people have the power to act, in the long run they will, most of the time, reach the right decisions. The alternative to this would be rule by the elite.” (1971; pg. 11). Because power-based organizing is practiced by grassroots organizations making democratic decisions, there is no set procedure. Instead, there are ways of describing the dynamic processes. A tool for understanding the varied sets of activities that power-based organizing processes have in common is the *cycle of power-based community organizing* (Speer, et al., 1995; Schulte, 2008). Conceptualizing organizing as a cycle, rather than a linear process with a beginning and an end, speaks to the fluidity that characterizes organizing processes. As illustrated in Figure 3.1, the cycle begins with assessment, followed by research, action/

mobilization, and reflection – then a return to the beginning with assessment. While actual organizing processes seldom proceed along this simple path, exploring each of these four processes within a cycle is useful.



*Figure 3.1. Cycle of power-based community organizing*

### *Assessment*

Within the power-based community organizing cycle, assessment means activity that is focused on building the base of the organization. Many social movement organizations and issue- or identity-based organizing processes have no corollary phase in their processes. Assessment builds public relationships and focuses on leadership development. It also lays the groundwork for the issue work that is to come. Developing a new institution into a local organizing committee first involves holding a series of



exploratory meetings with a group of interested individuals from the institution. The leadership of the institution (pastor, priest, rabbi, etc.) is asked to attend these meetings and voice their blessing of the organizing effort. Organizers attend the meetings and offer trainings on elements of organizing (Rivera, 2008).

If the institution decides to participate after the exploratory meetings, a local organizing committee (LOC) is formed that meets regularly (typically monthly). At this point, the institution's organizing effort is an affiliate of the local organizing federation. A planning committee meets prior to the LOC meetings to establish the agenda. Before moving into issue work, the LOC focuses on relational work. As a practical rule, half of the members of the institution should have participated in a one-to-one before moving on to the issue work (Gut, 2008). Group meetings during this phase of organizing often include training sessions on various parts of the organizing process. Part of this training is directly focused on how to do relational work according to the model of power-based organizing.

Participants may have prior experience with other service sector or non-profit activities, many of which have a very different approach to interactions. Political campaigns and social movement organizations approach potential volunteers, donors, and participants through canvassing, telemarketing, e-mail, and other membership-drive tactics (Candaele & Dreier, 2008). The leaders of these groups tend to appear to be selling something, which reinforces their role as the producer – and the other party's role as the consumer. Similarly, social service providers have a provider-client orientation that puts the provider in the role of expert, similar to the medical model of service

provision. As participants are trained in the relational work of organizing, they learn to avoid these ways of relating to other participants. In a one-to-one, the leader or organizer relates to the new participant as a potential leader and seeks to affirm this person's ability to operate with power. The hope is that the new participant will soon be involved in building new public relationships of their own, and expanding the base of the local organizing group.

The relational work in the assessment phase is sometimes referred to as a one-to-one listening campaign. Leaders in the LOC are asked to commit to a certain number of one-to-one meetings. Organizers participate as well. As the assessment phase of the cycle of organizing progresses, the organizers frequently ask leaders to reflect on the private problems that they are encountering in their one-to-one meetings. These conversations about the prevalence of problems feeds into the research phase of the process. Medellin (1997, p. 139) identifies eight strategic goals that undergird the one-to-one listening campaign:

1. to strengthen existing relationships;
2. to extend and develop new relationships with more people;
3. to invite and include more people into the LOC;
4. to provide a testing and training ground for leaders in the organizing effort;
5. to listen to how people's lives are affected day in and day out by the actions of those in power;
6. to probe how people identify and interpret why and how their lives, their families, their communities, and their church are as affected as they are;

7. to probe their anger
8. to assess their perspectives in light of other conversations.

### *Research*

The research phase of the power-based organizing process involves moving from generalities to specifics on public issues that can be addressed by the group. This process is sometimes referred to as *cutting an issue*. Cutting an issue is one of the most tactically demanding tasks that organizers and leaders perform as part of the organizing process. Problems are identified by participants, and many of these problems have little that is concrete or within the personal experience of the members of the organization. The local school system sucks. Why? What can be done? If there is a lack of ideas for solutions, Alinsky (1971) suggests that it “is simply that if people feel they don’t have the power to change a bad situation, *then they do not think about it*<sup>19</sup>. Why start figuring out how you are going to spend a million dollars if you do not have a million dollars – unless you want to engage in fantasy?” (p. 105).

As people build power and understand that community problems can be addressed in the context of a power-based community organization, they begin to think in more detail about the problems, and potential solutions. The entire array of problems with, for instance, a local system of public education cannot be fixed as a single issue. A large nebulous area of concern like this is considered a problem. By comparison, an issue is something that is actionable, something for which someone is responsible, and something

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<sup>19</sup> Emphasis in original.

that can create polarization (Gut, 2008). An issue must be cut from the larger problem.

In selecting an issue, the group begins looking for ways in which the actions of a governmental or corporate institutions contradict their stated aims. To this end, the research portion of the organizing process intentionally puts participants into situations in which they can direct questions to public officials and other knowledgeable sources.

They get answers, and unearth contradictions and potential solutions. Medellin (1997), drawing on presentations by Jose Carrasco, suggests seven questions that structure the research process:

1. who are the people with the power and authority to act on the issue – who can act?
2. what is the self interest of those with power and authority regarding this issue – what do they want?
3. what power relationships are affected by or having an interest in the issue – who else could influence the outcome and what do they want?
4. which institution has the responsibility to act on the issues – who is supposed to act?
5. what written policies, regulations, laws and procedures are relevant to the issue – what is supposed to be done?
6. what written documentation exists on bureaucratic activity or individual behavior – what is actually being done?
7. what are the symbols and values contained within the issue and how are they being supported or threatened by the above – why is it important to act?

This process of questioning often turns up discrepancies and contradictions between the world as it should be, and the world as it is. Directly involving participants

in the process of uncovering these contradictions and discrepancies gives rise to motivation and power to change. When participants are face-to-face with public officials and other powerful figures who are masking systemic problems with rhetoric or counterfactual information, their understanding of the system and their own role is expanded. They become students of systems, power and ideology. They also create a map of the particular power relationships in their own communities.

The research phase of the organizing process revolves around the instrumental goal of careful selection of issues that can be pushed publicly. Especially in the early stages of the formation of a power-based organizing group, the preference is for issues that can be won. Because power-based organizations have broad bases that cut across different socioeconomic and religious groups, they are less likely than other identity-based groups to take up some of the more nationally contentious social issues. As democratic organizations, any issue that they take up must be capable of winning broad support within the organization (McCarthy & Walker, 2004).

As multi-issue, multi-faith organizations, the position that these groups take is less predetermined than in a single issue group, or a group hailing from a single constituency or demographic. The research process can therefore involve many meetings – sometimes a series of meetings with the same public official. When carried out in a disciplined and intentional way, the research process serves to highlight some of the strengths of power-based groups to outsiders. In fact, in contrast to Alinsky organizations, PICO groups (and some other contemporary power-based organizations) often focus on building

collaborative working relationships with local government officials, stressing their public actions as attempts to build relationships.

Power-based organizing groups are known for breadth and creativity when taking on issues. Gecan advises, “If the formal process doesn’t work, or, worse yet, is a fraud and a trap, don’t waste much time depending on it. Figure out how to create your own. If the existing authority has collapsed, if the inspectors and the agencies and the local politicians have abdicated, then carefully and playfully generate your own authoritative approach.” (2002, pg. 69). As diverse groups taking on multiple issues, there are any number of angles to take on each issue. This challenges those involved in the organizing process to participate in building knowledge and skills in a process that has been referred to as experiential education (Boyte, 1993). The culmination of this process sets the stage for action/mobilization.

### *Action/ Mobilization*

The action/mobilization phase of the cycle involves the largest and most publicly visible functions of a community organizing group. Power-based organizing strategies are predicated on the pragmatic principle of change. Speaking of the ideology of change that effective organizers should employ, Alinsky (1971) describes a position of political relativism. In a practical sense, this means that power-based organizations have no permanent enemies, and no permanent allies. Actions, however, seek to isolate an issue and polarize it. Actions seek to have a concrete impact and provoke reactions. An action

must have a target, understood as a person who is responsible for or capable of taking responsibility for the issue at hand.

The specific issue that is chosen reflects the outcomes of the research process. During research, participants seek to identify points of contradiction (Speer et al., 1995) – differences between expressed values of a target (public agency, company, elected official, etc.) and the tangible outcomes of a particular policy or arrangement. These contradictions should allow people to readily understand a tangible manifestation of an unjust power relationship. Once such an issue has been identified, an action planning committee is established that arranges the attendance of public officials, media, and the membership of the organizing group. The planning committee can be large, and the size has an impact on the turnout at the action – experience suggests that for every member of the action planning committee, five additional attendees at the action can be expected (Gut, 2008). Like the research actions, the actions are planned in detail. An individual with personal experience of the issue is usually asked to briefly relate their story to the audience. Participants collaboratively formulate a series of questions that will be asked during the action. Individual participants are chosen to ask each questions, and each follow-up question. Once planned, the process is rehearsed.

The action lasts one hour and may involve hundreds or thousands of people. Members of the organizing group introduce themselves and the organizing group to the audience. They identify the issue, summarize findings from their research, and they propose a course of action. The target(s) of the action are asked to respond, and are questioned regarding their responses. In general, the responses that they will give

publicly are known in advance by the action planning committee through briefings that occur prior to the action. Although these briefing meetings are small, they are planned carefully so that the negotiations that take place are consistent with approvals from the larger action planning committee (Medellin, 1997). If the responses are inconsistent with the proposal by the organizing group, the planned questions may escalate the conflict, seeking to “pin” the target.

Though the action strategy involves conflict, it is not designed to create permanent enemies. As Gecan explains, “intelligent action, even public confrontation, is at bottom an attempt to engage and relate. Most activists fail to appreciate this” (2002; p. 54). In this way, the conflictual strategies employed by power-based organizing groups operate in the democratic tradition. “A free and open society is an ongoing conflict, interrupted periodically by compromises – which then become the start for the continuation of conflict, compromise, and on ad infinitum” (Alinsky, 1971, pg. 59). Conflict is accepted as part of the power-based organizing process because it is a necessity for making systems change. So, also, is compromise (Robinson & Hanna, 1994). Demonstrating the sophisticated understanding of the change process that underlies their praxis, power-based organizing groups do not approach actions as strict win-lose propositions. As Gut (2008) explains, the first victory that should be reinforced by the organizer is that people showed up to the action. Regardless of the outcome, the organizing group focuses on the progress that has been made, and avoids the tendency of activists to fall into defeatism (Lerner, 1999).



## Reflection

*“In the world as it is, the solution of each problem inevitably creates a new one. In the world as it is there are no permanent happy or sad endings”* (Alinsky, 1971, pg. 14).

An action is the most highly attended and publicized part of the organizing process. Following an action, there can be a notable drop in activity as the membership of the organization processes the results of the effort. The organizers and leaders have learned through experience to be active in contacting participants during this time-period immediately following an action in order to process the outcomes of the organizing activity (Gut, 2008). Part of this reflection phase involves relationship building, but it has also evolved into a crucial time to reconsider the overall approach and the issues. John Baumann (2008) highlights the reflection process as one of the major evolutions that the PICO organizing process has undergone during its more than thirty years of facilitating local organizing projects:

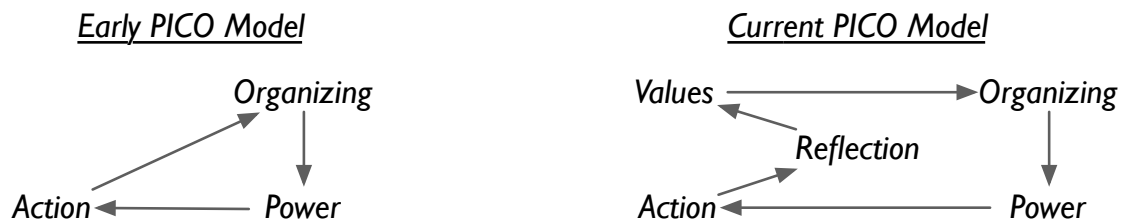


Figure 3.2. Evolution of the PICO Model of power-based organizing (Baumann, 2008)

As organizing groups have built power, they have found it crucial to reflect on the uses of that power – not only tactically, but from the perspective of values. Are they abusing the power that they have built? Are they becoming addicted to power and demanding public recognition? Have they lost touch with the relational work of

organizing? The cultural foundations of the faith-based institutions that form the units of today's power-based organizing groups have facilitated this reflection. After an action, the spiritual leaders of the institutions are often invited to reflect with the group about the action that has taken place. This meaning-making endeavor feeds back into the processes of individual and organizational empowerment (Speer & Hughey, 1995).

Suggesting that pure altruism is a myth that is commonly invoked to mask self-interest, Alinsky argued that his organizing was committed to a "complex of high values" including "freedom, equality, justice, peace, the right to dissent" (1971, p. 46). If democratic processes lead to outcomes that defy these values, then democracy has been perverted. Democracy, in this view, is the best available – yet imperfect – tool. The reflection processes that PICO organizers have adopted seek to maintain the linkages between the actions of the organizing group and the self-interest of individuals. They teach that operating in your self-interest does not always equal selfishness. They also seek to focus participants on the self-knowledge that they are gaining by becoming active in the public sphere (Reed, 2008) – reflecting the understanding that systems and individuals must change in concert. PICO organizing is broadly committed to a set of basic values, such as human dignity and compassion (Keddy, 2001), as well as values embraced by the entire field of power-based organizing, such as the fostering of a democratic culture of civic participation (Robinson & Hanna, 1994). The reflection involved in the organizing process requires constant reassessment of values, self-interest, and action.

## People

Organizers often refer to the process of *building the base* (e.g. Brager, Specht & Torczyner, 1987). Mondros and Wilson (1994) identify three aspects included in the process of building the base:

1. recruiting and engaging new people,
2. keeping current members motivated and involved, and
3. deepening member participation

Recruiting and engaging new people sometimes involves finding existing leaders in a community, and learning how people already connect to each other through social networks. Referrals are requested, and the organizer solicits meetings and extends invitations. Many people with whom the organizer meets ultimately do not become involved in organizing. Yet, the relational focus of the organizing model does not devalue these experiences. As long as the organizers and leaders are reaching out and moving beyond their inner circles to establish new relationships, they are engaging in the relational work of organizing.

In order to accomplish its goals, and even to survive, the power-based community organizing group needs a continual flow of new people. It also needs to try to retain as many of the people as it can. Having a large number of people involved is beneficial for several reasons, from an organizational standpoint. Funding, and the relationships that produce funding for organizing come through the activities of members. When approaching public officials and requesting meetings, it is helpful to be able to claim to represent a large number of people. Large numbers of attendees at public events

reinforce not only to outsiders, but to new participants, that the organization is healthy and powerful. New participants bring ideas, personal stories, and volunteer energy for the accomplishment of tasks that would otherwise strain the small staffs of local organizing groups. And, new members reach out to other new members and keep a steady flow of new attendees coming to organizing events (Mondros & Wilson, 1994).

The PICO model's approach to keeping current members motivated and involved is similarly rooted in the relational approach to organizing. Organizers and leaders are taught to invite challenge and accountability in their relationships with each other. The idea is that a public relationship will naturally develop tensions and resentments. The responsibility in a relationship is to ask questions, to listen, and to uncover these tensions so that they can provide room for growth, and the relationships can endure. Medellin (1997) compares this process to a commitment to a journey with another person. The journey involves both individuals in the roles of teacher and learner. As a partner in such a relationship, one must recognize and accept the other's current condition, as opposed to measuring against an ideal. The relational model also advocates both participants in the relationship allowing for change to occur – within the relationship, and the perspectives and identity of the other person. Part of this change should be a greater realization of the possibilities for systems change, as reflected in the PICO principle “the first revolution is internal” (Medellin, 1997, p. 131).



*Figure 3.3. Imagery from the PICO website: [www.piconetwork.org](http://www.piconetwork.org)*

Deepening the participation of members over time involves the organizational practices of continually shaking up the established order. In effective power-based organizing, the leadership in meetings should not continually fall to the same people, it should be fluid and diverse. New perspectives and new sets of skills should be constantly developed, and new opportunities for responsibility and leadership should be shared<sup>20</sup>. Tasks that might be mundane are stressed as important parts of the development of skills and abilities, and leaders are trained to look to the organizing activities as learning opportunities (Medellin, 1997). The temporary nature of any given role allows people to view themselves and each other as possessing a range of capabilities. In a poorly functioning organizing group, organizers or leaders may work to limit the access of new

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<sup>20</sup> This organizational characteristic can be described as a strong opportunity role structure (Peterson & Speer, 2000).

participants feeling that they will only mess up ‘their’ process; not wanting to sacrifice any measure of control (Mondros & Wilson, 1994).

The core organizational leadership of established power-based organizing groups promote a culture of intentional action, discipline and commitment in the organizing process. Meetings have structure and purpose. They also have time limits. Accordingly, one of the more basic leadership roles is that of time keeper in meetings. Part of the leadership development process involves a critical approach, which seeks to identify individuals with promise for leadership within the organization. Gecan (2002) calls this “sort[ing] out the majority of hard and persistent workers from the small minority of loudmouths” (p. 12). While the underlying philosophy of grassroots organizing holds that anyone can become a leader, this doesn’t mean that everyone will become a leader. Part of the task for the existing leadership in an organizing group is identifying which newer people are likely to be more effectively developed as future leaders. Basic requirements for leadership in organizing are the ability to follow through on promises, to be held accountable, and to admit mistakes and failures when they happen (Medellin, 1997).

Power-based community organizing is often described as operating from the bottom up, or from the grassroots. These rhetorical emphases seek to highlight the decentralized decision making process that takes place within the organizing process, and the relative lack of hierarchy. Though organizers help to guide the process along, it is volunteer leaders who shape the campaigns and ultimately speak publicly on the issues. Accounts of community organizing are replete with the realization that ordinary people,

once given the opportunity, can often accomplish more than even they themselves would have thought. Gecan (2002) writes, “People who have ideas and drive are on every street, in every project, every workplace and school, waiting in the wings, ready to be discovered. Someone has to ask them to step out, not to be consumers or props or spectators but to be players in the unfolding drama of public life” (p. 22). In fact, Reed (2008) suggests that once new participants learn that they are part of a legitimate vehicle for real change, the challenge tends not to be getting good ideas, but rather getting too many good ideas all at once.

Professional organizers must learn to navigate several tensions in their roles in the organization. One such tension involves the degree to which they assert themselves and their opinions on the organizing process. On one hand, they want for the organization to succeed, and they want to retain influence on crucial decision-making. On the other hand, they must seek to constantly involve new people and existing leaders in real decision-making. Mondros and Wilson (1994) describe the challenging balancing act of distributing leadership roles and decision-making power and the organizer’s own role as a leader in the organizing process. They suggest that organizers who consistently challenge themselves to open up the process and involve new people in decision making are more effective at maintaining and deepening participation. Research suggests, however, that many organizers, while espousing democratic decision-making actually have very centrally controlled decision making structures (Delgado, 1986).

With its emphasis on decentralized decision-making, the PICO organizational culture strongly contrasts the dominant organizational model in the US, built on

managerial authority. Across the professions, the cultural dynamics of the work world function in ways that isolate individuals in discrete tasks, alienate them from their coworkers and supervisors, and infuse them with a sense of guilt and inadequacy (see Lerner, 1999). The PICO model promotes an organizational culture that is focused on mentorship and a fluid pattern of leadership and approaches. When applied effectively, this model fosters creativity and continually opens up new possibilities for growth and change (Medellin, 1997). Unlike stereotypical counter-cultural utopian forms of organization, the PICO model places emphases on personal and organizational accountability. Although many portions of the process involve deliberation, there is a consistent set of guiding principles and practices.

This set of principles and practices developed by power-based organizing groups can be conceptualized as an organizational repertoire, and as a frame for collective action (Clemens, 1993; Tarrow, 1998). The congregation-based organizing groups (PICO Network, the Gamaliel Foundation, and the IAF) contain frames for collective action that emphasize not only religious values, but pragmatism and *realpolitik*. Sometimes, these frames are made explicit in training of new organizers and leaders. For example, one of the longstanding tools for the training of organizers and leaders in the power-based organizing model is the Melian debate. To conduct this training, leaders read an excerpt from Thucydides History of the Peloponnesian War (first known non-mythological historical account of a major military conflict), which describes the conflict between Athens and Sparta. The Athenian fleet has arrived at the island of Melos, which is a Spartan colony. Melos, a small island, was attempting to remain neutral in the conflict,



and was resisting the Athenian attempt to make it a tributary. The Athenian generals sent an envoy to negotiate with the Melians before giving the order to attack and conquer the island.

After setting up the scenario, leaders participating in the training are divided into two groups. A debate is simulated in which participants take the perspective of either the Athenians envoy or the Melian leadership. In the ensuing debate, the Athenians, assured of their military dominance, are played by one group which urges the other to peaceably submit. The group playing the Melians must attempt to dissuade the Athenians from attacking, while refusing to submit to Athenian rule. In the historical account, the Melians attempt to sway the Athenians by appealing to what they perceive to be the Athenians' self-interest. They ask what is to be gained by resorting to force against a neutral power such as Melos. Will it not antagonize every other neutral power, who will thereafter fear being attacked?

The groups role-play the debate with members rotating in and out of several negotiation chairs. The tables turn as each group is told that they are to switch perspectives. The group taking the perspective of the Melians must now argue from the perspective of the Athenians, and vice versa. After the role-play negotiation is completed, the groups are given another excerpt from the history of the Peloponnesian conflict, which describes the historical outcome – the Melians refused to comply with the Athenian demands, and were besieged by the Athenians. Most of the Melians died. Alinsky liked to use this story to push idealistic students to question their assumptions about the ways that power operates (Boyte, 2003). Athens, the more powerful force,

served its own self interest. Melos attempted to appeal to the self-interest of the Athenians, but ultimately failed to accurately understand the situation.

This training advanced Alinsky's idea that to participate in politics, you must begin with the world as it is (Osterman, 2002). Gecan writes "and that's where most of our best training ends – leaving people stirred up, examining their habits in the public arena, imagining themselves operating in a different way, and fitter for the vital democratic duties that lie before them" (p. 46). The intended learnings from the Melian debate as is used today by the PICO Network (Reed & Rivera, 2008) include clarity about one's power and interests, an understanding of what one is willing to put at risk, and the understanding that negotiation begins with a power analysis.

Most of the transmission of the organizational repertoire that takes place in organizing is not structured around training and simulation. Practice is the preferred mechanism for the attainment of skills and knowledge. Experience, and the knowledge gained through experience are highly valued in the organizing culture. The public work carried out by organizing groups could thus be considered as both form of pragmatic education (Schön, 1992; Sandro, 2002), and as a form of reflective-generative practice (Dokecki, 1996).

### Limits

This chapter has argued that power-based community organizing represents a promising form of public work from both instrumental and relational perspectives. However, there are limits to the model and its practice that must be taken into account.

According to Medellín (1997), local organizing projects sometimes struggle to maintain their fighting edge, with complacency cropping up in different projects at different times. They also struggle to balance the various parts of the organizing cycle, and with limiting their own power by engaging only in safe or familiar tactics and issues. Working in the context of religious institutions limits the range of issues that can be addressed, since churches may not want to push progressive issues that trigger national debate on morality, such as LGBT marriage, gun control, or reproductive rights for women. Additionally, cultural shifts that have accompanied suburbanization of the middle class present both challenges and potential opportunities for the organizing model (Osterman, 2002; Boyte, 2003). Community organizing groups, like many local non-profits, tend to be fairly fragile entities, vulnerable to funding crises or leadership attrition (Dreier, 1996)<sup>21</sup>.

A prevalent critique of local community organizing efforts stems from the assertion that local organizing constitutes an ameliorative solution to structural changes benefiting the powerful – and that local efforts are incapable of achieving lasting transformative systems change. Scholars of neoliberal capitalism detail the ways in which extra-local forces continue to advance their interests in the global political-economy and enhance their bargaining positions at national and international levels. These changes sometimes act to exacerbate root causes of local problems, and often undermine the power of middle and working class people, local, and even national governments. Local and national government actions are often in the interests of these powerful forces by giving subsidies to businesses, displacing the poor, and reducing

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<sup>21</sup> Networks, too, are vulnerable, as can be seen in the recent case of embezzlement at the top levels of ACORN.

social service obligations. When localities choose not to pursue these strategies, they increasingly risk the flight of capital, as other localities become more deregulated, and therefore more competitive in a global economy. Viewed through this lens, local community organizing can be understood to be engaged in a Sisyphean task of combatting the symptoms of a larger illness at the local level (Sites, 2005).

As community organizing groups have proliferated over the past several decades, so too have urban problems. Many of the problems can be explained by the weakening hand of local communities in the neoliberal global economy. By identifying the community as both the base of the organizing effort, and the level at which problems should be addressed, the local community organizing model can limit itself to combatting symptoms of larger problems within the constraints of local politics (Fisher, Brooks & Russell, 2007). Additionally, while organizing has a history of selecting targets from both the public and private sectors, the practice has evolved to focus on targets primarily within the public sector – while over the same time-period, the power of local government has decreased when compared to the private sector (Defilippis, Fisher & Shragge, 2006). This focus on the local public sector may produce easier wins, but it is not a promising long-term strategy for engaging the power structure.

A related, and farther reaching criticism of local community organizing suggests that it may be not only futile, but detrimental to contemporary society's ability to engage in movements for social change. The argument is made in Piven and Cloward (1977) that local community organizing potentially diverts attention and energy from these overarching transformative goals and pours them into tasks related to achieving a larger

slice of the shrinking pie available in conventional local politics. Also, despite its success at the local, and sometimes state levels, community organizing has not yet proven to be a particularly effective vehicle for change at the national or international scale. For instance, Gecan (2002) details an attempt by several northeastern IAF affiliates to meet with either of the two parties' nominees for U.S. president in the 2000 campaign. After repeated attempts, they were unable to even get an appointment to meet with either candidate (Bush and Gore), highlighting the relative powerlessness of local organizing groups at the level of national politics. Gecan displays his frustrations with "those who want to make an impact on the nation... They have grand ideas and interesting notions but no appetite for building relationships, no patience for the daily deal-making that goes on within institutions and between institutions, and no respect for the art of politics and inevitability of compromise" (Gecan, 2002, p. 75).<sup>22</sup>

So clearly, community organizing faces challenges. It has not meaningfully altered the destructive impulses of advanced industrial society – nor has it entirely ridded urban areas of problems. Despite a community organizing presence, many longstanding neighborhood problems persist, and new challenges continually arise. Undoubtedly, the groups and networks employing a power-based organizing model face great challenges in the current political and economic systems, and must develop new tactics if meaningful gains are to be made. However, much of the critique of local organizing that arises is based either on the disappointment that organizing cannot do more, or that organizing provides inadequate substitution for the social service institutions that have been gutted

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<sup>22</sup> The ecological scale for change (local, national, international) is a major unresolved debate among advocates for change.

as part of a neoliberal agenda. Certainly, it is not a panacea or a replacement for government.

However modest they may seem when compared to the global flows of capital, there have been tangible gains achieved at the level of policy and the distribution of goods and services at the local level, as discussed in Chapter One. And, the prospect of national and international action is at the forefront of the minds of leaders in the field. The proliferation of new organizing groups – and the continual evolution of the organizing model – raises the hope that there will be increasing tangible gains from organizing, and that organizing will become more effective at the level of national and international politics. However, aside from any tangible achievements, I strongly counter the claims that organizing is futile or counter-productive for the following twelve reasons:

1. It's building relationships (i.e. social capital) and breaking patterns of isolation.
2. It's not just building any relationships, it's building them across faiths, across races, across social classes (i.e. 'bridging' social capital).
3. It's not just teaching 'tolerance', it's building people's ability to connect their self-interests across the dividing lines of society.
4. It creates a setting in which values such as human dignity and compassion are practiced.
5. It's education – experience that enhances further experience.
6. It's teaching people civic skills (e.g. public speaking) and giving them leadership experience.

7. It's teaching people how to understand community and social systems in ways that do not boil everything down to individual problems.
8. It's teaching people to exercise power and to resist domination.
9. It's demonstrating the power ordinary people can wield when they join together and embrace a thoughtful and pragmatic process.
10. It regularly promotes accountability of those in power.
11. Even when inactive, it provides the ever-present possibility of public pressure, which shapes the behavior of those in power.
12. Finally, it provides a model – even for those who are not participants – of how to be an active producer of change in a society in which few such models exist.

Keddy (2001) emphasizes this last point in describing organizing as a culture-shaping enterprise. Through action and reflection, organizing represents a continual process of becoming – it is a process that simultaneously expands individual identities and community capacity for collective action. The 2008 democratic primary for president of the US highlights the cultural impact of the power-based community organizing model on democratic politics, and the role of leadership in organizing. Alinsky and his method were taken up as a topic in a thesis by Hillary Rodham (Rodham, 1969). In it, she describes his organizing efforts and his reactions to the hypocrisy around citizen participation of the legislative War on Poverty. Speculating on the effectiveness of the Alinsky model, Rodham argues that it is likely that it will be ineffective without Alinsky himself at the helm, pointing out that few leaders of national prominence had (then) emerged from Alinsky organizations. Rodham claims in her thesis that Alinsky

offered her a job – but she refused. In contrast, her future presidential primary rival Barack Obama took a job organizing in a low-income Chicago neighborhood, and wrote, “that a viable organization can only be achieved if a broadly based indigenous leadership — and not one or two charismatic leaders — can knit together the diverse interests of their local institutions” (1990, p. 38). As has been observed – and stated by Obama – many of the campaign’s messages and approaches are taken directly from the power-based community organizing model (see Candaele & Dreier, 2008).

Understanding organizing and its individual and community impacts, as well as its ability to impact the broader culture, it becomes clear that organizing represents a way of getting the social organism thinking (Dewey, 1894, as cited in Menand, 2001).

Christens, Hanlin and Speer (2007) suggests that efforts for lasting systems should incorporate the following: “a reconciled view of individual and system, movement toward greater complexity, an eye toward power relationships, and a search for connections and points of leverage” (p. 230). Local organizing groups, when they are operating effectively, provide an example of systems change strategy which operates at the interstices of system and individual.

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## CHAPTER IV

### CONTEXT

*“The most pervasive fallacy of philosophic thinking goes back to neglect of context.”*

- John Dewey, 1931

When a new participant becomes involved in organizing, no two experiences are exactly the same. So, when we speak of participation in organizing, we are generalizing up from a large number of different experiences to create an abstraction that stands in for actual *participation in organizing*. The actual experiences differ according to the historical context, any number of particularities, and the personal situations of the people involved. The central hypothesis of this dissertation is that these contexts shape the experiences and, therefore, the subsequent behaviors of individuals in systematic ways. The goal of maintaining and deepening member participation in power-based organizing can be enhanced by understanding how individuals relate to different contexts within power-based organizing.

#### Individual Participation

Voluntary sector groups depend on the sustained involvement of their membership. Much of the effectiveness of power-based organizing groups, in particular, stems from their ability to consistently draw large groups of people together. The long-

term impacts of organizing on neighborhoods and cities can be difficult to identify and disentangle from a data-analytic perspective. *Participation in organizing* is a more immediate outcome from the process, and can be understood as a proximal outcome for organizational power, which, in turn, often leads to neighborhood and metropolitan change. In addition to its role in the development and maintenance of organizational power, individual participation in power-based organizing is a relevant indicator unto itself. Studies of civic engagement and social capital have shown similar activities to be in short supply in contemporary society. However, most studies of participation rely on membership rosters or retrospective self-reports of participation from surveys. Few studies make use of actual documented participatory activities, over time, in specific organizations.

From a measurement perspective, civic engagement and participation refer to groupings of activities such as voting, attending events, contacting elected officials, and engaging in acts of politically or socially oriented consumption such as reading a newspaper (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995; Stolle & Hooghe, 2004; Berry, 2005; Delli Carpini et al., 2004). Social psychological studies indicate that many more people support the idea of participation in a range of civic activities than actually participate (Clary & Snyder, 2002). Participation and engagement have been linked to numerous benefits to society (see Ch. 2). In addition to benefits to society, there is evidence supporting benefits incurred by individuals from participation and civic engagement. Studies indicate that participation or engagement promotes youth well-being and psychological development (Yates & Youniss, 1998; Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007);

promotes tolerance and empathy (Mendelberg, 2002), trust (Whiteley, 1999) and skill development (Prestby et al., 1990) and social learning (Florin & Wandersman, 1984); and is associated with psychological sense of community (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990), and psychological empowerment (Florin & Wandersman, 1990).

Numerous studies seek to predict participatory behavior using characteristics of individuals. These characteristics can be grouped into two broad categories: demographic and psychological. Psychological studies of participation focus on personality, developmental, social, political and behavioral characteristics of individuals. From the standpoint of personality psychology, extraversion and empathy are associated with civic engagement (Carlo, et al., 1999; Elshaug & Metzger, 2001, Penner, 2002). From developmental psychology, family history of participation is associated with individual participation (Greenberg, 2001), as are higher levels of sophistication in moral reasoning (Muhlberger, 2000), and high levels of self-efficacy and locus of control (Cohen et al., 2001). From a social or political psychological view, trust in others and interest in politics are associated with participation (Uslaner & Brown, 2005; Bekkers, 2005). And, behaviors have been suggested as causally linked to participation, such as television viewing, which is blamed by Putnam (2000) for portions of the decline in civic engagement.

Regarding the relationship between individual demographic characteristics and participation, political science provides an influential lens which highlights the role of civic skills (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). The ability to speak English is an example of civic skill in the US. Other skills include organizational leadership

experience, public speaking experience, and a large vocabulary. According to this view, these skills are possessed in disproportionate measure by the economically better off, who are thought to have less to gain by participating, but are more frequently sought after as participants in civic activity. This viewpoint helps to explain murky relationships between, for instance, individual or household income level and participation (Freeman, 1997; Brady, Schlozman & Verba, 1999; Bekkers, 2005). Accordingly, education is much more strongly associated with participation than other demographic characteristics (Bekkers, 2005; Paulsen, 1991; Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). Age is associated with participation – Putnam (2000) describes the relationship between age and participation as an arc – both younger and older persons participate less frequently than middle-aged persons. Racial differences in participation have been shown. While studies have found that whites participate more on average than other racial/ethnic groups, especially through donation of money, the differences in participation have decreased over recent decades (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

Contrasting these studies of individual characteristics and participation, this study is focused on association between individual engagement in power-based community organizing and aspects of participatory context. The contexts of participation examined in this study are *neighborhoods*, *networks*, and *settings*. Settings are explored through the types of meetings that individuals have attended. Networks are examined through attendance overlap between individuals, and the one-to-one meetings that individuals have with organizers. And, neighborhoods are studied through aggregate demographic characteristics of the neighborhoods in which affiliates are located.



## Neighborhoods

Studies on influences of neighborhood composition on various outcomes have increased alongside the availability of software for geographic information systems (GIS) (Shinn & Toohey, 2003; Luke, 2005). Previous studies of behavioral outcomes in the context of neighborhood composition highlight the roles of neighborhood characteristics such as household income, educational attainment, residential mobility, mortgage lending, racial composition, property values, population density, proportion of homeownership and family structure (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Perkins, Brown & Taylor, 1996; Christens & Speer, 2005). Although demographic predictors of participation are frequently studied at the individual level, there is little evidence that these indicators function similarly at aggregate levels (Haddad, 2004). There is, however, evidence linking aspects of neighborhood context to both rates of political participation and the effects of individual characteristics on political participation (Huckfeldt, 1979).

While many studies of compositional demographic effects use residential addresses nested within boundaries (i.e. municipalities, police precincts, or school districts), this study uses data from census tracts within a specified distance of the address of the faith-based or other institution with which individuals are affiliated. Although some individuals may not live within this boundary, they are hypothesized to be affected by local aspects of context while participating. This approach is consistent with other hypotheses in this study – it is focused on the impacts of participatory contexts. Time spent at home or at work is frequently filled with private activities. In contrast, the time

spent at a faith-based institution or other organizing affiliate is highly social, potentially magnifying the relative influence of neighborhood composition characteristics.

### *Economic Heterogeneity*

Neighborhoods have become increasingly stratified by income due to interrelated processes of suburbanization, disinvestment, gentrification, and residential segregation by race; all processes related to the economic resources of households (Massey & Denton, 1998). Civic skills and norms that lead to voluntary participation tend to be higher among individuals with higher incomes; and these individuals are more often recruited for participation in voluntary activity (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995). These findings logically lead to the supposition that higher-income neighborhoods might have, in the aggregate, higher levels of participatory activity. However, empirical findings on the effects of neighborhood income on participation have been mixed (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997; Duncan et al., 2003; Perkins et al., 1990).

There is some indication that low-income neighborhoods are more likely to engage in participatory activity (i.e. Duncan, et al., 2003). Neighborhood physical incivilities, common in lower income areas, are associated with participation (Perkins, Brown & Taylor, 1996). On the other hand, Oliver (1999) finds less participation in both homogenous high-income cities and low-income cities than in cities with more economic heterogeneity. This may be attributable to the occurrence of fewer reasons to participate in more homogeneous neighborhoods and cities, and less interest in political participation than in more economically heterogeneous cities. Residents of affluent municipalities

may have fewer needs requiring governmental action and more agreement on policy issues. Besides agreement on issues, neighborhoods with homogeneously low income, or concentrated disadvantage, have unique barriers to participation (Wilson, 1987), such as a relative lack of opportunity to participate, and a lack of peer influence to participate (Stoll, 2001). Additionally, these factors may contribute to a relative lack of collective efficacy (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997).

Some of the divergence in previous findings on the effects of neighborhood income may be due to a lack of differentiation between types of participation, and the use of measures of central tendency for the measurement of income to the exclusion of measures of dispersion. A distinction between expressive and instrumental participatory activities, for instance, shows association between participation and neighborhood income (with lower income neighborhoods participating more) for expressive participation, but not for instrumental participation (Swaroop & Morenoff, 2006). Using this distinction, power-based community organizing activities can be considered instrumental<sup>23</sup>. Several studies suggest the presence of a nonlinear relationship (Swaroop & Morenoff, 2006; Oliver, 1999; Rankin & Quane, 2000) between neighborhood income and instrumental participation. Drawing on these findings, a positive relationship between neighborhood economic heterogeneity and participation in power-based community organizing is hypothesized. Using homogeneity/ heterogeneity (an indicator of diversity) along with a measure of central tendency will be more likely to highlight the relationship with participation than using only an indicator of central tendency. In

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<sup>23</sup> This is a crude distinction, since community organizing encompasses a range of activities that are both instrumental and expressive. One way to think about the process is that it involves an expressive process through relational work, but an instrumental set of external activities.

contrast to this hypothesis, some findings indicate that diversity imposes burdens that are detrimental to trust, and therefore participation. This view is prevalent in economic literature (Costa & Kahn, 2003), and has been recently taken up by Putnam (2007).

### *Residential Stability*

The power-based community organizing process is built on interpersonal relationships (see Ch. 3). It involves residents willing to dedicate time and energy to organizing processes which can last for years; individuals motivated to make changes in their cities and neighborhoods. These conditions are likely to be met among a greater percentage of residents making up a stable population base with longstanding investment in that city or neighborhood. Previous studies have found association between length of neighborhood residence, homeownership, and participation and engagement (Perkins & Long, 2002; Irwin, Tolbert & Lyson, 1999). Moving is associated with a reduction in participation in collective activities such as voting (Brians, 1997). And, homeownership is associated with longer rates of tenure, less residential mobility, higher levels of neighborhood commitment, greater appreciation in property values, and higher levels of participation in community organizations (Wandersman, 1981; Rohe & Stewart, 1996). A measure of residential stability also likely accounts for variation in the physical environments of neighborhoods, since dilapidation can lead to a lack of neighborhood stability (Subramanian, et al., 2006).

This study addresses neighborhood context by examining relationships between neighborhood variables – economic heterogeneity, residential stability and

homeownership – and participation at a neighborhood level of analysis. The question is whether individual rates of participation in community organizing vary systematically according to the economic composition and residential stability characteristics of the neighborhoods of the affiliates through which individuals become involved. Considering previous findings, it is expected that these relationships exist, and that participants becoming involved through affiliates in more economically heterogeneous neighborhoods will be more likely to participate over time than participants becoming involved through affiliates in more economically homogeneous neighborhoods. Likewise, it is expected that residents of more residentially stable neighborhoods and neighborhoods with higher levels of homeownership will be more likely to participate over time.

## Networks

*“Today we increasingly realize that nothing happens in isolation.”* - Barabási (2002, pg. 7)

People exist in and co-construct many different social environments. Through their exposure to different social settings, they also build a network of relationships of varying intensity or strength. The view of individuals as embedded within a complex system of relationships brings to mind ecology. In the application of the ecological analogy to social systems, Kelly (1966) posited the principle of interdependence, which states that change in a component of a human system produces change in another. Community psychological studies have found utility in the application of this concept of

mutual influence between groups and individuals in a number of policy studies and community interventions (e.g. Maton, 2000; Perkins, Brown & Taylor, 1996). In recent years, public awareness of human system interconnectedness has been raised by various byproducts of globalization and technological innovations, such as multinational production processes and social networking services operating over the internet. While they tend to be conflated in theory, urban social networks are distinct from neighborhoods (Sampson, 2004) and other geographic boundaries.

Social networks have been researched in relation to a variety of topics, such as disease transmission, innovation diffusion, culture, linguistics, transportation, and trade. In such network analyses, individuals or organizations are assessed for their levels of connectedness to (or interaction with) others, and by the number, relative strength, frequency, or duration of these connections (Luke, 2005). For instance, Granovetter (1973) characterizes the strength of an interpersonal tie according to amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services rendered (p. 1361). These measures allow for the generation of empirical understandings of such concepts as relational distance/proximity, network centrality, clustering, density, and cohesion. The social structures revealed by such analyses are interconnected with phenomena of interest to community research. For instance, strength and stability of social networks in neighborhoods is linked to trust and collective efficacy (Sampson, 2004), which facilitate social order and enhance community capacity.

Analyses have demonstrated social dynamics that tend to emerge regarding networks. Tightly networked groups actually present a number of disadvantages to their

members. The most advantages are conferred to those who have strands of overlap with other groups. Further, power in networks tends not to lie in having a number of intense connections to people in the same cluster within the network, but in having a number of weaker links to others across gaps in the network (Hughey & Speer, 2002). Having ties across gaps in networks allows individuals to gain access and information from the connections they have in a diversity of clusters, and not to depend heavily on a few cohesive or insular connections. Community organizing represents a way for individuals to develop relationships that span these structural gaps in networks and acquire the personal benefits from doing so – this is consistent with the ideology of organizing which says that power lies in building relationships.

Rather than recruit participants through membership drives or similar methods, the power-based organizing model builds a broad base on the strength of interpersonal relationships, which are cultivated through several parts of the organizing process. The organizing effort is simultaneously focused on instrumental outcomes that can be attained using the power that is built in relationship. This thesis, that instrumental aims can only be achieved in the context of lasting public relationships between participants, is central to the power-based organizing process. The application of social network analysis to community organizing, then, is a promising proposition. Within the current focus on individual participation, one question is whether the connections that individuals make through attendance differentially impact their future participation.

Barabási (2002) suggests that the way forward within network analysis is to understand processes with regard to social networks (p. 225). At this point, there are only

a small number of network analyses that examine behavior over time (Luke & Harris, 2007). This study examines the relationship between networks and participation, and hypothesizes a positive relationship between change in individual rates of participation and the rates of participation of individuals who are attending the same meetings. This idea can be understood as participation overlap, diffusion, or contagion (i.e. Wallace, et al., 1997). The hypothesis is based on the premise that social interaction and meeting coattendance with highly involved individuals fosters a higher rate of participation over time. The one-on-one meetings held between professional organizers and participants are expected to similarly promote higher rates of future participation.

### Settings

Power-based organizing models, as explored in chapter three, devote considerable attention to process (Staples, 2004). Within the cycle of organizing, multiple meeting types are used as procedural components of attempts to realize the overarching goals of instigating change, building social power and social capital, and empowering individuals. These meeting types range from large and publicly visible actions, to smaller committee or planning meetings, which are held more frequently and relatively privately. The most publicly visible, and largest type of meeting held by organizing groups are action meetings. These meetings typically involve a number of individuals from a diversity of institutions, including the media. They have a “target” – an individual or entity that will be the focus of pressure for change. Action meetings have been compared to a three-part



play: 1.) an introduction of key players, 2.) a buildup of dramatic tension, and 3.) a resolution or dénouement in which tensions are resolved (Robinson & Hanna, 1994).

The power-based organizing model seeks to build a large coalition of active affiliates. Each affiliate that becomes active forms a “local organizing committee” (LOC); typically a group of ten to fifteen highly involved leaders. These committees rotate leadership responsibilities among members and seek active involvement of other members within their affiliate (congregation, parish, etc.) (Speer, et al., 1995). LOCs meet regularly throughout the cycle of organizing to discuss issues and responsibilities, devise strategies, and reflect. Multiple research meetings (sometimes called “research actions”) are held leading up to an action. These meetings involve leaders and key members of institutions with knowledge on the topic that the organizing group is pursuing, and involve a general gathering of information, and, in particular, a search for tensions or contradictions. Planning meetings are held leading up to many actions and research meetings, and after such meetings for evaluation/reflection purposes. Other types of internal meetings may be held, and participants from the organizing network may attend meetings held by other entities (i.e. city council meetings).

All parts of the power-based community organizing process, these participatory settings have shared characteristics and differences. Each type of meeting involves different characteristics that create different social climates (Trickett & Moos, 1973) or characteristics of settings. These shared characteristics can be understood as the setting’s genotype, whereas various types of meetings within the organizing process have characteristics that vary according to the setting phenotype (Luke, Rappaport & Seidman,

2002). Different phenotypes – action, research, planning, etc. – provide differing sets of expectations and availability of differing sets of roles. They also create different understandings of the organizing process, and, hypothetically, differences in their future participation patterns. For instance, Mondros and Wilson (1994) suggest that engaging a newly recruited participant depends on their being given valid organizational tasks, as opposed to menial or meaningless assignments. They also suggest that an opportunity to serve on a committee that is working on a topic that directly concerns the new participant is an effective mechanism for engagement (p. 69).

These observations from practice echo what has been found more broadly in the research literature on settings. For example, Sarbin (1970) posits that the availability and adoption of individual roles in a social situation can be understood as characteristics of a setting. Roles tend to be more readily available to participants in smaller settings. The most famous observation of this tendency is Barker's finding that students in smaller high schools tend to participate in a higher number of interschool and extracurricular activities (Barker & Gump, 1964). Students in smaller schools feel more competent and satisfied with extracurricular participation, and feel more internal and external motivation to participate, including motivation that stems from perceived obligations. Students in larger schools experience more vicarious enjoyment and satisfaction through perceptions of affiliation with a large entity. Similar findings were reported for other settings (Altman & Rogoff, 1987).

Drawing on these findings, this study hypothesizes systematic variance in future participation according to the types of meetings that individuals attend in the current year.

The mechanism for this hypothesized effect is the varying levels of opportunity for engagement in the process that are available within each type. Although actions may inspire individuals to participate in future events by providing satisfaction via affiliation with a large, powerful entity, they do not provide as many opportunities per participant for role adoption and meaningful involvements. Attendance at local organizing committee (LOC) meetings and research action meetings, in particular, is thought to provide greater opportunity. Planning, evaluation, action and other types of meetings may offer opportunities to participate in immediate responsibilities or provide satisfaction due to affiliation with a large entity, but they do not offer the same level of opportunity for meaningful roles in the larger organizing process. It is therefore hypothesized that individuals attending research action meetings will have an increased likelihood of future attendance, compared to individuals attending other types of group meetings. Meeting sizes vary by the type of meeting being held, and it is expected that the size of the meetings influence future participation, but that most of the predictive effects of size can be captured through the closely related categorical variable of meeting type.

### Local Federations

Organizational activities vary when federations are operating at different points in the organizing cycle, or are taking up different issues. Patterns of participation, relationships and meeting types occur for a number of reasons that are not measurable by taking the process apart into component pieces. Community organizing federations are often involved in efforts on more than one issue at a given time. Achieving change in the

public school system, for instance, involves different tactics and patterns of participation than addressing housing or health care. The activities of a group in Brooklyn have inherent differences from the activities of a group in Northern Colorado. While the hypotheses on neighborhoods, networks, and settings divide and quantify aspects of context for the utility of statistical analysis and generalization, they leave out much that is of interest in a transactional approach.

How can patterns of participation in community organizing be described? How similar or dissimilar are individual and group-level trends across time? Is there a seasonal increase and decrease in activities? Are there notable irregularities in patterns? Do individuals attend meetings of similar types, or diverse types? Do local federations tend toward discernible patterns with the types of meetings and levels of aggregate attendance? Questions like these are explored through descriptive and graphical analyses in the next chapter. These more open-ended questions at the organizational level may yield findings that are comparable to previous studies of organizations over time (i.e. Gaventa, 1980; Fox & Hernandez, 1989).

### Summary of Hypotheses

The next chapter describes the methods and data that will be used to examine the hypotheses described in this chapter. The hypotheses all relate aspects of participatory context to individual participation over time. The aspects of context can be understood according to the following grouping: neighborhood, network, and setting. The neighborhood in which people participate is the neighborhood in which their institution is

located. Those living in neighborhoods that are more economically heterogeneous and more stable are expected to participate more over time. The networks that people build by attending meetings is expected to differentially impact their experiences in the organizing process. Those co-attending with other more highly involved attendees are expected to participate more over time. Similarly, it is expected that those having more one-to-one meetings will participate more over time. With regard to settings, attendance at meeting types that allow participants to adopt meaningful roles in the organizing process, such as research actions, are also expected to positively predict individual participation over time. The longitudinal design of the study that yielded the data for analysis allow a sophisticated statistical approach to these questions.

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## CHAPTER V

### METHOD and DATA

#### Growth Model

Following the research questions posed in Chapter Four, this chapter describes the methods and data used in this study. Both the questions and the data are suited to longitudinal data analysis. One advantage of a longitudinal design over a cross-sectional design is that, by incorporating time, it is possible to test whether variables from one time point are associated with variables in the next time point. Put differently, it is possible to build a model that predicts future individual participation according to the levels of other variables. Though the term prediction is often used to describe association in cross-sectional designs, it is rarely true prediction. A class of models has been developed over the past twenty years which allows efficient modeling of change over time, as well as modeling of units nested within larger units.

When these models are being used for longitudinal analysis, they are often referred to as growth models. And, when they are being used with multiple levels of analysis, they are called multilevel modeling (MLM) or hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). The use of growth models and other longitudinal approaches (e.g. survival analysis) is increasing across academic disciplines (Singer & Willett, 2003). Growth models have been used to explain variance in outcomes such as change in reading scores (Francis et al., 1996), social and political attitudes (Steele, 2008), and aggressive

behaviors (Espelage et al., 2003) across measurement occasions. Similarly, multilevel methods are employed in a variety of fields in which there is an inherent nesting of data such as students within schools (Raudenbush & Bryk, 1986) or residents within geographic space (Long & Perkins, 2007). In fact, the structure of a hierarchical linear model and a longitudinal growth model are virtually identical, and can be used in combination (Rabe-Hesketh & Skondral, 2008). The current study uses a binary dependent variable, necessitating the use of a probability model using the logistic transformation – a technique that is referred to as a three level generalized hierarchical linear model (GHLM) (see Luke, 2004). For the sake of simplicity, this study adopts the generic term *growth model* to refer to this technique.

The growth models used in this study are each composed of several nested models. The outcomes of higher-level regression models enter the equations of the models at lower levels as fixed effects. Thus, a growth model provides information on the degree to which occurrences vary systematically within and between contexts and individuals. In the longitudinal design for this study, events over time are nested within individuals. Individuals, in turn, are nested within the affiliate organization – the local organizing committee (LOC) – of which they are a part. This is a preferable analytic strategy to analyses reliant on aggregation of the event and individual data to higher levels, which would sacrifice the ability to detect change over time and individual effects, respectively. Conversely, an analytic strategy of disaggregation of the data to lower levels would introduce the risk of committing the ecological fallacy (Houchens, Chu & Steiner, 2007). The use of traditional regression models assumes independence, which is

not a condition met by these data, due to clustering of events within individuals and individuals within affiliates – both of which are relevant theoretically.


Along with the statistical modeling of the data, exploratory analysis and visual data analyses are performed. Along with preparation setting the stage for understanding how the growth models fit the data, descriptive analyses provide useful information about patterns of participation in their own right. Exploratory data analysis is recommended for applied longitudinal research (Singer & Willett, 2003). A pseudo-random sample of individuals from the data-set is used for some of these explorations. Individual growth trajectories, plots of participation according to meeting type, organization, and seasonality are useful for visualization purposes. Much of the visual data analysis and manipulation was performed in STATA 10 (StataCorp 2007a; 2007b) and the reported estimation of the growth models was performed in the stand-alone program HLM 6.0 (Raudenbush et al., 2004).

#### Data Collection

The data were gathered through the Skipper Initiative for Community Organizing carried out during 2001-2005, funded by the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities, Inc., under the direction of Dr. Paul W. Speer. The Skipper Initiative sought to understand the linkages of people of multiple faiths to active participation in shaping their communities according to the values of their faith traditions through foci on process and prevention (Speer, 2006). To that end, the evaluation portion of the Skipper initiative gathered information on the community organizing process in five PICO federations

working in five cities over five years. From a research design perspective, portions of the inquiry related to the Skipper Initiative can be characterized as naturalistic, quasi-experimental, or action research. One element of the action research carried out through the Skipper Initiative is that data were fed back to organizations periodically through the collection process with the intention of providing organizers with basic descriptive analyses of participatory dynamics over time (e.g. Speer et al., 2005a). In addition, some particular issues driving the organizing processes in various sites have become topics of research (e.g. Speer et al., 2005b; Christens, 2004).

Naturalistic research has been carried out regarding outcomes of organizing processes (e.g. Jones et al., 2004), as well as dynamics of multi-faith collective action (Armstead, Christens & Speer, 2003). Qualitative interviews have been conducted and analyzed according to several themes (e.g. Christens, Jones & Speer, 2008). And, utilizing methods appropriate for quasi-experimental design, waves of survey data have been collected and analyzed alongside survey responses from random samples of residents in the five cities (e.g. Speer, 2006; Speer, Christens & Peterson, *in review*). This multi-method, transdisciplinary approach to empirical research has been put forward as a desirable feature of systematic inquiry intended to enhance understanding of community processes at multiple levels (Christens & Perkins, 2008; Altman & Rogoff, 1987).



**Congregations Building Community  
Sign-In Sheet**

Please print clearly. If you are already on our mailing list, you don't need to give us your address, just your name so we know you're here. Thanks!

Meeting Journey to Justice - Our Lady of Peace - Dallas Meeting Date June 23, 2002

Name	Address	City, State, Zip	Phone (h)	Phone (w)	E-mail	Church / Organization
[Obscured]	Westbank	Glenwood	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	St. Stephens
[Obscured]	Oxford Lane	Glenwood	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	St. Stephens
[Obscured]	P.O. Box	Breckenridge	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	St. Mary's
[Obscured]	P.O. Box	Breckenridge 80424	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	St. Mary's
[Obscured]	P.O. Box	Breckenridge 81637	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	St. Mary's
[Obscured]	P.O. Box	Gypsum	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	St. Chris / St. Mary's
[Obscured]	P.O. Box	Arden 81620	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	St. Clare's
[Obscured]	Conroy Rd	GW5	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	St. Stephens
[Obscured]	Crestwood Dr	GW5 81601	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	St. Stephens
[Obscured]	BIGHORN RD	VALE 81657	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	leagu nwa
[Obscured]	Catholic Charities	81601	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	presbyterian church
[Obscured]	"	Glenwood Spc.	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	st. stephens
[Obscured]	"	"	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	"
[Obscured]	"	"	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	[Obscured]	"

Figure 5.1. Example sign-in sheet: Skipper Initiative (identifying information obscured)

### Events

At meetings between 2001 and 2005, across five sites, sign-in sheets were used to record the attendance of individuals. Individuals indicated their affiliations with faith-based (or other) institutions, and sometimes included additional personal information such as address, telephone number, and e-mail address. Sign-in sheets were periodically mailed to the research team and entered. Between 2001 and 2004, organizers were also able to log on to a Skipper Initiative portion of the PICO website to record basic information about the one-on-one meetings they were holding and general reflections on



the organizing process. Individual participants and organizers, then, appear in several data-sets multiple times. Each one-on-one meeting or group meeting is considered an “event”. The type of meeting that was held (i.e. action, research, planning, local organizing committee, etc.) is recorded for each meeting, as is the date of the meeting. The participation events are therefore unambiguous occurrences, since they are recorded by participants signing in to meetings<sup>24</sup>.

### *Individual Participants*

Data on individual participants were recorded from the sign-in sheets provided at meetings across the five sites. As data were recorded over time, recurring instances of participation, and within-person participation patterns became available. The names were matched in the data-set, and a unique identifier was assigned to each participant in each site. The sign-in sheet data make behavioral patterns evident; they also provide the basis of a two-mode network by recording incidences when individual participants meet with other individual participants through attendance at the same meetings. They also provided the universe of names for a telephone survey sample during the third year of the study. This survey is used to determine additional individual demographic information for a sub-set of individual participants in the next chapter.

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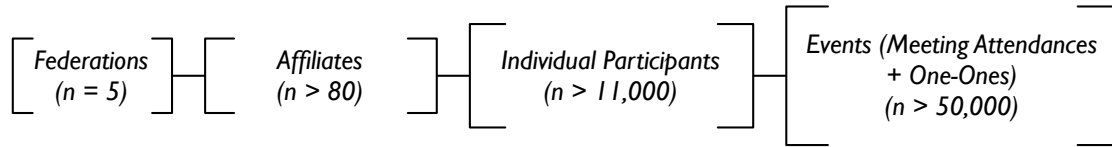
<sup>24</sup> While attendance data have been cleaned and checked, including, in some cases, double-checking by the organizers from the participating federation, some level of residual error exists. Causes of error include failure to sign in at meetings, illegible handwriting, varying name/ title/ nickname usage, and data entry and management error.

### *Affiliates*

Sign-in sheets included a space for individuals to specify affiliation with a faith-based organization or other type of affiliate. This allows individuals to be understood according to their shared affiliation. In addition, group meetings are often held in, or sponsored by, one or several affiliates. Both individuals and events, then, could be understood as being nested within affiliates. The mailing addresses of active affiliates have been identified, allowing for geographic analysis. Demographics data on neighborhood composition were obtained from the 2000 Decennial Census, which involved data collection closely preceding the first year of the Skipper Initiative.

### *Federations*

The affiliates, individuals, and events recorded in the data are each nested within one of the five PICO federations (also called projects or sites) participating in the Skipper Initiative. The five federations are located in Brooklyn, NY, Rochester, NY, Kansas City, KS, Kansas City, MO, and Ft. Collins, CO. The organizing activities of the different projects are not coordinated. Each may have multiple issues at different points of the organizing cycle. As contexts for organizing, there is a great deal of variability between federations.



*Figure 5.2. Nested data structure*

## Data Management

For this study, the criterion variable is participation in organizing. This is measured over time for each person in the five federations, meaning that what is captured is change in involvement in the process of power-based organizing over time. This is designed to empirically represent variations in the process of sustaining and deepening member participation (Mondros & Wilson, 1994). This information is gathered from the sign-in sheets used at meetings. From the data collection and entry processes, each individual participant was assigned a unique ID. Meeting information and attendance data were entered from the sign-in sheets into Excel workbooks, one per federation, broken into spreadsheets by time-period (typically one year). Column headings contained information on each meeting, including the date that the meeting was held. Individual participants, identified uniquely by “PID” [Personal Identifier], were stored as cases. Presence of a “1” indicated an individual participant’s attendance at a meeting; no entry indicated nonattendance at the meeting.

So that a growth model could be fit, the data were reconfigured into a relational database. Meetings were given unique identifiers: “MID” [Meeting Identifier]. A separate Meetings table was created to store meeting information for every meeting

across all five sites, listed by MID, with fields indicating date, meeting type, and the number of attendees. An “Individuals” table was created to store personal information on all individual participants who attended across all five years; such as name, address, phone number, and organizational affiliation by PID. Duplicate records for participants were removed and their information was reassigned to the correct PID. Then, a related “Attendance” table was created to contain information on which participants (by PID) were in attendance at which meeting (MIDs). The Attendance table creates the association between each person and each meeting they attended.

One-to-one data were initially stored in a separate database with unique identifiers for individual participants under the field name Contact ID. The unique identifiers in this database are different from the IDs in the meeting data. Participant names in the one-on-one data were stored in a single field, unlike the names in the meeting data, which were stored in three columns; “title”, “first”, and “last”. These differences were edited so that the information would be complete, and related to the other attendance data. No-shows and attendances that could not be linked to a participant were removed from the data. Meetings between more than two participants were split into two distinct meetings. At this point, the one-to-ones were matched to the Individuals table by name, so that those participants who attended meetings were associated with the correct PID. In addition to the automated matching process, a manual process helped to ensure accuracy by identifying variations on names, such as the inclusion or exclusion of a middle initial or title. A similar process allowed the association of the attendance data and the data on participants from the survey.

If a participant indicated an affiliation on the sign-in sheet at any of their attendances, this was recorded and noted as their affiliation in the Individuals table. Accordingly, a related table contained information on each of the institutions. This table, Affiliates, contains the addresses of the institutions (usually faith-based institutions). These addresses were geocoded, and information was retrieved on the Census tracts in which the affiliates are located. This information includes the total number of households, the median household income, the number of households in different income brackets, the percentage of housing units that are owner-occupied, and the percentage of families who have lived in the same house for the five years preceding the Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

These tables, Individuals (by PID), Meetings (by MID), Affiliates (by AID), One-to-Ones (by PID), and Attendance, form the underlying structure of the relational database that has been used to create the variables for analysis – exploratory, visual, and statistical. Additional tables were created to organize the information in different ways for output into different graphical or statistical software packages. The database management software used was FileMaker Pro, version 9 (FileMaker, 2007), and the primary statistical package used was Stata 10 (StataCorp, 2007a).

## Construction of Variables

### *Criterion Variable: Participation*

The criterion variable for this study is participation in organizing, measured at the level of individual people. Due to the method of data collection, it is possible to know the full list of who participated in each meeting – for each meeting that was held over a five year period. From this, it is possible to arrange the data numerous ways. For present purposes, the data are aggregated over time into years. Years, as units of time, are intuitively appealing since they are not sensitive to the effects of seasonality on participation – which are examined graphically in the next chapter. In a five year study, the use of years as dividing lines for time allows the necessary structure for growth modeling (which requires three or more waves) without adding unnecessary complexity to the data.

It is useful to think of the participation data several ways once it is aggregated by individual by year: as a count, as a proportion, or as an indicator variable. The count is equal to the number of times that each individual participated in each year. The proportion is the count divided by the total number of meetings that were held by the local federation that year. This is equal to the percentage of meetings that an individual attended out of the meetings that they could have feasibly attended. And, the indicator is a simple binary depiction of whether an individual participated in a given year – or whether they did not. While the count and the proportion are useful ways of thinking about and visualizing participation aggregated over time, the indicator variable is the

criterion variable that is used for the growth models shown in the next chapter. The decision to use the binary indicator was driven primarily by the presence of a large number of zeros (non-attendance in a given year for a given individual) contained in the attendance data. When used as a count or a proportion, the distribution of the criterion variable is skewed, creating problems regarding the assumptions of multi-level regression models. The use of the indicator variable requires the use of a nonlinear probability model, which makes no assumptions about the normality of the distribution of the variable.

The data are structured to be able to ask questions in the following way: what can be said about the influence of these predictor variables on the *likelihood of future participation*? To this end, the criterion variable for each individual is their participation or non-participation in the subsequent year. This reduces the number of “waves” of data from five to four by ignoring data for which there is no future year to predict. In order to account for autocorrelation of the participation variable (the extent to which highly involved individuals are more likely to participate in the future), the proportion of meetings attended in the current year is included as a predictor variable in the growth models. This can be thought of as “controlling” for the level of participation in the current year.

### *Settings: Meeting Types*

From the raw data, there were varying forms of information recorded about meeting types. Most federations use similar nomenclature for local organizing

committees (LOCs) or local organizing ministries (LOMs) within the affiliates. And, most research actions, actions, and planning meetings were recorded similarly. A number of other meeting types were reported and were subsequently coded into different categories. The coding process involved first coding each meeting type according to every description of meeting type that was used in the data, then creating a new field that logically groups these into categories for analysis. One category, “Federated” involves any meeting that appeared to be either held at the federated level, or primarily involving federation staff – the professional organizers. The decision not to include these meetings as predictors in the model has to do with avoiding the impact of paid staff status on future participation, which is understandably large. Another category “Organizational” contains meetings that are more typical of non-profit organizations. This category includes forums, job fairs, and fundraising activities. The meeting types of primary interest from a theoretical standpoint are the research actions and the actions.

Drawing on theory, it is expected that attendance at research actions in the current year is a significant predictor of greater likelihood of future participation. This is expected because research actions are the meetings most likely to involve new people in a setting where they are given a meaningful role, and an understanding of the power-based organizing process. In contrast, actions are large meetings with few available meaningful roles for individual participants. Therefore, actions are included in the models as a predictor for the sake of comparison. Variables for research actions and actions are coded as binary – an indicator of whether an individual attended a meeting of that type in each



year. Recall also that proportion of participation is included in the model to absorb the effect of level of participation in the current year.

### *Networks: Social Network Engagement*

The networks that are formed as individuals attend meetings can be thought of networks of affiliation, or two-mode networks (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). Individuals are not tied directly to other individuals through these data, as is often the case in social network analysis. Instead, individuals are connected to events, and then connected through the event to other individuals. These individuals, in turn, are tied to still other events. It is possible to analyze the structure of a two-mode network to visualize information on the characteristics of both individuals and events. Rather than an inquiry on the structure of the networks of affiliation formed as individuals attend events, the present study uses information on the levels of attendance of affiliated individuals over time<sup>25</sup>. Accordingly, the network variable represents the level of involvement of the other attendees at meetings that an individual attends during the year in which the attendance occurs, or, the engagement of an individual's social network. This concept is henceforth referred to as *social network engagement*.

An individual's social network engagement increases when individuals attend meetings with highly involved participants, and decreases when the other attendees at meetings have low levels of involvement outside of that meeting. The calculation is made more complex by the need to omit the attendances of the individual themselves (in

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<sup>25</sup> Structural analyses of the networks of affiliation are a promising avenue for future research using these and other similar sets of data.

order to avoid contaminating an independent variable with the dependent variable), and the need to omit the attendances at each particular meeting (“inside attendances”) from the count of attendances at other meetings during the year (“outside attendances”).

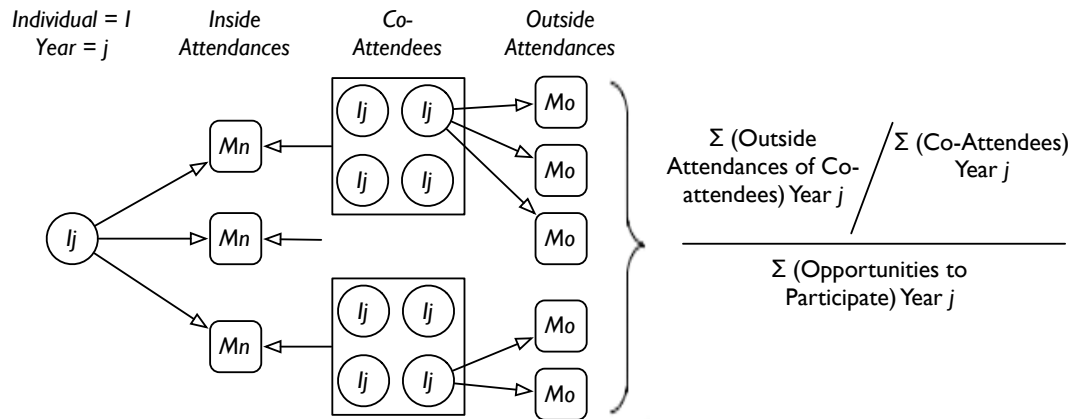


Figure 5.3. Variable construction: Social network engagement

As figure 5.3 illustrates, the two-mode social network engagement variable is constructed by summing the outside attendances of meeting co-attendees in a given year, dividing this number by the number of co-attendees, and then dividing the resulting proportion by the number of opportunities to participate in federation activities during that year. This produces a numerical value that expresses the average level of activity among the individuals with whom an individual has come into contact through group meetings in the current year. Accordingly, elevated levels of this variable are hypothesized to have a positive relationship with the likelihood of sustaining participation in the subsequent year. The number of one-to-one meetings that an individual has in the current year is also hypothesized to be positively associated with greater likelihood of future participation in organizing. No transformation is performed on the one-to-one variable.

### *Neighborhoods: Compositional Variables*

The variable representing economic heterogeneity is constructed using data from the U.S. Census 2000 (SF3, Table P52). The frequencies are given for number of households in income categories, which are aggregated for present purposes into five categories (less than \$15,000, \$15,000-34,999, \$35,000-59,999, \$60,000-99,999, and greater than \$100,000). The diversity of occurrences within these categories is measured using an index of qualitative variation (IQV) – a statistical measure of variance for nominal variables (Wilcox, 1967; 1973). The IQV is the likelihood that any two households within the selected geography will fall into different income categories, as opposed to the same category. Possible values range from zero to one: a value of one would indicate a perfectly even distribution among income categories, while a value of zero would indicate that all of the residents of the census tract fall into a single one of the income categories (i.e. all below \$15,000 or above \$100,000). The IQV is computed using the normalized proportions of households in each income category by total households in the census tract. The series of calculations used to compute the variable IQV can be expressed as:

$$IQV = 1 - \sum (f / n)^2 / ( (k - 1) / k )$$

where k is equal to the number of income categories (five, in this case), f is equal to the frequency, and n is the number of cases (households). Accordingly, higher values of economic heterogeneity are reflected in higher numerical values (between zero and one) in the index of qualitative variation. The IQV is included as a predictor in the growth

model at the neighborhood level, along with the median income of each census tract, and two variables related to neighborhood population stability.

The variables representing neighborhood population stability are constructed using data from the U.S. Census (2000) Summary File 3, Table P24, H6 and H7. The first variable reflects the number of individuals five years of age or older who lived in the same house five years prior to the decennial census (1995), divided by the total population of individuals five years of age or older. The second variable reflects proportion of households occupied by the owner, rather than by a renter. The number of owner-occupied housing units is divided by the total number of occupied housing units in the geographic unit (census tract).

### Summary

The data and methodology for this study are unique in many ways. Very few studies in the social sciences track the activities of specific individuals over time. Most studies use self-reports of participation or membership rosters to measure participation. Most studies of participation are focused on individual characteristics, such as demographics and intrapsychic phenomena such as attitudes and beliefs. Few studies capture or utilize information on the settings in which behavior is occurring. And, although they are increasing, still relatively few studies use longitudinal designs and geographic analysis, compared to the number of cross-sectional studies using survey data. While I argue that these points of difference from the bulk of the community research

literature largely represent strengths of the current research, there are weaknesses in the design as well.

One weakness of this design is that there is very little information included on the individuals themselves. For example, the main growth models do not contain information on the demographic characteristics of individuals. Without this information, it is difficult to determine the relative impact of the contextual variables compared to the more commonly studied demographics. In an attempt to address this weakness, the subset of the participants who responded during the first wave of telephone surveys (n=463) are utilized. Growth models similar to the models which are fit to the entire data-set are fit to the survey subsample. The only difference is that demographic information is included in the smaller model using the data for individuals in the survey subsample. The model for the survey subsample provides insight into the relative strength of the contextual predictors, compared with more commonly used independent variables.

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## CHAPTER VI

### RESULTS

#### Exploratory and Graphical Analysis

##### *Meetings*

The data from five federations over five years show 13,208 individuals participating, including group meetings and one-to-ones. There were 3,435 group meetings, in which 11,528 individuals participated a total of 40,304 times. Additionally, there were 15,043 one-to-one meetings reported. The total number of recorded acts of individual participation over five years, including participation in one-to-ones, was 55,347. The number of annual attendees per federation ranges from a minimum of 215 to a maximum of 4163. All of these figures can be assumed to be slightly understated, due to individuals failing to sign in to meetings<sup>26</sup>. The final report of the Raskob Skipper Initiative (Speer, 2006) shows a series of charts that track the annual rate of individual participation by federation (ranging from approximately 1.5 to 5). This rate and the aggregate measures of participation shows volatility within federations, highlighting the tension between involving new members and maintaining their involvement thereafter.

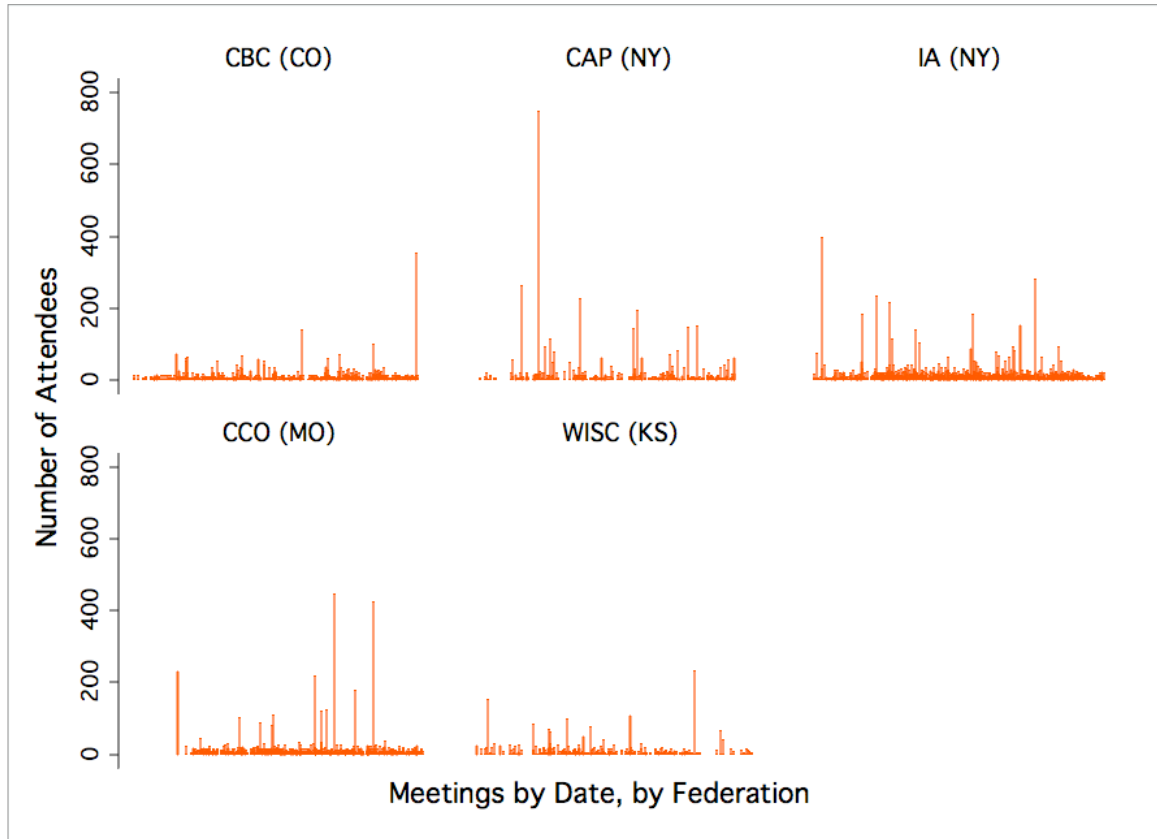
The five Skipper Initiative federations include some of the smaller federations in the PICO National Network, which is currently composed of 58 federations. As of 2008,

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<sup>26</sup> An estimate of the number of individuals failing to sign in ranges from 0% to 4% of attendees – see Speer (2006)



one of the five federations that participated in the Skipper Initiative has ceased organizing activity. One way to visualize the patterns of participation is to display meetings by date and plot the total attendance at each meeting by individual federations (see Figure 6.1)<sup>27</sup>.

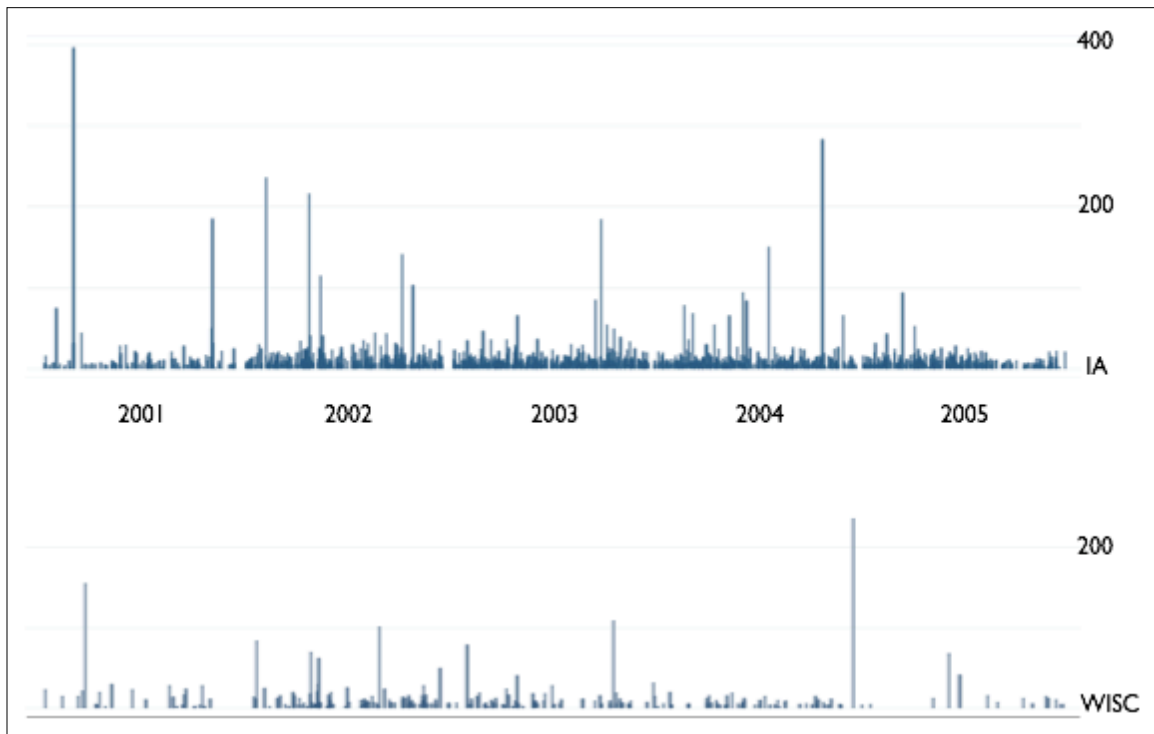


*Figure 6.1. Meeting attendance by date by federation*

The groups with the most aggregate participation are not the groups that held the largest single meetings. The single largest meeting, held by CAP, was a job fair. The data show that CAP had difficulty maintaining the participation of such a large group beyond that meeting. In other words, it appears that few of these attendees maintained or deepened their participation in organizing subsequent to the job fair. In contrast, IA and CCO show a strong baseline of regular participation. Anecdotally, the groups with the

<sup>27</sup> The method of visual display draws on Tufte's (2001; 2006) small multiples and sparklines.

more regular, smaller meetings were more effective in moving issues – suggesting that the smaller and mid-sized meetings involved in organizing are an important component of a comprehensive strategy for a local federation.



*Figure 6.2. Meeting attendance by date for selected federations*

A comparison of the meeting attendance over time in two selected federations, IA and WISC (Figure 6.2), highlights the variation in attendance patterns across local federations. Neither organization drew more than 400 attendees to a large meeting in five years. However, the attendance at large public meetings by members of IA belies the true magnitude of participation in the organization. Many more people participate in IA meetings on a regular basis than participate in WISC meetings. Figure 6.2 suggests different sets of questions for the two federations as they seek to sustain and deepen participation. For IA, why is the regular attendance at smaller meetings not translating

into larger turnout at public events? For WISC, why are there comparatively large gaps in time during which no meetings are held?

Following the categorization of meetings by type presented in the last chapter, Figure 6.3 plots the total attendance at each meeting over time, grouped by the categories of meeting types. Recall that ‘Organizational’ is a sort of catch all category for meeting types that are typical in nonprofit settings, such as fundraising and forums. Accordingly, the large job fair held by CAP falls in this category. In contrast to actions, LOC meetings and Local Planning meetings are held much more often, and involve far fewer attendees. Research actions are more akin to these smaller meeting types both in frequency and aggregate attendance.

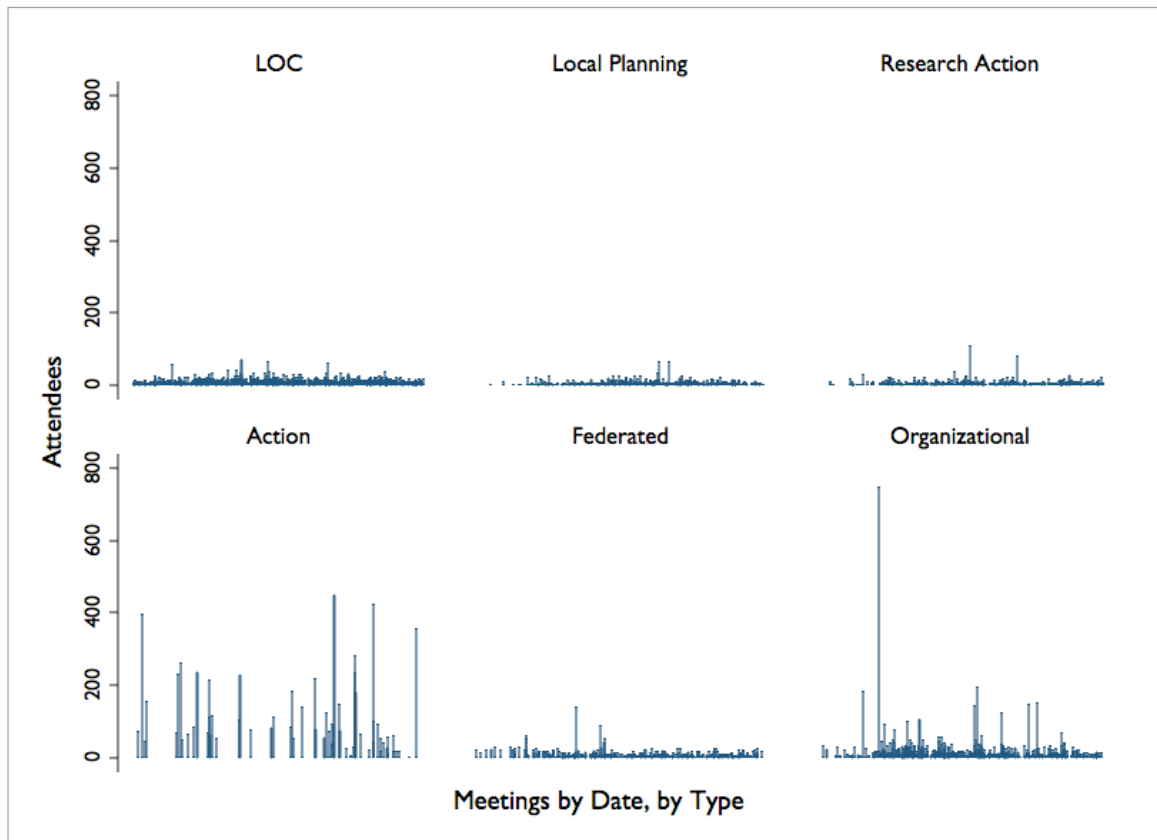


Figure 6.3. Meeting attendance by date, by type

Although not readily visually discernible from the charts above, participation in power-based organizing varies by season. December and January have relatively low levels of activity, and participation tends to pick up in the Spring and Fall. Figure 6.4 shows participation aggregated over all five years for each of the five federations in the Skipper Initiative in each month of the year.

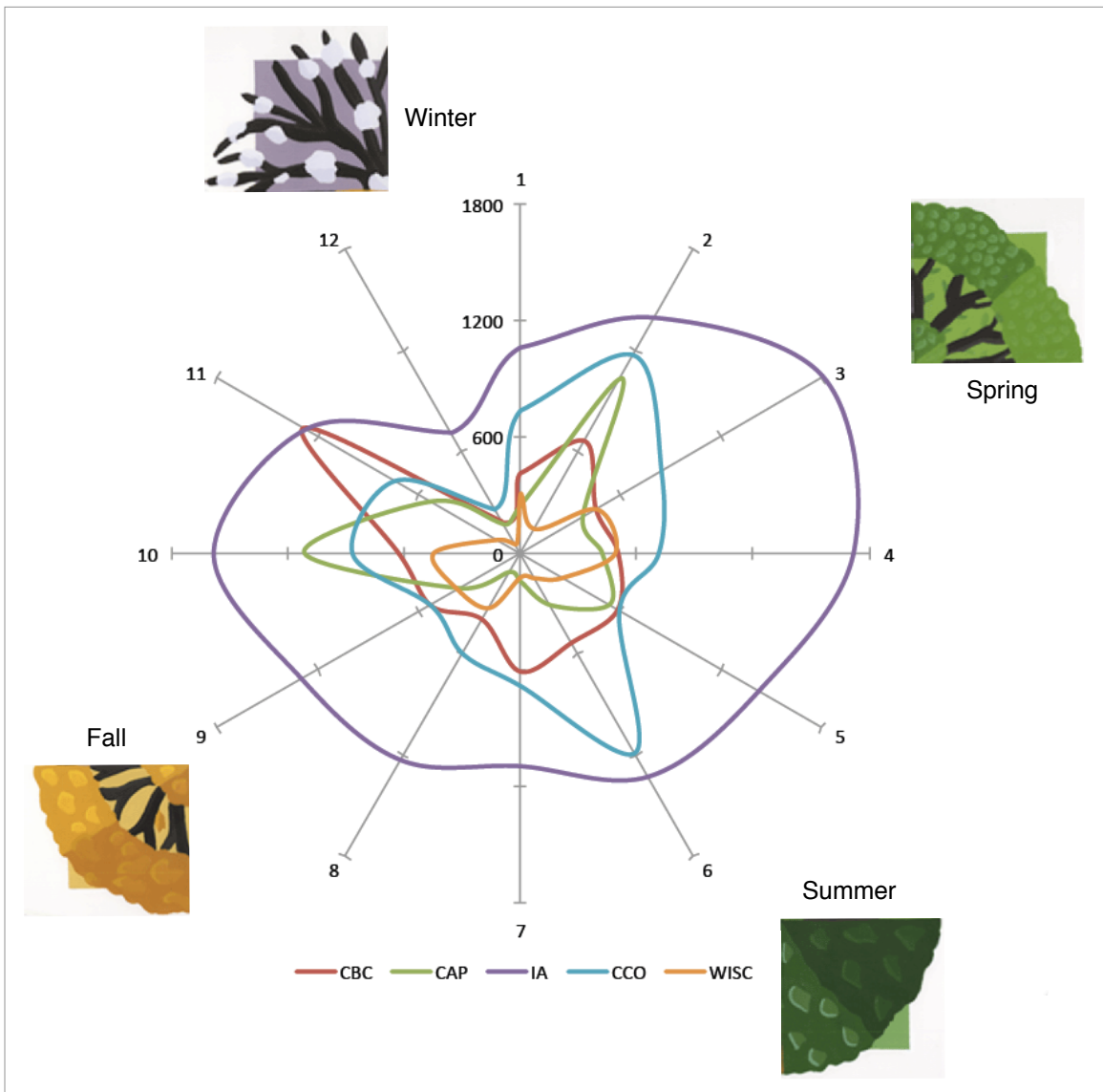


Figure 6.4. Seasonality of organizing activities, by federation

How much of the seasonal variation is due to the number of meetings held – or opportunities to participate – and how much is due to variation in attendance at meetings? Figure 6.5 shows the aggregate participation from five sites over five years. The dark shade at the base of each column represents the number of meetings held in each month, while the grey shaded portion of the column represents the aggregate attendances. The line indicates the mean attendance level at meetings held in each month (with values shown on the second y-axis).

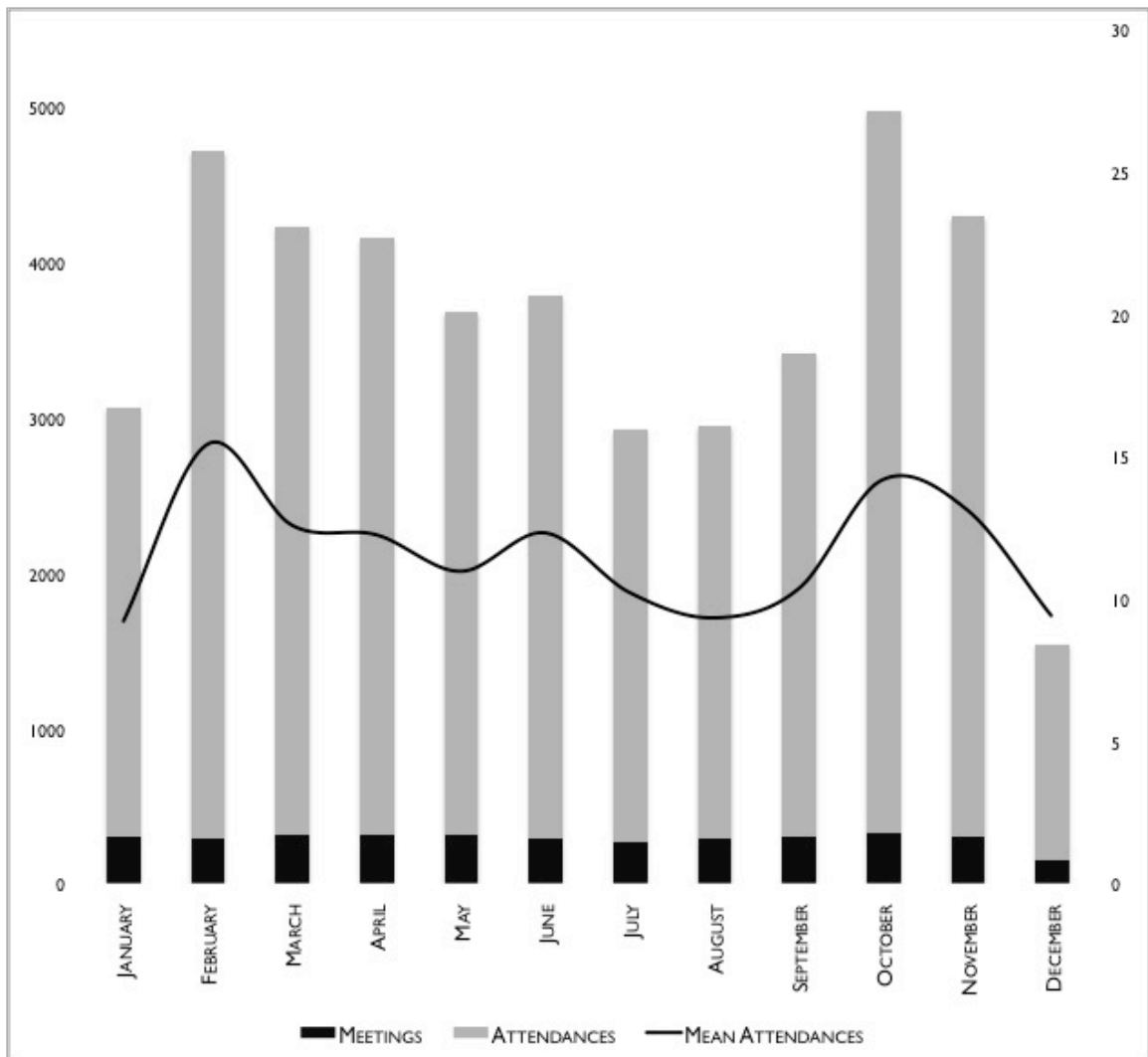


Figure 6.5. Monthly meetings and participation rates

Average participation rates per meeting change from around 10 to 15 – a 50% increase – between January and February. Another spike in participation rate occurs in October, after a drop in participation during the summer. The only month in which there is a noticeably low number of meetings is in December. Even though there are far fewer meetings, December also has a low participation rate per meeting.

### *Participants*

Among the 11,528 people who participated in group meetings, the mean number of attendances was 3.4 (standard deviation = 12.3), with a ceiling of 514 attendances. When those attendances are aggregated annually, the mean annual attendance is .68 (standard deviation = 3.2), with a ceiling of 182. These figures demonstrate the skewed distribution of participation in power-based organizing. A few people participate very often; a large number of people participate very infrequently. This is understandable when considering the population of participants, which includes federated staff and leaders, as well as people only attending a single meeting during the five year timeframe. Of course, it is not possible, using only the current data, to determine whether these people attending only once have prior records of participation, or whether they have permanently ceased to participate in organizing through the local federation.

7,833 out of 11,528 (nearly 68%) of participants who attended one meeting attended only once – meaning that they did not return to organizing activities within the timeframe of this study. There are at least two caveats with the use of this number as a generalization for the power-based organizing process. First, many of these individuals

attended for the first time during the fifth year of the study, and there may not have been enough follow-up time to detect their continued participation. Second, many of those who did return may have been active for long periods of time preceding the start of the study, which would inflate the appearance of sustained participation within that group of individuals.

To better understand the patterns of individual participation, it is helpful to examine a subset of the data that is less affected by two caveats described above. First, in an attempt to remove the effect of highly involved individual participants, the subset is composed only of the people who did not participate in the first or second years, but participated during the third year (removing the attendees from the first two years drops 5,312 individuals or 46% – and removing those who participated for the first time after year three drops 4160 individuals, or 46%). Looking only at the remaining 18% of people who participated during the third year for the first time during the study's timeframe ( $n = 2058$ ), the mean number of attendances is 2.43 (standard deviation = 5.28). From this subset of first time attendees in year three of the study, 1,383 people participated only once during the remaining three years – 67.2%. In combination with the figures for the entire data set, this provides confirmation of the finding that around two-thirds of first time attendees in power-based organizing groups never return after participating once.

*Table 6.1. Frequencies of attendance for first time attendees in year three (n=2058).*

Attendances, Years 3,4 & 5	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative %
1	1383	67.2	67.2
2	307	14.9	82.1
3	114	5.5	87.7
4	61	3.0	90.6
5	50	2.4	93.1
6	24	1.2	94.2
7	20	1.0	95.2
8	16	0.8	96.0
9	11	0.5	96.5

The distribution of individual attendances described in Table 6.1 continues upwards to relatively extreme numbers. Among the remaining 3.5% of people not shown in the table, elevated levels of participation are common. Three individuals who first participated in year three participated 47 times over the next three years, and other people participated 57, 62, 79, 85, and 86 times (one person for each value; 86 = max). Of the 5,008 individual attendances, the top 3.5% of participants are responsible for 1,744 attendances over three years – or 34.8% of the total participation. So, while two-thirds of new attendees do not return (at least within several years) to power-based organizing activity, a small percentage of first time attendees go on to account for about a third of the total attendances of their local federation.



Comparing federations on the retention of first time participants from year three offers a window into the similarities and differences in the functioning of power-based organizing federations. First, there is a similarity in the number of individuals who participated for the first time during year three – not in the raw number of new individuals (range from 215 to 533 per site) – but in the percentage of the total federation attendees across all five years that this number represents (14.7% of total attendees to 19.9%). In other words, the number of first-time attendees in a year appears to be consistently related to the overall level of attendance in the federation. In a given year, these data show that an organizing federation comes across a number of new individuals which corresponds to 15-20% of the larger group of participants over a five year timeframe. Continuing from this similarity, however, there are pronounced differences in the abilities of the different federations to promote further participation among that group new attendees, and the ability to deepen their participation over time.

As an example of this difference, two of the federations demonstrate a higher rate of return among presumed first time attendees. Compared to the population benchmark of two-thirds of participants participating for the first time in year three and then not showing back up during the study's timeframe, only 61.7% of new CCO attendees fail to return, and only 55.4% of new IA attendees do not return during the study. Compare this with 81.4% of new CAP attendees in year three who do not return for the remainder of the study. WISC and CAP show a similarity both in the high percentage of first time year three attendees who do not return (73% and 81.4% respectively) and in the low frequencies of participation among those who do return. A way to glimpse this second

characteristic is to use the most involved 3.5% that was used for the entire sample. How many times does a new attendee have to show up to be a part of the most involved 3.5% of their year three cohort? In CAP, six attendances over the next three years puts the new attendee in the top 3.5%, and in WISC, only five. These numbers contrast the other federations, IA, CBC, and CCO, in which ten, eleven, and fourteen attendances are required, respectively.

Only roughly fourteen percent of the total number of attendees ever did a one-to-one meeting that was reported in the data<sup>28</sup>. The distribution of participants doing one-to-ones is less skewed than the distribution of participation in group meetings. Of those who did one-to-ones, 48.7% did so only once. The top 3.5% of individuals in terms of one-to-ones conducted over five years is not reached until 35 one-to-ones are conducted; and, only six people did more than 100 (max = 235). There is a divergence in the number of one-to-ones recorded by federations. CAP recorded only 560 over five years, while CCO recorded 3,629<sup>29</sup>. The percentage of participants in federation activities who also conducted a one-to-one ranges from 6.3% (CAP) to 21.5% (CCO). Participants in WISC and CBC conducted larger percentages of their one-to-ones between fewer individuals than the other groups.

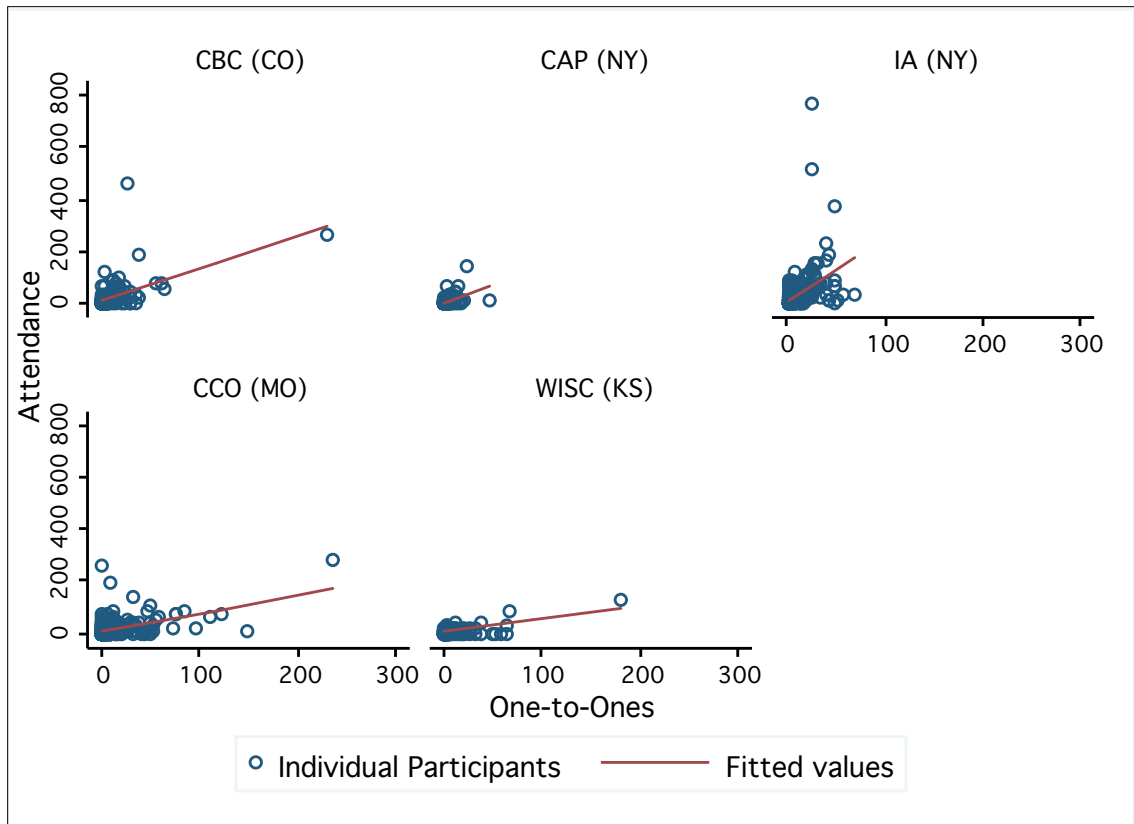
In the final report on the Skipper Initiative (Speer, 2006), aggregated annual one-to-ones and annual attendances were compared to examine the relationship between one-to-ones and participation. This relationship is hypothetically supported by the PICO

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<sup>28</sup> This is an underrepresentation of the true percentage since data collection procedures on one-to-one meetings were not as reliable as for participation.

<sup>29</sup> This divergence at the federation level may be particularly affected by idiosyncratic reporting of one-to-one meetings in the different cities.

model, but was not supported by all the analyses done for the final report. The mechanism of the proposed relationship is described in Chapters Three and Four of this study. The data management procedures described in Chapter Five allow for a disaggregated test of the relationship between one-to-ones and participation levels by individual.



*Figure 6.6. Relationships between meeting attendance and one-to-ones*

Figure 6.6 provides a visualization of the disaggregated relationship between participation and one-to-ones, by individual. While the strength varies across local federations, there does appear to be a relationship that is consistent across federations. The scatterplots show individuals' total participation (y axis) and their total number of one-to-ones (x axis) over five years. The relationship made evident in this figure is

explored further in the next section using growth models. The notable differences between the federations show that IA, the largest group by most measures, has no individuals who conducted over 100 one-to-ones over the five years. The spreading of the one-to-ones across more individuals may be a more effective model for the promoting participation.

While the analysis above is useful for exploratory purposes, it does not take time into account. The data that it uses are disaggregated to the individual level, but are aggregated across time. Data can be disaggregated further from the individual level to show variation over time within individuals. The visual display of these data are empirical growth plots. Following Singer and Willett (2003), Figure 6.7 explores the individual growth records for a random sample of individuals from the data-set. The individuals are identified by randomly assigned numbers, and the dots represent the proportion of meetings that each individual attended, out of the total number of meetings they could feasibly have attended, by year.

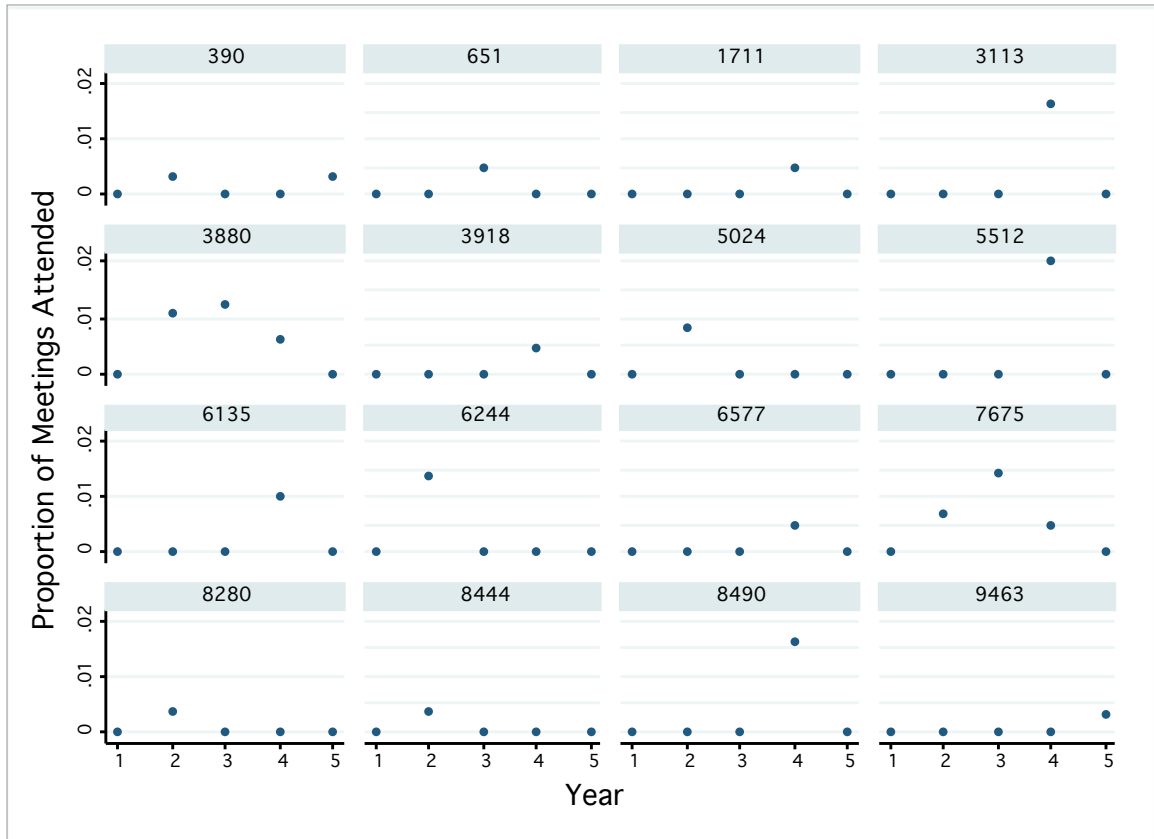


Figure 6.7. Empirical growth plots: Random sample of participants ( $n = 16$ )

None of the individual participants in this pseudo-random sample are highly involved – and none of them participate in every year. Given the concentration of elevated levels of involvement within a relatively low number of attendees, this is to be expected from a small random sample. The proportion of meetings attended is less than 2% in every year for each of these individuals, out of the total number of meetings that occurred in each local federation. The empirical growth plots allow the visualization of individual patterns of participation, and change over time. This can be expressed further using ordinary least squares (OLS) linear fits (i.e. individual growth trajectories) as shown in Figure 6.8 for the same pseudo-random sample of individuals.

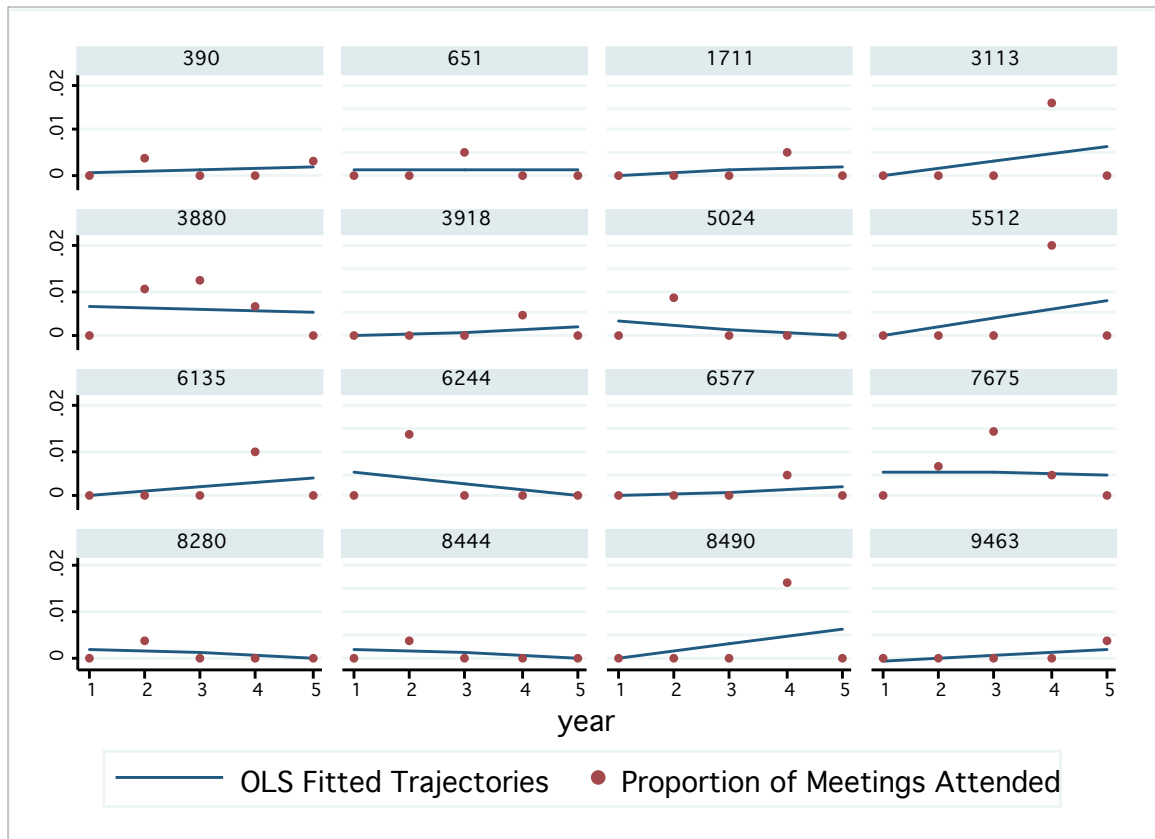
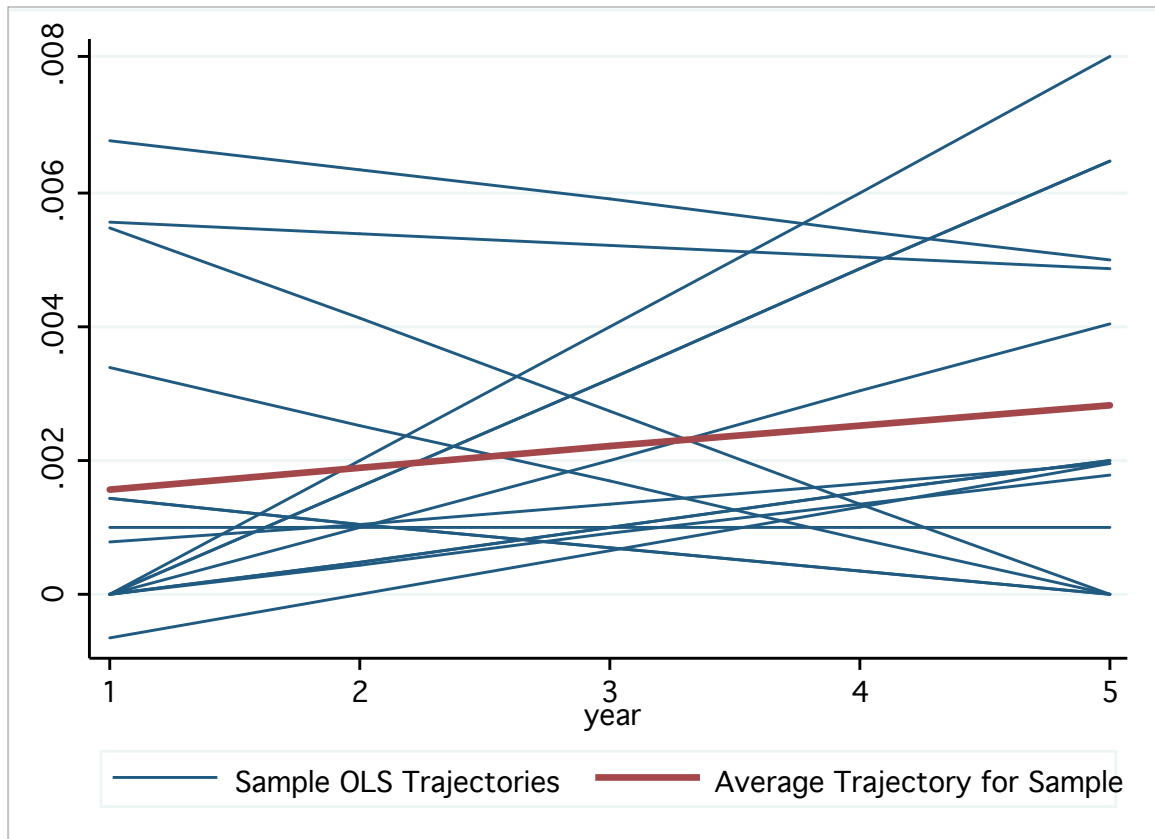


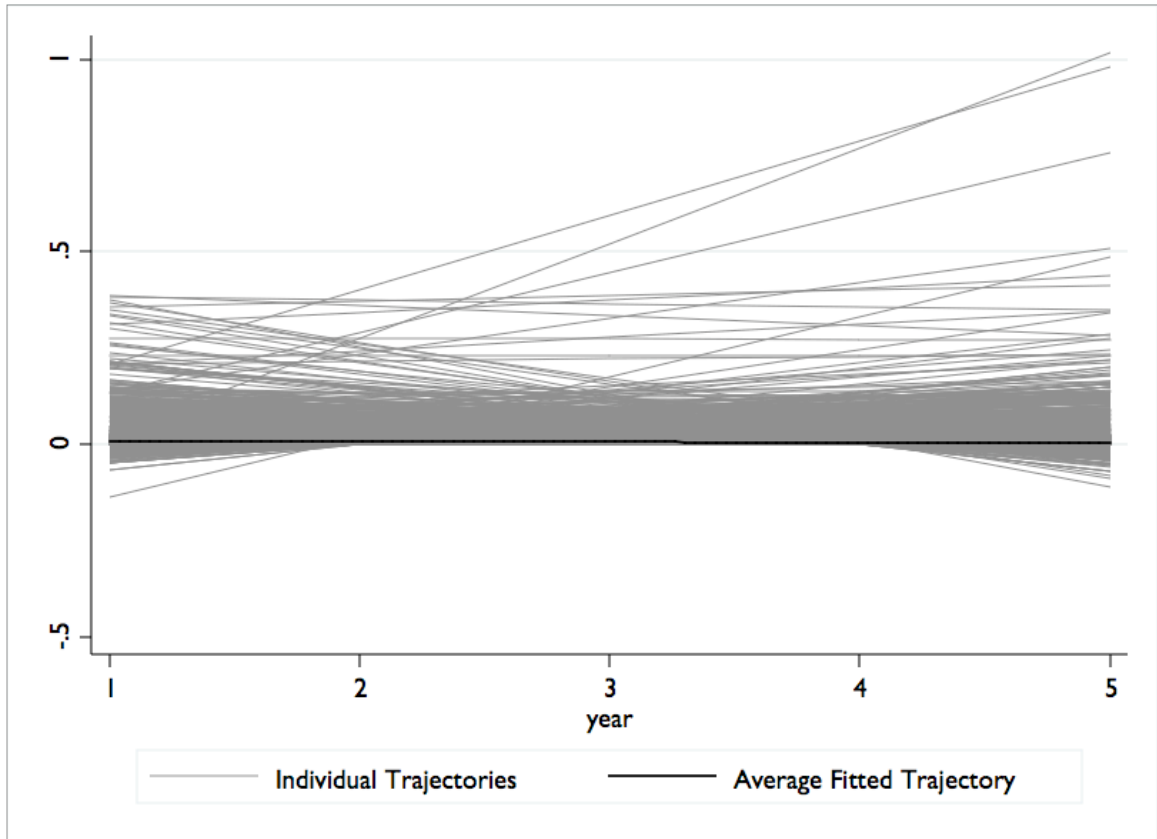
Figure 6.8. Linear trajectories: Random sample of participants ( $n = 16$ )

Although the OLS method is not ideally suited to fitting a final model to data that are structured longitudinally, the trajectories provide a visualization of the effect of time on rate of participation by individual (Singer & Willett, 2003). Plotting all the linear trajectories from the pseudo-random sample together allows a visual comparison of trends in participation by individual, as well as a population average trajectory (see Figure 6.9).



*Figure 6.9. Individual and population trajectories for random sample ( $n = 16$ )*

Figure 6.9 shows the fitted values for change over time in individual participation trajectories for all 16 individuals in the pseudo-random sample, as well as a population average participation trajectory (thicker, red line). Figure 6.10 displays the same individual growth trajectories fitted to the data on proportion of meetings attended for all 11,528 participants – and the population average for that group (thicker line). The density of the plotted trajectories visually obscures individual cases, but creates a shaded area that is useful for understanding the range of typical growth trajectories.



*Figure 6.10. Individual and population trajectories for participants (n = 11,530)*

The average population trajectory, displayed as the darker line, stays close to zero in the figure above, reflecting the fact that very few participants attend a large percentage of meetings. The y-axis represents a proportion: the number of meetings attended divided by the number of meetings that were held by the local federation in each year. While none of the 16 participants in the random sample (Figures 6.7, 6.8 and 6.9) were highly involved, Figure 6.10 reveals the presence of several very highly involved participants – in some cases, these people are attending more than half of the meetings held by their local federation in a given year. Finally, the trajectories for individual



participants can be plotted over time for each federation, allowing visual exploration of trends in individual participation (see Figure 6.11).

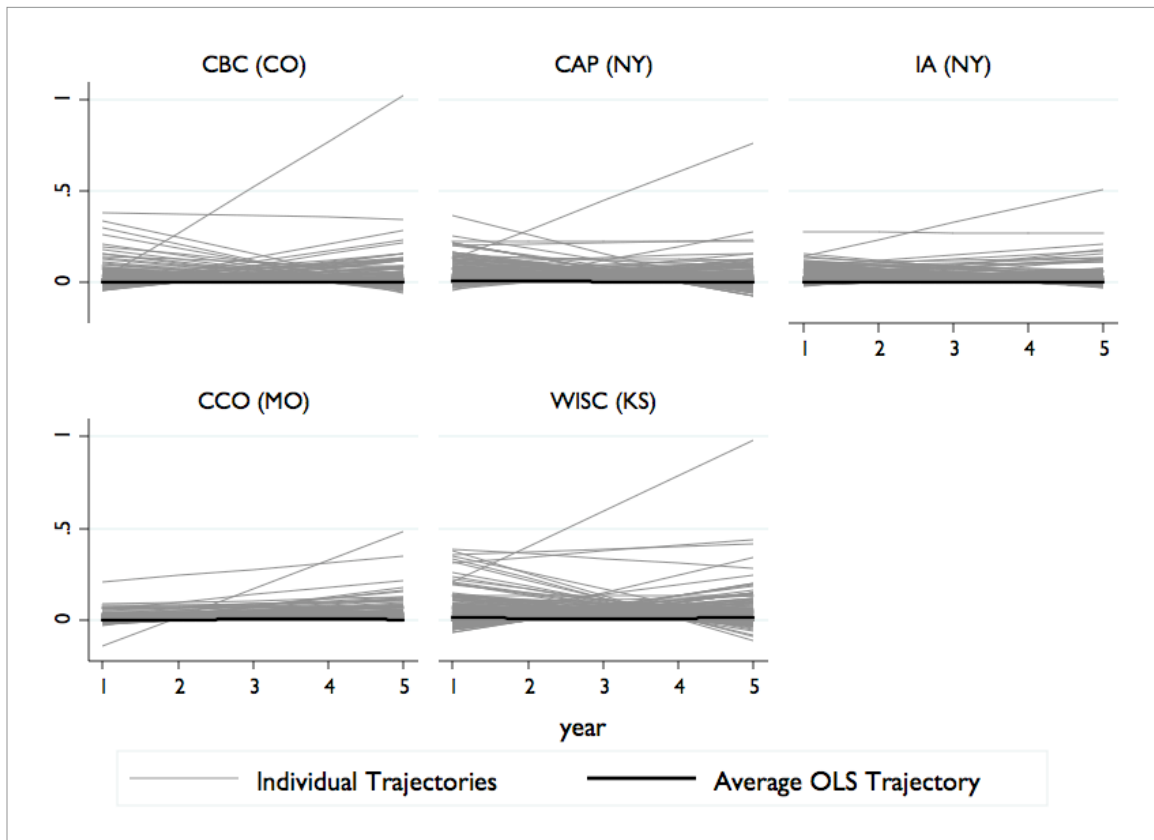


Figure 6.11. Individual participation trajectories by federation ( $n = 11,530$ )

Of interest from these plots by federation is the fan shape formed by the overlapping trajectories most clearly detectable in the plot of WISC participants' trajectories. Greater slope (positive or negative) in the lines indicates a greater amount of change over time. In this case, a collection of lines with greater slopes can be interpreted as turnover in the organizing group. Individual participants are becoming more involved, or less involved. Contrast the visual pattern of WISC to that of IA, among whose

participants there appears to be very little change over time. More of the people involved in IA have a steady rate of participation – neither increasing, nor decreasing dramatically over time.

These visual and numerical explorations of the participation data from the Skipper Initiative have allowed several basic understandings to emerge about participation in power-based community organizing. First, the majority of new attendees do not return to organizing events after they have participated once. However, the rate of return varies across federations. In the five federations followed for this study, one group had close to half of new participants returning at least once; another group had around one in ten returning at least once. Second, participation varies systematically by time of year, with drops in participation during summer and winter. Third, participation is concentrated among a small number of highly involved participants, although the degree of this concentration also varies across federations. Fourth, there is an apparent relationship between doing one-to-ones and overall attendance. Fifth, change in rates of annual participation occur, but that change is not evenly distributed between federations. The sample of five federations is insufficient to make many claims about reasons for (or impact of) this variance; and future studies should seek similar data on a larger number of organizing federations.

## Growth Modeling

*“At no time in any discussion or analysis of mass movements, tactics, or any other phase of the problem, can it be said that if this is done then this will result. The most we can hope to achieve is an understanding of the probabilities consequent to certain actions”* (Alinsky, 1971, pg. 17).

Aspects of contexts of participation in power-based community organizing are understood as variables. Following the hypotheses put forward in the last chapter, a series of growth models are fit to the data to quantify the relative influence of characteristics of these contexts and participation in organizing. For these models, the dependent variable is a binary indicator of participation/ non-participation in each year. Although the use of the binary variable does not take full advantage of the availability of information on the depth of individual participation, it also has both substantive and statistical advantages. A substantive advantage is that the model fit is not disproportionately influenced by the small minority of heavily engaged participants. A statistical advantage is that it resolves the issue of the non-normality in the distribution of participation.

As described in Chapter Five, the data are structured so that the dependent variable is participation/ non-participation in the next year. Models are first fit to the data for annual participation of the population of individuals ( $n = 11,528$ ) (Models A, B, and C). Then, similar models are fit to the data for the survey subsample ( $n = 461$ ), (Models D, E, and F) so that individual demographic information can be understood relative to participation and the contextual variables. Before fitting the models with substantive

predictors, unconditional means models and unconditional growth models are fit to the data. The unconditional means models (A and D) do not take time into account. The unconditional growth models (B and E) take time into account, but include no substantive predictors. Both sets of unconditional models establish baselines for comparison in model fit to the growth models that take both time and substantive predictors into account (C and F).

All the growth models are probability models that use a log transformation of the binary dependent variable. This transformation of the level-one outcome variable avoids the assumption of normality in the distribution. The logit link function for the level-1 dependent variable is given by Equation 6.1 (Figure 6.12).

$$\begin{aligned}\eta_{ijk} &= \text{Log}[\phi_{ijk} / 1 - \phi_{ijk}]; \\ \phi_{ijk} &= \text{Prob}(Y_{ijk} = 1 | \pi_{jk})\end{aligned}$$

*Figure 6.12. Equation 6.1: Transformation of binary dependent variable*

The models are built using an extension of the multilevel model (Goldstein, 1995) – the generalized hierarchical linear model (GHLM; Hox, 1995; Luke, 2004) for longitudinal data. Estimation of all models (A-F) uses full Penalized Quasi-Likelihood (PQL) (Breslow & Clayton, 1993) in the HGLM function of the software program HLM3 version 6 (Raudenbush et al., 2004). The set of hierarchical equations, and the composite specification in Equation 6.2 shows the specification for the unconditional means models (*Models A and D*).

Hierarchical Specification:

Level-1:  $\eta_{ijk} = \text{logit}(Y_{ijk}) = \pi_{0jk}$

Level-2:  $\pi_{0jk} = \beta_{00k} + r_{0jk}$

Level-3:  $\beta_{00k} = \gamma_{000} + u_{00k}$

Composite Specification:

$$\eta_{ijk} = \gamma_{000} + r_{0jk} + u_{00k}$$

*Figure 6.13. Equation 6.2: Unconditional means models*

After fitting the unconditional means model, a second type of model – an unconditional growth model – takes time into account (Singer & Willett, 2003). The variable representing time is centered by the subtraction of one year, so that the first year is equal to zero, creating the timeframe {0, 1, 2, 3}. The specification for the unconditional growth models (*Models B and E*) can be written as shown in Equation 6.3.

Hierarchical Specification:

Level-1:  $\eta_{ijk} = \text{logit}(Y_{ijk}) = \pi_{0jk} + \pi_{1jk}(\text{YEAR}_{ijk})$

Level-2:  $\pi_{0jk} = \beta_{00k} + r_{0jk} \mid \pi_{1jk} = \beta_{10k}$

Level-3:  $\beta_{00k} = \gamma_{000} + u_{00k} \mid \beta_{10k} = \gamma_{010}$

Composite Specification:

$$\eta_{ijk} = \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{010}(\text{YEAR}_{ijk}) + r_{0jk} + u_{00k}$$

*Figure 6.14. Equation 6.3: Unconditional growth models*

The next step is the addition of substantive predictors. The full growth model for all participants (*Model C*) is given by Equation 6.4. This model includes time, setting, network, and neighborhood contextual effects. Prior attendance is included in the model as a control for within-individual autocorrelation. It is also important as a moderator for the effects of participation in the dummy-coded variables for attendance at different

meeting types. All non-binary variables in the full models are centered according to their respective grand means for substantive interpretability and as a safeguard against multicollinearity (see Singer & Willett, 2003).

To avoid over-specifying of the model to the available data, efforts were made to make variables at level-3 simple and parsimonious. The variables for percentage homeownership and percentage of residents who had the same prior place of residence were combined into a single score for each tract. This combined score was then divided into five discrete categories. Similarly, quintiles were used for the index of qualitative variation that was constructed to measure income heterogeneity, and for the measure of median household income. These modifications allowed the model to fit only three discrete variables at level-3, where statistical power is of greatest concern. These decisions were informed by the model building strategies proposed by Bryk and Raudenbush (2002).

Hierarchical Specification:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Level-1: } \eta_{ijk} &= \text{logit}(Y_{ijk}) = \pi_{0jk} + \pi_{1jk}(\text{YEAR}_{ijk}) + \pi_{2jk}(\text{ATTENDANCE}_{ijk}) + \pi_{3jk}(\text{ONE-TO-ONES}_{ijk}) \\
 &+ \pi_{4jk}(\text{NETWORK}_{ijk}) + \pi_{5jk}(\text{RESEARCH}_{ijk}) + \pi_{6jk}(\text{ACTION}_{ijk}) \\
 \text{Level-2: } \pi_{0jk} &= \beta_{00k} + r_{0jk} \mid \pi_{1jk} = \beta_{10k} \mid \pi_{2jk} = \beta_{20k} \mid \pi_{3jk} = \beta_{30k} \mid \pi_{4jk} = \beta_{40k} \mid \pi_{5jk} = \\
 &\beta_{50k} \mid \pi_{6jk} = \beta_{60k} \\
 \text{Level-3: } \beta_{00k} &= \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001}(\text{RESID. STABILITY}_k) + \gamma_{002}(\text{MEDIAN INCOME}_k) + \\
 &\gamma_{003}(\text{HETEROGENEITY}_k) + u_{00k} \mid \beta_{10k} = \gamma_{100} \mid \beta_{20k} = \gamma_{200} \mid \beta_{30k} = \gamma_{300} \mid \beta_{40k} = \gamma_{400} \mid \beta_{50k} = \\
 &\gamma_{500} \mid \beta_{60k} = \gamma_{600} \mid
 \end{aligned}$$

Composite Specification:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \eta_{ijk} = \text{logit}(Y_{ijk}) &= \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001}(\text{RESID. STABILITY}_k) + \gamma_{002}(\text{MEDIAN INCOME}_k) + \\
 &\gamma_{003}(\text{HETEROGENEITY}_k) + \gamma_{100}(\text{YEAR}_{ijk}) + \gamma_{200}(\text{ATTENDANCE}_{ijk}) + \gamma_{300}(\text{ONE-TO-ONES}_{ijk}) + \\
 &\gamma_{400}(\text{NETWORK}_{ijk}) + \gamma_{500}(\text{RESEARCH}_{ijk}) + \gamma_{600}(\text{ACTION}_{ijk}) + r_{0jk} + u_{00k}
 \end{aligned}$$

*Figure 6.15. Equation 6.4: Full conditional model*

Table 6.2 reports the parameter estimates for models in the full sample (*Models A, B, and C*).

Table 6.2. Parameter estimates for the full sample (Models A, B & C).

		N = 46,112 (level-1); 11,528 (level-2); 115 (level-3)			
		Parameter	Uncon. Means Model (A)	Uncon. Growth Model (B)	Full Model (C)
Fixed Effects - Time Varying, Level-1	INTERCEPT	$\gamma_{000}$	-.709 (.04) ***	-.454 (.04) ***	-.37 (.11)**
	YEAR	$\gamma_{100}$	—	-.174 (.01) ***	-.165 (.01)***
	ATTENDANCE	$\gamma_{200}$	—	—	13.6 (.847)***
	ONE-TO-ONES	$\gamma_{300}$	—	—	.116 (.01)***
	NETWORK	$\gamma_{400}$	—	—	.001 (.002)
	RESEARCH	$\gamma_{500}$	—	—	.288 (.067)***
	ACTION	$\gamma_{600}$	—	—	-.501 (.04)***
Fixed Effects - Level-3	RESIDENT STABILITY	$\gamma_{001}$	—	—	-.017 (.03)
	MEDIAN INCOME	$\gamma_{002}$	—	—	-.027 (.04)
	HETERO- GENEITY	$\gamma_{003}$	—	—	.003 (.03)
Random Effects	Var. Lev2	$r_{0j}$	.004 (.0002)	.01 (.0001)	.01 (.0001)
	Var. Lev3	$u_{00}$	.364 (.132)***	.367 (.135)***	.329 (.108)***

~  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Note: Estimation using full Penalized Quasi-Likelihood (PQL) with Bernoulli distribution at level-1. Parameter estimates are reported from the population-average model.

A comparison of model fit between *Model C*, and the baseline unconditional model, *Model A*, supports the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that *Model C* provides a superior fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 1788$ ;  $df = 9$ ;  $p < 0.001$ )<sup>30</sup>. Measures of effect size for HGLM do not correspond to proportion of variance explained in traditional regression

<sup>30</sup> Obtained from the deviance information criterion.



models because there is no error term at level-1 (predicted values are probabilities). A measure that allows a similarly intuitive understanding is the percentage of correctly classified cases. Using a cutoff of 0.5 for the predicted probabilities (derived by exponentiating and transforming fitted values from the level-1 residuals), *Model C* correctly predicts the future participation 71.9% of the time<sup>31</sup>.

Of the substantive predictors, prior attendance has the greatest effect, though its theoretical importance is limited – it is included in the model as a control. The number of one-to-ones that an individual conducts in the current time-period, and their attendance at one or more research actions in the present time-period are significantly positively predictive of future participation. Conversely, attendance at one or more actions in the current time-period is significantly negatively predictive of future participation. Controlling for all other predictors in the model, the variable for social network engagement – which measures average level of outside attendance of co-attendees – is not statistically significant. Neither are the neighborhood-level (level-3) independent variables measuring neighborhood stability, median income, and income heterogeneity at the census tract level.

Finally, the full growth model for the participants in the survey subsample (*Model F*; N = 461) is given by Equation 6.5. This model incorporates demographic variables at the individual level (level-2) which are often associated with civic engagement and participation (see Ch. 2). Income is measured in an ordinal scale composed of seven categories<sup>32</sup> on annual family income. The mean response for participants in the survey

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<sup>31</sup> This is an improvement over the unconditional model, which correctly classifies 70.3% of cases.

<sup>32</sup> Categories break at \$15,000, \$25,000, \$35,000, \$45,000, \$55,000, and \$70,000.

falls into the category of \$35,000 to \$45,000 (sd = 2.22 categories). Education was measured on an ordinal scale composed of five categories<sup>33</sup>. The mean response falls between some college and a completed college degree (sd = 1.18 categories). Ethnicity was assessed through a question that asked respondents to identify a choice (African-American, Asian, Caucasian, Latino, Other). Thirty-four percent of respondents identified as African-American<sup>34</sup>. Two-thirds of respondents identified as women. Race/ethnicity was coded into an indicator variable for African-American, and gender was coded into an indicator for male.

For descriptive purposes, when compared to a random sample of residents from each city, the participants in PICO organizing were, on average, slightly older, had completed more formal education, and reported lower levels of family income. Participants in the survey sub-sample participated in organizing activities an average of 14 times over five years (sd = 26.1; max = 230 attendances). The mean of the indicator for future participation in each year is .48 – meaning that participation is slightly higher for the survey subsample than for the equivalent figure for the entire sample of participants. The mean number of one-to-ones held by participants in the survey sub-sample was 3.95 (sd = 10.06; max = 77 one-to-ones). In each year, the mean number of one-to-ones held was .98.

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<sup>33</sup> Less than high school; High school graduate; Some college; College degree; Graduate degree.

<sup>34</sup> Four percent of respondents identified as Latino, four percent as Other, one percent as Asian, and two percent did not specify ethnicity. Although the model showed significant differences in participation according to race, the imbalance of the racial variable across respondents in the subsample confounded the interpretation (e.g. the Colorado group, CBC, had no black respondents, compared to one of the Kansas City groups, WISC, in which a majority of respondents were African-American) – the variable was not included in the final model.

Hierarchical Specification:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Level-1: } \eta_{ijk} &= \text{logit}(Y_{ijk}) = \pi_{0jk} + \pi_{1jk}(\text{YEAR}_{ijk}) + \pi_{2jk}(\text{ATTENDANCE}_{ijk}) + \pi_{3jk}(\text{ONE-TO-ONES}_{ijk}) \\
 &\quad + \pi_{4jk}(\text{NETWORK}_{ijk}) + \pi_{5jk}(\text{RESEARCH}_{ijk}) + \pi_{6jk}(\text{ACTION}_{ijk}) \\
 \text{Level-2: } \pi_{0jk} &= \beta_{00k} + \beta_{01k}(\text{INCOME}_{jk}) + \beta_{02k}(\text{GENDER}_{jk}) + \beta_{03k}(\text{EDUCATION}_{jk}) + r_{0jk} \mid \pi_{1jk} \\
 &= \beta_{10k} \mid \pi_{2jk} = \beta_{20k} \mid \pi_{3jk} = \beta_{30k} \mid \pi_{4jk} = \beta_{40k} \mid \pi_{5jk} = \beta_{50k} \mid \pi_{6jk} = \beta_{60k} \\
 \text{Level-3: } \beta_{00k} &= \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001}(\text{RESID. STABILITY}_k) + \gamma_{002}(\text{MEDIAN INCOME}_k) + \\
 &\quad \gamma_{002}(\text{HETEROGENEITY}_k) + u_{00k} \mid \beta_{10k} = \gamma_{100} \mid \beta_{20k} = \gamma_{200} \mid \beta_{30k} = \gamma_{300} \mid \beta_{40k} = \gamma_{400} \mid \beta_{50k} = \\
 &\quad \gamma_{500} \mid \beta_{60k} = \gamma_{600} \mid
 \end{aligned}$$

Composite Specification:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \eta_{ijk} = \text{logit}(Y_{ijk}) &= \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001}(\text{RESID. STABILITY}_k) + \gamma_{002}(\text{MEDIAN INCOME}_k) + \\
 &\quad \gamma_{003}(\text{HETEROGENEITY}_k) + \gamma_{010}(\text{INCOME}_{jk}) + \gamma_{020}(\text{GENDER}_{jk}) + \gamma_{030}(\text{EDUCATION}_{jk}) + \\
 &\quad \gamma_{100}(\text{YEAR}_{ijk}) + \gamma_{200}(\text{ATTENDANCE}_{ijk}) + \gamma_{300}(\text{ONE-TO-ONES}_{ijk}) + \gamma_{400}(\text{NETWORK}_{ijk}) + \\
 &\quad \gamma_{500}(\text{RESEARCH}_{ijk}) + \gamma_{600}(\text{ACTION}_{ijk}) + r_{0jk} + u_{00k}
 \end{aligned}$$

*Figure 6.16. Equation 6.5: Full conditional model for the survey sub-sample*

Table 6.3. Parameter estimates for the survey sub-sample (Models D, E & F)

		N = 1,844 (level-1); 461 (level-2); 71 (level-3)			
		Para- meter	Uncon. Means Model (D)	Uncon. Growth Model (E)	Full Model (F)
<i>Fixed Effects - Time Varying, Level-1</i>	<i>INTERCEPT</i>	$\gamma_{000}$	-.078 (.095)	.894 (.142)***	.886 (.367)*
	<i>YEAR</i>	$\gamma_{100}$	—	-.655 (.046)***	-.821 (.058)***
	<i>ATTENDANCE</i>	$\gamma_{200}$	—	—	10.89 (2.52)***
	<i>ONE-TO-ONES</i>	$\gamma_{300}$	—	—	.075 (.031)*
	<i>NETWORK</i>	$\gamma_{400}$	—	—	.027 (.01)**
	<i>RESEARCH</i>	$\gamma_{500}$	—	—	.941 (.259)**
	<i>ACTION</i>	$\gamma_{600}$	—	—	.061 (.161)
<i>Fixed Effects - Level-2</i>	<i>INCOME</i>	$\gamma_{010}$	—	—	-.053 (.033)
	<i>GENDER</i>	$\gamma_{020}$	—	—	.25 (.149)
	<i>EDUCATION</i>	$\gamma_{030}$	—	—	.018 (.061)
<i>Fixed Effects - Level-3</i>	<i>RESIDENT STABILITY</i>	$\gamma_{001}$	—	—	.094 (.074)
	<i>MEDIAN INCOME</i>	$\gamma_{002}$	—	—	-.208 (.079)*
	<i>HETERO- GENEITY</i>	$\gamma_{003}$	—	—	.147 (.082)
<i>Random Effects</i>	<i>Var. Lev2</i>	$r_{0j}$	.777 (.604)***	1.076 (1.15)***	.62 (.384)***
	<i>Var. Lev3</i>	$u_{00}$	.616 (.38)***	.745 (.555)***	.454 (.207)**

~  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Note: Estimation using full Penalized Quasi-Likelihood (PQL) with Bernoulli distribution at level-1. Parameter estimates are reported from the population-average model.

As in the case of the models for the full sample, the comparison of model fit between *Model F*, and the baseline unconditional model, *Model D*, supports the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that *Model D* provides a superior fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 474$ ;  $df = 13$ ;  $p < 0.001$ )<sup>35</sup>. Baseline percentage correctly classified (*Model D*) = 77.5. Model-based percentage = 78.4.

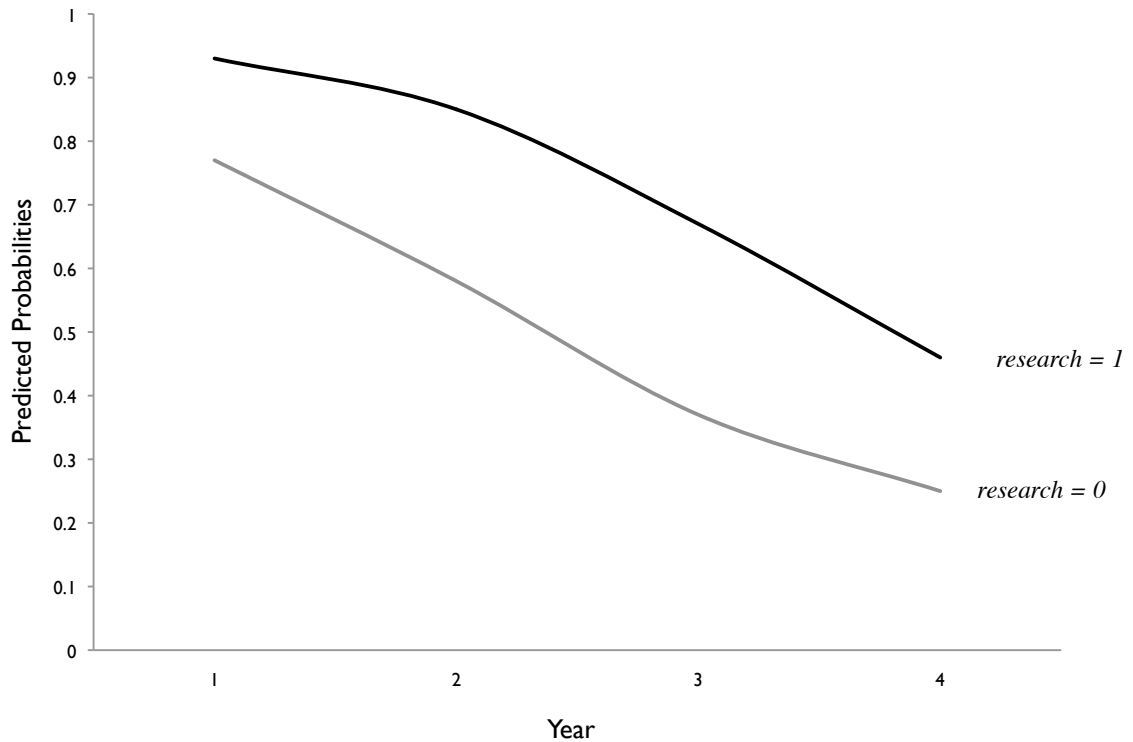
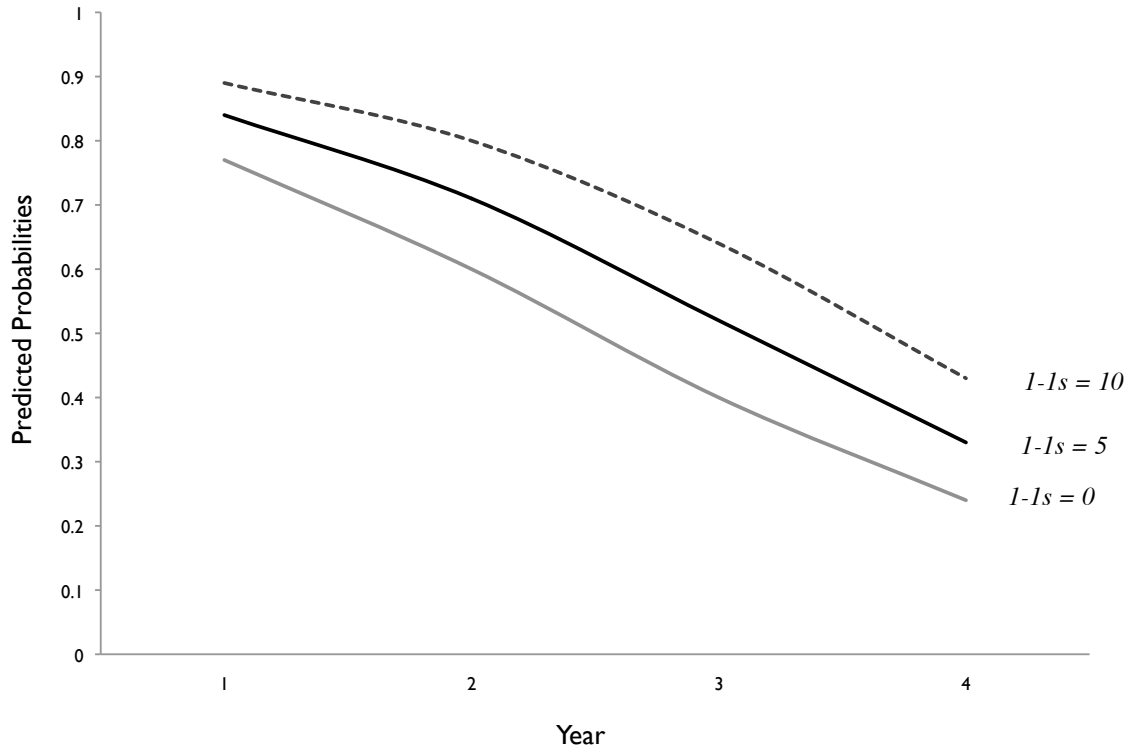


Figure 6.17. Predicted probabilities of participation by research indicator

Figure 6.17 displays the model-based (*Model F*) predicted probabilities of participation in the next year by those who do not attend a research action in the current year (*research* = 0), and those who attended a research action in the current year (*research* = 1). Since the majority of participants do not return to organizing activities, the model predicts lower likelihood overall. However, participants in research actions

<sup>35</sup> Obtained from the deviance information criterion.

have a notably higher predicted probability of future participation, with the remaining variables in the three-level model held constant.



*Figure 6.18. Predicted probabilities of participation by number of one-to-ones*

Figure 6.18 displays predicted probabilities of participation by the number of one-to-ones held by each participant, while holding other variables in the model constant. Examples show the probability of attendance in the upcoming year for hypothetical individuals holding zero, five, or ten one-to-ones.

The findings from applying longitudinal analyses to the data on participation highlight the importance of settings for future individual participation. Interestingly, individual demographic characteristics and neighborhood demographic characteristics, which are frequently studied in relation to participation in community life, are relatively

unimportant for individual participation over time in power-based community organizing. Of greatest importance, aside from (and holding constant) a person's participation in the prior year, attendance at research actions and holding one-to-one meetings account for systematic variance in future participation. Findings also provide tentative support for the hypothesis that social network engagement accounts for systematic variance. The next chapter considers implications for these findings in the applied context of power-based organizing, and the disciplines whose research is concerned with these phenomena.

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## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a series of ways to think about the findings from this study. The most direct application is to organizing practice within the local federations that compose the PICO National Network. Expanding outwards from this focal point, the research is considered within the broader field of local community organizing. The discussion is then expanded to a consideration of the phenomena explored in this study in relation to broader social movements and attempts to encourage civic engagement. In doing so, this chapter explicitly traces connections to community psychology, pragmatic philosophy, sociology, and political science. The perspectives provided by the interdisciplinary connections to power-based organizing and the present line of research are explored for each discipline. The final section sketches ideas for future work out of this line of research.

#### Discussion

The Skipper Initiative was the first study of the power-based community organizing process to implement a robust quantitative design (tracking individual attendance across five groups for five years, with qualitative interviews, two waves of survey data, and survey data for a randomly selected comparison group in each city). Initial findings were shown in the report to the Raskob Foundation, which funded the

study (Speer, 2006). This dissertation describes new findings from these data, pointing to the importance of context – particularly participatory settings and the development of interpersonal relationships. How can such findings be applied to community organizing practice? How do they relate to other initiatives that seek community participation?

A basic descriptive finding of particular importance concerns the attrition rates of first-time attendees. The data on first-time attendees in year three of the study were used to isolate new attendees who had not attended in the first two years. Amongst this subset of the sample, only a third of first-time attendees ever returned to a second meeting during the next three years. This number was seen to vary substantially across sites, with up to nearly nine in ten first time attendees failing to return in one federation, and only around a half failing to return in another. This finding suggests that organizing practices across sites are contributing heavily to the level of attrition from the organizing process – and therefore the effectiveness of the organizing group in achieving community-level change. The current study cannot draw firm conclusions about practices at the federation level to explain this variability due to the sample size of five federations. However, findings at the individual and event levels point to practices that lead individuals to participate in future organizing events.

For example, the findings highlight the importance of the one-to-one meeting, which is heavily emphasized in the training of organizers and leaders, and in the research literature on organizing. One novel aspect of the current findings is that the timing of one-to-ones is taken into account through a longitudinal design. This research design provides the first empirical support for the hypothesis that one-to-ones are significant

predictors of future attendance at group meetings, while controlling for other variables, such as overall prior attendance rate in the previous year. The one-to-one meeting is thus reinforced as a tool for maintaining and deepening participation among members, while controlling for other variables at the event, individual, and affiliate levels.

Attendance at research actions are also shown to be of particular influence among the meeting types in predicting future participation in group meetings. Importantly, this finding also comes from a statistical model which controls for other variables, including the overall rate of prior participation, which allows the effect of attendance at research actions to be assessed more directly. Unlike attendance at action meetings, which came out as a significantly negative predictor (in Model C) or as a non-significant predictor (in Model F), attendance at a research action increases the predicted probability of future attendance. The hypothesized mechanism for this effect is based on behavior setting theory, which posits that the availability of meaningful roles are characteristics of particular settings that impact the behaviors of individuals in those settings. These findings go further and point to the lasting impact of setting differences, which significantly impact individual attendance in subsequent years.

The PICO model explicitly seeks to work within, develop, and expand the social networks of participants in community organizing. This study, drawing on two-mode network data hypothesized a positive relationship between the social network engagement of participants – defined as the mean level of outside attendances of meeting co-attendees – and future participation. When the rest of the predictors in the longitudinal model are taken into account, the social network engagement of participants

was not a significant predictor, providing insufficient evidence to support the hypothesized relationship. However, the model for the survey sub-sample (Model F) did find a significant relationship between social network engagement and future participation when variables at other levels, including level-2 demographics are taken into account. This finding warrants future study into the relationships between networks and participation in organizing.

This group of findings on context and participation provide a new window into the PICO organizing model, which has developed through the organizing experiences of thousands of leaders and organizers over decades of work. The organizing model seeks to develop indigenous leadership through local institutions and neighborhoods, and to build collective capacity to operate with power to create community change. However the model meets with different levels of success in different locations and circumstances, and the current findings provide some ideas for more effective practice using the PICO model. Some variations in participation, such as seasonal variation, provide only marginally useful information for organizing practice. Others, such as the variance in future participation according to one-to-one meetings in the current year suggest that practitioners of the model (organizers and leaders) intentionally target individuals for one-to-ones so that they will return in future years. Similarly, involving new participants in research actions and other meetings in which they will be able to assume a role with meaningful responsibility can be a tool for maintaining and deepening participation across a local federation.

The neighborhood-level and individual-level predictors that were entered into the model had surprisingly weak associations with future participation. The variables themselves were chosen according to a review of previous findings on civic engagement, social capital, and political participation (see Chapter IV). Variables such as education at the individual-level have been particularly strong predictors of participation in previous studies. This study showed no statistically significant association between years of formal education and future participation in community organizing<sup>36</sup>. One potential explanation for the divergence between previous research and the current findings is that few other studies actually track attendees over time. In order to become a part of the data-set used for this study, an individual had to participate at least once. Individual-level variables like years of formal education may have played a role in determining who chose to participate, and thus enter the data-set.

At the level of the neighborhood, the only statistically significant finding was from Model F for the survey sub-sample. The finding was that the lower-income neighborhoods contained individuals more likely to participate in the future, holding all other variables in the model constant. The fact that this finding was not produced by the model for the entire sample (Model C) calls its relevance into question. The other variables with hypothesized relationships with future participation, income heterogeneity and neighborhood stability, did not produce significant results in either model. This, again, is somewhat surprising given the previous findings reviewed in Chapter IV. The same selection effect mentioned in the previous paragraph for individuals may help to

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<sup>36</sup> Nor was there a simple correlation between education and number of attendances ( $r = -0.016$ ).

explain results at the neighborhood level, as well. There may be unmeasured differences between neighborhoods in which power-based organizing activity is taking place (and therefore enter the current data-set), and those in which it is not. In other words, there may be greater amounts of participation in neighborhoods with greater income heterogeneity – but the current findings fail to find that such neighborhoods provide more fertile ground for deepening participation in organizing over time.

As organizers and leaders seek to develop habits of regular participation among larger groups of participants, these findings suggest that choices between neighborhoods and demographic characteristics of participants are relatively unimportant. More important are the settings in which individuals are participating and whether individuals are doing relational work through one-to-ones. The emphases suggested by these findings are largely in keeping with the practice of the power-based community organizing model as it is taught by those in the PICO Network. However, observation of organizing processes demonstrates that it can be difficult to remain proactive in involving new individuals. For instance, an organizer might know from trainings that they should be encouraging the LOC to continually seek to involve new participants in leadership positions – but the familiarity of the existing members and the traditions established between them may make it difficult to overcome inertia and reach out to develop new leaders. Anecdotally, these situations are frequently encountered by organizers and leaders.

Conversely, some organizing groups move rapidly from one group of individuals to the next, seeking the energy that can come from a more pressing issue and a new

constituency. They may be leaving potential long-term leaders in their wake. The ambiguity in such situations could be diminished by increasing data collection capacity in federations, and increasing the capacity of organizers and leaders to access information on participation in real-time. This is one of the primary directions for future research, discussed further in the final section of this chapter.

As it stands, organizing is far from a homogenized field. Even within particular networks, practice can differ across localities and time. While there is some cross-pollination between the networks, they have also developed distinguishing characteristics. For example, ACORN has become characterized by centralized control within the network, and brief and intensive issue-based campaigns at the local level. They are also increasingly focused on national organizing campaigns that draw on the combined power of all of their local organizing groups (Fisher, Brooks & Russell, 2007). In contrast, PICO remains relatively de-centralized, and focused on local organizing that is practiced through more democratic organizing. Swarts (2008), in comparing PICO organizing with Gamaliel and ACORN organizing, found that members of the PICO and Gamaliel federations were much more likely to mention research when describing their organizing experience in interviews (p. 18). PICO was also seen to be more open to emotional expression and relational work than other groups.

Relationships and research – both relatively strongly emphasized by the PICO model – are found in the current study to be drivers of sustained individual participation within PICO federations. This suggests, first, that the PICO model is a viable strategic model for community organizing in practice. It suggests that organizers and leaders

could sustain and deepen member participation by more carefully attuning to the process of involving new attendees in research and relational work, and seeking to involve new participants with other highly involved existing participants. This strategy of intentionally altering settings and networks fits with the organizing model's preference for environmentally-focused intervention (Stokols, 1992).

The PICO organizing model is intended to build durable organizations that can act with intentionality at a local level. Simultaneously, it seeks to practice participatory democracy and retain grassroots control of the organization. Where these twin tasks are accomplished, they defy 'the iron law of oligarchy' (Michels, 1915), which holds that representative organizations tend to become dominated by a few elites acting in their own individual self-interest. In accounts of representational processes that have defied the 'iron law', organizations have had structural characteristics which create frequent opportunities for members and representatives to interact, create the possibility of autonomous member actions which create horizontal linkages between members, and have had a balance of power between leadership and membership that is accomplished by the ability of members to hold leaders accountable (Fox & Hernandez, 1989). Recent case study research on community organizing in the IAF Network suggests that the Southwest IAF, while not quite an example of defying oligarchy, avoids many of the negative consequences commonly associated with oligarchy in social movement organizations (Osterman, 2006). The power-based organizing groups avoid these negative consequences due to their development of a strong sense of agency within their membership, and through the development of a culture of contestation.



Osterman (2006) highlights differences between power-based community organizing groups and the groups often studied as social movement organizations. In power-based organizing groups, organizers do not compete with members for their position, nor do they fear losing their leadership status and reverting to being simply a part of the membership. The organizers come from outside the pre-existing membership of the institutions, and seek to shape them into organizations capable of collective action. It is the organizers who train members in a culture of contestation and leadership accountability. Members, likewise, do not compete to become organizers, and organizers do not typically publicly represent the group. These structural characteristics, perhaps paradoxically, are a part of what enables power-based organizing groups to avoid the negative consequences of oligarchy in other representational groups. The investment of comparatively large amounts of time in relational work and training – rather than overtly issue-focused work – provides the horizontal connections among members and the member-leader interactions that characterize non-oligarchical groups (Fox & Hernandez, 1989).

The current findings on the role of research actions and one-to-ones in sustaining and deepening member participation echo these observations on overcoming or avoiding negative consequences of oligarchy in representative organizations. Although the current findings are from data gathered exclusively from PICO federations, they raise the question of whether similar dynamics are at play in other forms of local organizing, or collective action more broadly. To the extent that similar patterns are observed in other voluntary processes, they would point, again, to the viability of building networks of

relationships between participants and involving participants in community research as strategies for maintaining and deepening participation in organizing – and therefore building community capacity to make change. The sets of relationships which have produced collective capacity for mobilization has been studied by movement scholars as mobilizing structures (e.g. McAdam, 1986) or connective structures (Tarrow, 1998). Accounts of effective movements frequently focus on economic and historical conditions which allow movements to arise. Less frequently studied is the variance in the deployment of a particular model for mobilization.

As an change-oriented practice, organizing can be said to contain a “latent theoretical orientation” (Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987b). A pragmatic position holds that such dualistic distinctions (theoretical orientation and the associated practices) is unnecessary and possibly counterproductive (Christens & Speer, 2007). A term that captures a unity of theory and practice is *praxis* (Partridge, 2008). As praxis, power-based community organizing presents a series of insights about engagement in community life and the structures of collective mobilization. The organizing model is both rigid and flexible, both instrumental and relational, and creatively draws on cultural resources from both mainstream and counter-cultural institutions and movements<sup>37</sup>.

In contrast, much of the research and professional practice for community change is focused on programs that can be devised and then rolled out to create change (i.e. Bowen, 2008). Although such programs often mandate some level of community

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<sup>37</sup> Swarts (2008) observes that power-based organizing groups draw on, and use strategies from both ideal types of American social movements: A. the more radical and expressive postmaterialist movements, and B. the more moderate and instrumental organizing traditions, such as labor organizing.

participation<sup>38</sup>, the participatory ideals espoused by practitioners are frequently not met by the processes that unfold. Unlike power-based organizing praxis, in which the unpaid leaders of local organizing committees determine the issues to be addressed and the specific strategies that will be used to address them, programmatic attempts at change typically begin with assumptions that professionals will play a more active role in assessment, research, and implementation of plans for change. A crude way to differentiate between these two types of strategy for change is that programs are top-down change strategies, compared to organizing, which is closer to a grassroots, or bottom-up strategy. The influence of the power-based organizing model in this regard could be seen in Barack Obama's remarks to the U.S. Conference of Mayors this year (2008), "Change in this country comes not from the top-down, but from the bottom up. Change starts at a level that's even closer to the people than our mayors – it starts in our homes."

To some onlookers, the types of change achieved by grassroots organizing groups is either too small, too slow, or insufficiently radical. In comparison to some of the new social movements with predominantly middle-class supporters, power-based organizing does not have a firm commitment to a particular political ideology. Although the majority of issues that local federations push can be understood as efforts to create progressive change, the groups themselves are non-partisan, and involve moderates and conservatives in their memberships (Chambers, 2003). This is one of the distinguishing

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<sup>38</sup> See Christens and Speer (2007) for a review essay on criticisms of such participatory practice.

features of power-based organizing; and in many ways, this represents a strength of the organizing model.

By eschewing identity-based coalitions and static leadership, the power-based organizing process encourages the constant creation of new opportunities for individuals to assume leadership roles, and the organization consequently keeps cycling through new ideas and approaches to change. The structure of the group is perpetually open to a deep kind of democratic decision making, yet it is constrained to an organizing process that values intentionality and efficiency. Rather than relying on pre-established collective identities, organizing challenges participants to reach across differences (for example, in faiths, cultures, genders, or ethnicities) and form coalitions based on self-interest that transcends sub-group identities.

Whether it is due to the array of mechanisms through which power-based organizing groups pursue change, or due to shifts in the field such as institutional organizing through faith-based groups, community organizing is often termed *pragmatic*. Alinsky (1971) used the term in the title to his book on organizing. The roots of organizing reach directly into some of the founders of American philosophical pragmatism, through Alinsky and others. Pragmatists believe that ideas are only as true as the results that they create. They must be held up to a value system in order to be judged. Reading the work of both Dewey and Alinsky, I argue that both had a final value to which they pointed in their work. Dewey's final value was *growth*, and Alinsky's was *change*. Both intended these terms to encompass both the individual and the community. For Dewey, growth was experience that enhanced further experience; and for Alinsky,

change was a totalizing concept, involving even systems of values: “all values and factors are relative, fluid, and changing... it will be possible to “get it together” only relatively” (Alinsky, 1971; pg. xv).

The ways that power-based organizing praxis mirror the traditions of philosophical pragmatism and progressive education are multiple. Education, as discussed in Chapter 3, is practiced throughout the organizing process. Action as education is central to the understandings of both Dewey and Alinsky, and continues to be emphasized in the accounts of leaders in the networks of power-based organizing (i.e. Chambers, 2003). Describing leaders becoming engaged in organizing, Keddy (2001) writes, “They learn about how government works, and how government and the private sector interact, and collude with one another. They examine the history of their community with a critical eye to understand why things are the way they are. They are involved in on-going research on how to improve their community’s most dire problems.” Importantly, participants in organizing are both students and educators.

The organizers and leaders bring a sort of curriculum to these experiences that can be understood as seeking to produce political relativism and realpolitik. “As we begin to accept the concept of contradictions we see every problem or issue in its whole, interrelated sense. We then recognize that for every positive there is a negative, and that there is nothing positive without its concomitant negative, nor any political paradise without its negative side” (Alinsky, 1971, pg. 15). Dewey, James, and other early pragmatists grappled with dualisms such as individual/community, theory/practice – and found them to be inextricable in any practical sense, and therefore inextricable also in

theory. This denial of dualisms pervades the praxis of contemporary power-based organizing. It pushes participants toward constantly more complex understandings and more imaginative action (Christens, Hanlin & Speer, 2007). The pragmatic tradition is in evidence in the organizational repertoire of contemporary community organizing.

People encounter organizing through local media, as participant leaders, as organizers, as students and scholars, or as targets in group efforts for change. As people continue to encounter organizing, they become more aware of the uniqueness of a power-based organizing approach, as exemplified in press coverage of CCO and the 2004 Housing Action at St. Therese Little Flower described in Chapter One. Power-based community organizing, particularly when operating through faith-based institutions, has been credited with creative cultural achievements (Wood, 2002). As people interact with the power-based organizing model, they experience a form of praxis that is suffused with pragmatic understandings of democracy and education. Beyond the direct impacts on communities and personal impacts for participants, the organizing approach makes a unique cultural mark that has ripple effects beyond the organizations themselves (Keddy, 2001; Swarts, 2008). Organizing has, for instance, influenced the teaching and practice of the disciplines of social work and community development in the US (Rubin & Rubin, 2007).

In the process of situating progressive organizing within the core values of faith-based communities, power-based organizing has modified, but largely preserved the cultural innovations of the earlier generation of organizers. Faith-based organizing has moved away from some of the macho posturing that characterized organizing in earlier

iterations, yet continues in some other forms of contemporary organizing (Swarts, 2008). The core Alinsky innovations remain in the work of groups practicing models similar to the PICO model. Reitzes and Reitzes (1987b) point out that Alinsky demonstrated an understanding of the importance of symbols in social action, in a way similar to theorists of symbolic interactionism (Mills, 1940), and that he deployed key resources in ways that bring to mind resource mobilization theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Many of these strategies and tactics remain in the models of contemporary organizing networks, even if their organizing has become kinder and gentler (Swarts, 2008).

Reitzes and Reitzes (1987b) emphasize organizing's theoretical relevance to community sociology, drawing particularly on the work of Alinsky. His organizations' work with neighborhoods was geared not only toward the instrumental aims that the organizations pursued, but to building a united community across sometimes hostile groups in an urban setting. Power-based organizing is one of relatively few approaches to community practice that successfully bridges racial/ethnic, gender, religious, class, and political divides. This leads Reitzes and Reitzes (1987b) to hypothesize that members of such community organizations will have a heightened sense of community and community identity, will have elevated levels of participation, will feel a greater sense of attachment to their neighborhood, and will evaluate their neighborhood more positively than nonmembers. This same set of hypotheses has been borne out empirically in the community psychology literature (e.g. Perkins, Brown & Taylor, 1996; Speer & Hughey, 1996)

While this study has drawn on literature from multiple disciplines, it is also rooted in the literature of community psychology. Psychology as a discipline is characterized by a focus on individuals<sup>39</sup> – both as a level of analysis for study, and as a level of intervention in practice. Community psychology is a division of the larger field which has sought to understand persons in a more holistic way, as parts of a social world in which individual characteristics, relationships and societal forces are taken into account (Rappaport, 1977). Beyond the focus on understanding individuals in context, community psychology has sometimes sought to produce interventions that create change in community systems. Change in community systems inherently also involves individual change, and many community psychology interventions are targeted at both individual and systems change. However, many also remain similar to mainstream psychology, which seeks change in individuals, sometimes actively working to remove systems from consideration.

Community psychology has sometimes met with difficulties in a quest for disciplinary recognition – both within psychology, and as an interdisciplinary applied social science outside of psychology. Within psychology, there has been a push toward more biological understandings of psychological functioning. The equipment used to measure brain waves is conducive to highly controlled ‘medical-model’ experimentation. Just as psychotherapy encourages clients to look within themselves for answers to their problems, psychological researchers increasingly attempt to examine the brains of their research participants to unlock the mysteries of human thought and behavior.

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<sup>39</sup> This is particularly true in the United States. Other community psychologies have existed throughout the world, often without the need to distinguish themselves as ‘community psychology’ (see Fryer, 2008).



Community psychology, with its emphasis on research outside the laboratory, has fallen further afield within the larger discipline as a result. Conversely, in interdisciplinary settings, the consideration of systems is a less novel theoretical turn, and community psychologists have sometimes struggled to define their perspectives to audiences from other disciplinary backgrounds. Community psychology's emphasis on intervention, however – as well as its incorporation of psychological theory – does distinguish it from other social sciences; and, recent work in community psychology has been more explicit about the field's understandings of social power and systems change (i.e. Christens & Perkins, 2008; Christens, Hanlin & Speer, 2007; Foster-Fishman, Nowell & Yang, 2007; Prilleltensky, 2008; Speer, 2008).

Much of the previous research on community organizing from a community psychology perspective has looked at indicators such as psychological empowerment and psychological sense of community. This study does not focus on similar psychological indicators, potentially raising the question: 'what makes this psychology?' One answer is that the outcome variable of interest – participation in community organizing – is behavioral. This study has sought to add to understandings of predictors of that behavior. Another psychological component to the current research involves the mental health of the population of participants. The survey data from the Skipper initiative point to improved mental health and gains in psychological empowerment and civic engagement among those involved in organizing (Speer & Christens, 2008; Speer, Christens & Peterson, *in review*).

In addition to the ways this study touches on behavioral and mental health concerns, there are two additional ways in which this study is related to psychology. First, the process of community organizing is geared toward change in the way that individuals perceive social systems. In this sense, the process is an intervention in political psychology. Put differently, organizing stimulates change in the social imagination (Christens, Hanlin & Speer, 2007). Second, the organizing process, and the one-to-one process in particular, is a form of social practice that stimulates individual psychological development. In Chapter 3, the one-to-one meeting in power-based organizing was compared to psychological practice, and termed a form of social therapy. This is exemplified by the admonishment to organizers that individuals be treated as ends rather than means (Chambers, 2003). Taken together with the organizations' push for instrumental community change, the organizing process can be understood as development of persons-in-community (Dokecki, 1996). In this way, it potentially serves as a model for – and a challenge to – mainstream professional psychological interventions. In sum, while the current project is not *all* psychology, much of it is psychology in ways that more psychology should be.

Finally, this study has drawn on the research literature on civic engagement and social capital, primarily from the discipline of political science. In Chapter Two, power-based community organizing was located within the array of activities that are often combined into such measures. Organizing was identified as lying toward the producer end of the spectrum, compared to many activities which place the individual in the familiar role of the consumer. The empirical work in Chapter Six demonstrates that the

unique aspects of the organizing process, which involve individuals in the production of change and social capital, are also important drivers of future participation. That is, more meaningful involvement in the development one-to-one relationships, and the process of research to determine the direction of future action, increases the future level of individual involvement in organizing.

These findings, and their reflection of the power-based organizing model, should be kept in mind as funders and institutions continue to promote civic engagement and social capital as solutions to the range of issues identified in Chapter Two (e.g. economic development, health). First, the one-to-one relationship is a key building block for future attendance at group meetings. Currently, very few initiatives seeking to promote civic engagement pay attention to one-to-one relationships. Second, the participatory settings that are created to promote engagement should have an open structure with regard to the creation of opportunities for meaningful roles. A structured group inquiry into the causes and conditions of community problems is an example of a setting with an open opportunity role structure (Maton & Salem, 1995; Peterson & Speer, 2000). The research action can provide a model for the types of settings that can be expected to produce higher levels of civic engagement and social capital. The application of insights from the power-based organizing process to more general work in civic engagement is a promising idea<sup>40</sup> – although attempts to adapt insights into other settings have met with difficulties, suggesting, in short, that organizing is more than the sum of its parts.

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<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Boyte's (2004) accounts of civic engagement work, drawing on organizing roots, accomplished through initiatives and institutions such as the National Conversation Project, the National Issues Forum, the National Campus Compact, or the Center for Democracy and Citizenship.

Power-based community organizing has been highlighted in previous research as one of the most promising generators of social capital in an era of widespread declines in that measure (Warren, 2001). However, viewing organizing through the lens of civic engagement and social capital, it becomes clear that these measures are so broad as to encompass both organizing and a range of similar and very dissimilar activities. The breadth of these more-is-better discussions obscure potentially important differences between the settings of activities. Even within the power-based organizing process, the present research has shown differential effects of different meeting types on future participation; and other recent work has highlighted important differences between power-based organizing as it is practiced in different organizing networks (Swarts, 2008). Should types of voluntary activities and civic engagement not similarly be explored for differences? With few exceptions (e.g. Stolle & Rochon, 1998), the research literature has tended to combine, rather than distinguish between, contexts or types of participation and engagement. Complicating attempts to distinguish between types is the lack of a generally accepted taxonomy (or even vocabulary) for doing so. The development of such a taxonomy is one important avenue for future research<sup>41</sup>.

### Future Directions

The hypotheses for this study were crafted as applied questions, and this research comprises a part of a research collaboration with the local federations that are part of the PICO Network. The orientation that informed much of the data collection and research

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<sup>41</sup> A challenge facing any such taxonomy is that innovations from the grassroots and the evolution of the field render any comprehensive treatment quickly outdated.

for the Skipper Initiative drew on the tradition of *action research* (see Bradbury & Reason, 2007; Stringer, 2007). Throughout the Skipper Initiative, members and organizers within the PICO federations in this study were full partners with the research team in deciding how to frame questions and how to collect data. Many of the ideas for this dissertation project came from attendance and participation in the PICO National Leadership Training in Winter, 2008. The first section of this chapter describes ways that the specific findings in this research relate to the practice of organizing. This section goes on to describe weaknesses, or limitations of the current study, and several directions for future research.

The study design, which followed five sites for five years provided a unique window into the power-based organizing process in general, differences in processes across groups, and change over time within-groups and within-individuals. This allowed descriptive and visual representations of the organizing process, as well as growth modeling of individual participation. The two waves of survey data, particularly when paired with data from a random sample of residents from the same geographic areas, has yielded powerful findings on the individual impacts of organizing that are included in the final report (Speer, 2006), and other forthcoming publications mentioned in this study (e.g. Speer, Christens & Peterson, *in review*; Speer, Peterson, Zippay & Christens, *forthcoming*). Two waves of survey data provide for pre-test, post-test designs, but are insufficient for modeling data using a multilevel model for change. Future longitudinal studies of organizing should seek three or more waves of survey data so that multilevel, longitudinal models can be fitted to other outcome variables of interest.

Social network engagement was measured in this study through the use of two-mode network data. Although the effect of this variable was not significantly predictive of future participation in the model for the full sample, the effect was significant in the model for the survey sub-sample. The two-mode data, because they are based on the meetings that an individual attends, may draw on some of the same sources of systematic variance as the variables in the model for meeting type. Similarly, because the variable's construction sought to identify relational characteristics, it may draw on some of the same sources of systematic variance as the one-to-one meetings. Future research on social networks in organizing should seek to gather and utilize single-mode network data to disentangle these effects. Network analysis is also one of the most promising avenues for action research in collaboration with organizing groups, since it can provide visual evidence to leaders, who can then strategically plan to build or strengthen connections in specific parts of the network.

Few previous studies of participation, civic engagement, or social capital have gathered detailed participation data on specific individuals. Both the power of these data, and certain limitations, are demonstrated by the empirical work in this study. The participation data provided the sampling frame for the waves of survey data, and they help to contextualize any findings on individuals; further, they provide detailed information on group process, and help to contextualize findings on community impacts<sup>42</sup>. The data allow visualization of trends across groups and individuals, and would be particularly useful for practice if they could be viewed and analyzed in a timely

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<sup>42</sup> The information utilized in this study is limited to the community organizing contexts, and do not account for the other institutional and group memberships that characterize life in a community (Warner & Lunt, 1941).

manner. However, the process of copying sign-in sheets, sending them through the mail, having off-site researchers identify names from handwriting, and then entering the names into a database is a laborious and error-prone process. As a result, there was a consistently high lag time between the participatory events that were measured, and the ability to analyze and feed back the data to the organizations, reducing the timeliness, and therefore the usefulness of the information and analyses.

This process of data collection on participation is relatively expensive to maintain, and ceases when funded research comes to an end. Future research should involve new methods of data collection on participation that do not require so much labor to sustain. A promising avenue for this type of data collection involves membership cards that could be scanned or swiped at meetings, with records then updated in a database. Such a system would build the core capacity of organizing groups<sup>43</sup>, as well as equip the organizations with longitudinal data for research and evaluation. In the long run, a more automated record-keeping system for participants could have the power to collect data from enough local federations that the variance in participation patterns and other local trends could be meaningfully investigated at the level of the federation. The ability to quantitatively compare of a larger number of different groups across time would be particularly valuable for building knowledge on effective organizing practices. It could also provide a more standardized way to conduct evaluations as part of funded initiatives.

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<sup>43</sup> The same core capacities that are built through data collection on participation will prove useful as local or regional federations engage in future efforts to increase autonomy through local economic organizing (e.g. cooperatives, credit unions, or group insurance policies).

A persistent challenge in research on organizing is the measurement of community-level impacts. Some local case studies (e.g. Speer et al., 2003) provide evidence for change in community conditions. However, academic and policy writing still relies mainly on speculation and impressions when assessing the average or overall impacts of local organizing as a field. Broad and accurate understandings of the ability and future potential of local organizing groups to make lasting community change is a topic of great interest (Orr, 2007). Cases such as the CCO Housing Action presented in Chapter One rely on interviews and newspaper articles to capture understandings of community-level change. In order to demonstrate community-level effects in a more rigorous way, data from local sources – such as crime, health, school, and property information – can occasionally be obtained. A difficulty can be getting sufficiently longitudinal and disaggregated information. In larger cities, it may still be difficult to discern the unique impacts of organizing on constantly changing community conditions.

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## APPENDIX A

### LINKS TO ORGANIZING

*The following groups (listed in alphabetical order after PICO and the Raskob Foundation, which participated in and funded this study) are involved in the expanding field of power-based organizing.*

PICO Network

<http://www.piconetwork.org/>

Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities

<http://www.rfca.org/>

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Applied Research Center

<http://www.arc.org/>

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)

<http://acorn.org/>

Association for Community Organization & Social Administration (ACOSA)

<http://www.acosa.org/index.html>

Center for Community Change

<http://www.communitychange.org/>

Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO)

<http://www.ctwo.org/>

Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART)

<http://www.thedartcenter.org/>

Education Center for Community Organizing (ECCO)

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/ecco/>

The Gamaliel Foundation

<http://www.gamaliel.org/default.htm>

Highlander Research and Education Center

<http://www.highlandercenter.org/>

The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)  
<http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/>

Midwest Academy  
<http://www.midwestacademy.com/>

National Organizers Alliance (NOA)  
<http://noacentral.org/>

National Training and Information Center (NTIC)  
<http://www.ntic-us.org/>

Western States Center  
<http://www.westernstatescenter.org/>

*Links to a number of other national, regional, and international groups is provided by:  
COMM-ORG: The Online Conference of Community Organizing and Development  
<http://comm-org.wisc.edu/orgs.htm>*