ORGANIZING FOR POWER:

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

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PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY, 1995, Vol. 23, 57 – 73.

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Organizing for power is one process through which persons can become empowered and exert power; however despite important calls for increased emphasis on community organizing (Wolff, 1993), we do not know nearly enough about the various processes of organizing for power that already exist in many communities. Community organizing for power is important to community psychology because it is a potential mechanism for empowerment, and empowerment is one of the defining concepts of our field (Rappaport, 1981, Zimmerman, in press). Recently the term has also achieved widespread scholarly and popular usage ranging from policy research to political slogans to advertising campaigns. Several participants in the Fourth Biennial Conference on Community Research and Action lamented the ubiquity of the word and strived to increase the precision of the concept. But the concept of empowerment has become ubiquitous in part because there are a large number of contexts in which empowerment is thought to occur. We agree with Zimmerman (1993) and Perkins (1993) that empowerment may well need to be considered on a context specific basis. The context from which our examination of empowerment flows is community organizing for power (Heller, 1989).

The purpose of this paper is to present a case study of two conceptually similar community organizing efforts that highlights commonalities and important differences. This study first presents a qualitative analysis of two approaches to community organizing for power. Our analysis was made possible by participation and collaboration with members of community organizations which opened the way for access to documents, events, interviews, and settings that formed the basis of our case study. We also present some quantitative data concerning participant perceptions of organizing experiences and outcomes. These data highlight important differences in community organizing approaches, differences we believe can be useful to our field as we struggle with the important concepts of empowerment and power.

Community organizing for power is of particular interest to our field because it is focused explicitly on system change. Specifically, community organizing for power 1) is a process that capitalizes on individual, organizational and community strengths with minimal control by professionals, thus representing a model for our efforts; 2) represents a form of citizen participation that promotes indigenous leadership in often poor or declining urban areas with concentrations of "at risk" populations; and 3) embodies our values of community, diversity and change for improvement of individual and collective well-being. To study these community efforts for promoting power, it is necessary to distinguish them from other forms of organized effort.

Several researchers have noted a proliferation of community organizations since the 1960's (Boyte 1979; Giloth, 1985; Schwartz, 1979). Community organizations have been classified according to methods employed such as social planning, social action, community development, civic agency, electoral, or pressure group (Boyte, 1980; Perlman, 1976). Another important distinguishing characteristic of community organizations is the member base of the organizing effort. Kahn (1982) has identified four common bases: unions (based in the workplace), communities (based on geography), constituencies (based on individual characteristics), and issues (based on common individual problems). To these four we add a fifth base--institutions, e.g., schools, hospitals, religious congregations. An institution is an obvious choice as a foundation for a community organization because there is an existing structure upon which to build and because individuals may already identify with it.

The particular method of organizing we have studied is called pressure group or social action organizing. This form of organizing has been evolving in the United States since the 1930's and is now found in one form or another in most major cities in this country. Pressure group organizing draws upon the organizing traditions of Saul Alinsky, Paulo Freire and Miles Horton (Adams & Horton, 1975; Alinsky, 1972; Freire, 1970). The method seeks to build social power capable of leveraging resources and negotiating improvements for its members and their communities. We prefer to call these "power-based community organizations" because they explicitly acknowledge the role of power and seek to redirect power in community functioning.

These organizing efforts are important contexts for the development of empowerment theory because they exist as settings for promotion of both psychological empowerment and organizational power (Heller, 1989; Price, 1990; Zimmerman, in press).

Community psychologists have examined psychological processes for individual participants in community organizations (Chavis and Wandersman; 1990; Florin and Wandersman, 1984; Kieffer, 1984; Wandersman and Florin, 1981; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991) and the organizational characteristics of successful community organizations (Florin, Chavis, Wandersman & Rich, 1992; Prestby & Wandersman, 1985; Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich & Chavis, 1990). This research has stressed cognitive, developmental and control dynamics for individual participants and key organizational characteristics at an organizational level of analysis. Our research attempts to extend this work by an examination of organizing processes in community organizations developing social power.

Several theorists assert that power is fundamentally a relational phenomena and is therefore developed by building relationships among individuals, organizations and institutions (Brock, 1988; Burns, 1978; Janeway, 1980; Foucault, 1980; Serrano-Garcia, 1993). Assuming power can be developed through relationships in community organizations (Carassco, 1991; Pierce, 1984), we must still understand how organizing approaches differ in light of how power is manifested in a community organizing context. We believe sociological theory can be of some guidance here. In an important analysis of power in an Appalachian community, Gaventa (1980) delineates three levels or dimensions through which power is expressed. In the first dimension power is represented through superior bargaining resources that can be used to reward and punish various targets (Polsby, 1959). This dimension represents the popular and traditional understanding of power--those with the greatest resources, e.g., money or organized people, have the greatest power. A second dimension of power is the ability to construct barriers to participation or eliminate barriers to participation through setting agendas and defining issues (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962). By controlling topics, timing of discussion and the range of discourse within a topic, those with power can effectively limit participation and perspectives in public debate. In the third dimension, power is conceived as a force that influences or shapes shared consciousness through myths, ideology and control of information (Lukes, 1974), as in the notion that "private enterprise" is superior to governmental action.

Given that power may be manifested in these ways, it is important to identify the processes through which people come together to develop and assert power. Not all attempts to organize for power are identical. There is very little in our literature about the actual processes of organizing for power (Kieffer, 1984; Heller, 1992) and even less (Perlman, 1979) about how conceptually similar approaches may differ. Over what is now three years, we have observed and participated in two conceptually similar community organizing efforts aimed at developing and exercising power. The two community organizing efforts we describe could serve as models for community psychologists seeking to learn more about this important avenue to power. The purposes of this comparative case study were to 1) attempt to discern a process of power-based community organizing common to both organizations; 2) highlight important and instructive differences in organizing processes; and 3) report participant perceptions of the organizing experience. First, we present a brief description of an organizing process common to both power-based community organizations. Second we describe, in greater detail, the way the general organizing process was manifested for the two organizing approaches. Last, we present differences in perceptions of interpersonal relationships and behaviors between the organizations and differences on measures of psychological empowerment, perceptions of organizational power, and one archival measure of organizational power.

Settings for Research

For this research we participated with two power-based community organizations. We employed a comparative case study approach in this instance because so little was known in our field about the actual process of organizing for power and because "access" to power-based community organizations is, in general, not easily achieved.

The organizations we studied were the only two clearly identifiable power-based community organizations in a large midwestern city. Both community organizations employed the same general strategy and process of organizing. The two organizations shared many other common features: they professed similar goals (i.e., development of power), claimed to be citywide organizations, were comparable in membership size, operated in similar geographic areas with largely contiguous or overlapping boundaries, employed the same number of staff persons, were over 10 years old and were affiliated with national community organizing networks. Despite these similarities, one important difference between the groups may prove critical as our field attempts to learn more about this important community enterprise. The two organizations employed different organizational bases (Kahn, 1982). One organization operated from a geographical base composed of block clubs representing neighborhoods; we refer to this as the Neighborhood-Based Organization (NBO). In contrast, the second organization operated from an institutional base of congregations representing different religious denominations; this we refer to as the Congregation-Based Organization (CBO).

Procedure for the Study

Two methods of study were employed. Qualitative techniques formed the core of our method, and quantitative data were added to elaborate our description. Drawing upon extensive observations, in-depth interviews, document analysis and participation in a wide array of organization events over what is now a three-year period, we attempted to articulate a model of community organizing common to both CBO and NBO approaches. We believed these methods were appropriate to the task.[2] To augment these experiences and enrich our description of commonalities and differences between organizations, we used survey research methods to question individual members of both the neighborhood- and congregation-based organizations.

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[2] Although this research should not be taken as a formal participant observation study, we were able to examine all manner of organization documents, attend and participate, when invited, in planning meetings, conduct in-depth interviews with participants of many kinds and participate in organizing events in homes, churches and many other places.

Qualitative Case Comparison

Description of Community Organizing Cycle: The Common Process

To develop power, both CBO and NBO employed a cyclical pattern of organizing. This cycle entailed four processes: 1) Assessment; 2) Research; 3) Mobilization/Action; and 4) Reflection (See Figure 1). Each stage in this cycle was emphasized to a greater or lesser extent by the two organizations, and each stage was enacted in different ways by CBO and NBO. What follows is a brief description of the organizing process common to both organizations.

Assessment. Assessment was the process through which critical issues affecting a community were identified and defined by the organizations. This process began with a small group of individuals ranging from two to ten persons who met to share stories, opinions and solutions about community problems affecting their lives. Both organizations held a series of meetings to sharpen the focus of the group, expand membership and reach consensus about a specific issue on which the organizations would focus their energies. Assessment was also used to expand and develop each organization's leadership base.

Research. The research process for these organizations was the way participants examined causes and correlates of issues affecting the community. Each organization identified individuals, organizations and institutions in the community with knowledge of the issue identified in the assessment phase. Information about the nature of the issue and its potential influences and solutions was gathered through these knowledgeable community entities. Key to this process was uncovering the ways in which allocation of community resources contributed to a particular issue and how powerful community entities developed and exercised power around an issue. The research process was also used to determine targets for action.

Mobilization/Action. Mobilization referred to a process of strategy development and gathering an organization's members for collective action. Key to strategy development was examination of contradictions uncovered in the research process. Typically, contradictions were apparent contrasts between expressed values of powerful community entities and the practices, policies or funding priorities of these same entities. For example, the community organization might uncover, in the research process, that resources for youth recreation were channeled to suburban areas despite public commitment to build opportunity for persons in the urban core. The organization might also determine that attempts to deal with crime issues affecting members were skewed to law enforcement and not preventive efforts focusing on development of physical and social infrastructure. Based on the contradictions uncovered, each organization developed an action strategy requiring first the identification of a party with the authority to rectify the contradiction; this party would become the target of their action. Next, mobilization consisted of leaders calling on members to participate in organized action toward the target. Finally, "actions" were held to display what was considered to be the power of the community organization directed toward a target in their communities. Actions of power-based community organizations were usually very public in nature. The organizations sought to display power by bringing together large numbers of community members, media, public officials and other organizations concerned with an issue. An "action" was considered a collective attempt to exercise power developed through organization. The logic of action strategies for both organizations was that by bringing public pressure to bear on community targets, goals of the organization would be accomplished.

Reflection. Through the process of reflection, members considered actions taken by their organization, discussed lessons learned, considered how power was manifested in the action and calculated future direction(s) for the organization.

Although this four-stage cycle described the general organizing process employed by the power-based community organizations we studied, the two organizations differed strikingly in their implementation of the process.

The Community Organizing Cycle: A Congregation-Based Community Organization (CBO)

CBO began the process of organizing within the institutional setting of local religious congregations. Typically, the congregation-based community organizing process began with a staff member of the city-wide organization approaching the religious leader of a congregation. The leader of the congregation together with influential members of the congregation decided whether to participate in the organizing process. From this point forward, the organizing staff acted as consultants and advisors to guide the congregation through the organizing cycle. Each participating congregation in CBO then built a team of leaders, typically 10 to 15 persons, called the "organizing committee." Participation in an organizing committee was open to all congregation members; but in the CBO context, a leader was an individual who developed a constituency within the congregation. CBO had no elected positions for members of the organizing committee. Nevertheless, there were clearly identified roles within CBO that were filled as CBO moved through the organizing cycle. Roles were rotated within the organizing committee with the clear intention to develop organizational skills, promote confidence and increase knowledge of the community and community processes. Examples of roles included asking questions of public officials during public meetings, arranging media coverage for CBO and its agenda, researching public records, leading public events and time-keeping for events. It is important to note that the process of filling organizational roles was aimed explicitly at all members of the organization, not just members of the organizing committee. Members of the organizing committee actively sought to involve others by asking for individual commitments to assume roles. CBO believed that building from an existing congregation base and providing many explicitly defined and rotated roles for participation was a strength of its approach.

CBO Organizing Cycle

Assessment--CBO. The process stressed most by CBO was called the "one-on-one." These face-to-face conversations typically occurred in homes and focused on the concerns and aspirations of members regarding their local community and its impact on their lives and congregation. The principal aim of one-on-ones was identification of an issue that touched the emotions and immediate concerns of community members. CBO believed it was this process -- relationship building-- which was the major resource of the organization. Usually about 50 to

150 one-on-ones were conducted prior to determining issues for research and action. Problem areas for which specific issues were identified included "drug houses," youth recreation, physical infrastructure, deterioration of neighborhoods and violence. The emotion was reflected in stories told about community experiences. By listening to individual members of the congregation, participants gained an understanding of how fellow congregation members experienced community problems. CBO believed one-on-ones developed emotional bonds between persons that could be capitalized on throughout the organizing cycle. While the one-on-one process was underway, a period of two to six months, the organizing committee met regularly to share stories, set commitments for conducting future one-on-ones and refine issues for the remainder of the organizing cycle. We determined through interviews and observation that organizing committees typically reached about one-quarter of congregation households. Though occurring primarily with members of congregations, one-on-ones were not restricted to congregation members.

Research--CBO. Through the research process, leaders gathered to collect information about the most pressing issue identified in the assessment phase. The organizing committee invited and included members who were particularly affected by an issue to participate in planning public research meetings and in formulating research questions to be addressed. CBO research of an issue required the leadership to identify and meet with the particular persons who could inform them about the cause and extent of the problem and how community resources were allocated to it, examine with CBO members possible solutions and identify powerful community entities with influence concerning the issue. Research meetings were held either in a CBO member's building or in the location of the target individual or institution. Also, individual leaders performed background research before and after research meetings to enhance understanding of the issue. Typically, from three to ten research meetings were conducted for a particular issue, and sometimes several planning meetings were held prior to the public research meetings.

Research meetings were used not only to learn more about specific issues; they served also as settings for involving members in the organizing process and developing leaders' skills in organizing and conducting public meetings. The research process functioned additionally to develop a relationship between CBO and public officials or other community entities identified as involved in the issue at hand. Another important purpose of research was to uncover contradictions between stated policies, procedures and resource allocations contributing to the issue being researched. Participants in CBO believed the research process was a critical tool for understanding how organizational power could be developed around an issue and used to effect change.

Mobilization/Action-CBO. When the research phase was completed, the organizing committee met to bring together information gathered and develop a strategy for taking action on a specific issue. All CBO members contacted to this point were invited to participate. Typically, several mobilization meetings were held. During these CBO events, information gathered in research was shared; possible options for action were discussed, and a specific strategy for action was developed. Targets for CBO action were determined by consensus of CBO members. CBO participants then committed to conduct more one-on-ones to test community reactions to the research and proposed action strategy and to build a larger base of support for action. Based on community reactions, action strategies were refined.

CBO actions always took the form of public meetings called by the CBO and held on CBO "turf". These actions always followed the same pattern: research, testimony, target remarks and demands. Actions consisted first of formal presentations of research by CBO members regarding the issue. The presentation highlighted contradictions uncovered in the research process, linked contradictions to the specific issue and demonstrated the community's knowledge that the target had the capacity to address the problem. Next, several individuals from the community shared personal stories about how the issue has affected them, their family or their community. These stories anchor the issue to the community and reveal that the issue is not just facts and figures but something that impacts community members. Targets of CBO actions were one or several individuals or representatives of institutions that CBO research had identified as having control of resources believed to influence the issue in question. After the personal stories, targets were invited to make remarks about the issue. Lastly, after presenting research, personal stories and hearing the targets' remarks, CBO asked the target(s) to make specific commitments to resolve the issue. These commitments were viewed by CBO as the ultimate product of an action. Because a target's commitment was the focal point of an action, targets (not just organizational members) were informed in advance of the action about what they would specifically be asked at the meeting. Due to the understanding gained through research, CBO believed they always asked for commitments within the power of the target to tangibly address.

This action format was structured to express organizational power. The intent of the action was to demonstrate power by rewarding or punishing a target and to persuade a target to accept CBO demands, including ways of defining community issues. CBO believed actions were demonstrations of organizational power by a large (groups typically numbered from 100 to 1000), disciplined, well-informed group of community members.

Reflection--CBO. Immediately upon conclusion of an action, the organizing committee and other CBO participants met to analyze the effects of CBO action. The committee reviewed how leaders performed their roles, how well the community "turned out" for the action, how well the organization communicated its agenda and how obtained commitments could be tracked. Participants also examined how they felt personally, i.e., when they were unsure or frightened and how they grew through the process. CBO members then committed to more one-to-ones with members of the community. Through these subsequent conversations, actions were evaluated, further research and action on an issue was considered, and new issues were brought forward. The organizing cycle was then repeated.

The Community Organizing Cycle: A Neighborhood Based Community Organization (NBO)

NBO used neighborhood units composed of geographically-based clusters of block clubs as its base of organizing. Each neighborhood area targeted by NBO consisted of between 60 to 150 blocks each, but not all blocks within a neighborhood participated with the NBO. Typically, a staff member of the city-wide neighborhood organization would attempt to conduct a door-to-door canvas of a particular block. The stated purpose of the canvas was to identify issues important to block residents and identify recognized leaders of blocks. When a block leader was identified, he or she would become the nominal block leader and leaders' homes were used as locations for block meetings. The organizing staff then worked in an advisory role to guide blocks through the organizing cycle. In contrast to CBO, elected officers were central to NBO's organizational structure. Each block within a neighborhood elected its own officer who, in turn, elected from among all block officers a neighborhood representative. The neighborhood representative then joined other neighborhood representatives as leaders of the city-wide NBO. Further organizing activities were undertaken almost exclusively by these elected individuals.

NBO Organizing Cycle

Assessment--NBO. Rather than one-on-one conversations, NBO used an assessment strategy based on small group meetings at the block level. Block meetings were typically held in a home, school, church or neighborhood center. These block meetings served as the settings in which individuals spoke of neighborhood issues they personally faced. Some block clubs occasionally engaged in other forms of assessment including parties, "cleanups," and neighborhood-watch events. NBO believed the principal aim of these small group events was to identify issues for organized action as well as to build interaction, cohesion and neighboring among block residents (Unger & Wandersman, 1985). The block meetings in which we participated were attended by about four to six residents, and about ten percent of a neighborhood's blocks were active in the assessment phase of the organizing cycle. After elected block representatives identified issues of greatest concern to themselves and their neighborhoods, they met with other elected neighborhood representatives to discuss and refine joint issues and test ideas for action. Examples of issues identified were crime, neighborhood drug use and selling, residential lending practices and neighborhood deterioration.

Research--NBO. NBO aimed its research process to understanding issues and identifying targets for action. NBO stressed speed in their research--typically several weeks to two months. The expressed purpose of this emphasis on speed was to harness the emotions and sense of immediacy experienced by neighbors regarding a particular issue. Research was initiated by neighborhood officers who gathered a small group of block officers one or two times to investigate an issue of neighborhood concern. The NBO research process relied heavily on shared, preexisting knowledge and experience of these NBO leaders. Occasionally, a research group appointed by NBO officers worked to collect information through telephone calls or face-to-face meetings, held almost exclusively in the offices of public and private officials. Additionally, NBO representatives sometimes observed community gatherings through which important information could be obtained. Rarely, however, did NBO hold their own public meeting to research an issue. Typically, NBO held one or two research meetings in preparation for an action.

Mobilization/Action--NBO. After gathering information, either from research meetings or experiences of block officers and neighborhood representatives, NBO leaders met to plan a strategy for action. NBO employed a strategy heavily weighted toward action. In contrast to CBO's exclusive use of public meetings held on CBO "turf", NBO used a variety of action tactics. In addition to holding their own public meetings, NBO incorporated tactics such as picketing, sit-ins and disruption of public meetings organized for other purposes. With motives similar to those of CBO, NBO actions were designed to exert pressure on community targets. Mobilization for an action was expected to be accomplished by block officers. Inactive blocks were encouraged to begin participating in NBO actions. Targets for actions were selected by NBO leaders. In all actions, designated NBO members assumed the role of making media statements to communicate the NBO agenda. This attention to media by NBO was designed to demonstrate to those with power that NBO could punish them through disruption and negative media attention. These tactics were not the stated goal of NBO actions; rather, confrontational tactics were viewed as tools in an action strategy intended to result in negotiation between NBO leaders and a community target.

Reflection--NBO. Following NBO actions, neighborhood representatives met with other NBO leaders to examine the action and the strengths and weaknesses of the action strategy. But reflection was not systematic. The occasion for reflection was typically a meeting called by NBO leaders to include neighborhood representatives. Meetings usually occurred on the day of action, the next day or a week after the action. Leaders of NBO believed the reflection process enabled them to analyze the power of their actions and the neighborhood changes NBO actions were able to produce.

Quantitative Data

The Community Organizing Cycle: Participant perceptions and Archival Data

To build upon the foregoing qualitative descriptions and substantiate our observations, we conducted a survey of CBO and NBO members and collected archival data about these organizations. Participants for this part of the study were selected in a two-stage sampling design. Organizational units that overlapped geographically, three neighborhood units and three congregation units, were the focus of this portion of the study. Within these units, participants were chosen by means of a simple random sample from membership rosters of organizational units. Self-report research instruments consisting of existing scales and items written for the purpose of this investigation were mailed to a total of 210 participants. The mailing also included a cover letter describing the research and a letter of endorsement from the board of directors for each organization and a stamped return envelope. Instruments not returned in two weeks were followed with a second mailing. No potential respondents were members of both organizations. One hundred nineteen surveys--56%--were returned, and seven incomplete surveys were excluded. Thus, 112 persons participated in this part of the research--

59 members of CBO and 53 members of NBO.

Member perceptions of organizational relationships were examined through the Index of Group Dimensions (Hemphill, 1956). We used this instrument to assess member perceptions regarding the nature of relationships within the organization along three dimensions: control, the degree to which the organization regulated activities of members; intimacy, the degree to which members were familiar with each other; and stratification, the degree to which each organization was structured hierarchically. Member participatory behaviors were examined using an index, developed for this research, which asked respondents to indicate the frequency with which they engaged in three types of interactions believed to build relationships among members: 1) attendance at organizational meetings; 2) interpersonal contacts with other members (outside of formal meetings); and 3) telephone contacts with other members. Members indicated frequencies of these behaviors retrospectively for a three-month period. Respondents also completed the measure of psychological empowerment developed by Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988). We used an unweighted composite across three dimensions of empowerment: 1) cognitive; 2) personality; and 3) motivational. To examine participant perceptions of the power of their organizations, we developed a single nine-item scale based on Gaventa's (1980) conception of power. Respondents rated the power of their organizations to reward and punish community targets, determine community agendas and control ideologies and information. Examples of items included "NBO/CBO has had many members working together to pressure for changes over the last several years" and "NBO/CBO has been able to influence what issues get talked about in this community." A single score for these items was used in our analyses.

Organizational power was further assessed through examination of archival data. All articles about the two power-based community organizations which appeared in the city's major daily newspaper for three contiguous years prior to our study were content-analyzed. The purpose was to determine the organizational power of these groups using a method other than self-report. We examined the newspaper for indicators of each organization's ability to reward or punish community targets (measured by reported numbers of members attending CBO and NBO events), shape community debate (measured by numbers of articles about CBO or NBO) and influence ideologies (measured by the number of ideas promoted by CBO and NBO actually reported in the newspaper) (Gaventa, 1980).[3] All articles were coded by two trained undergraduate research assistants. Twenty percent of the articles were coded independently by both raters to assess interrater agreement. Mean interrater reliability was r=.86, with a range from r=.82 to r=.90.

Results of the membership survey provided a more elaborate description of differences we observed in the organizing processes used by these two power-based community organizations. CBO and NBO differed on several variables measuring perceptions of relationships among members, participatory behaviors and psychological empowerment. Further differences were also detected for the archival measure of organizational power.

Table 1 summarizes comparisons made between CBO and NBO for member perceptions of organizational relationships, participatory behaviors, psychological empowerment, and perceptions of organizational power. Significant differences were detected on five of ten variables. As shown, members of CBO perceived their organization as less controlling (F = 6.03, $\underline{p} < .01$) and more intimate (F = 11.2, $\underline{p} < .01$) than members of NBO. Further, CBO members reported greater levels of interpersonal interaction than NBO members (F = 12.4, $\underline{p} < .01$) and greater levels of psychological empowerment (F = 9.08, $\underline{p} < .01$). The two organizations did not differ on perceptions of organizational stratification, numbers of meetings attended and telephone contacts. No difference in perception of organizational power was detected.

Results for the content analysis of newspaper articles about the organizational power for each group are shown in Table 2. Dramatic differences were noted between CBO and NBO on two of the three variables assessed. Substantially greater numbers of CBO members were reported to have attended organization events than NBO members (CBO, 3050; NBO, 279). Despite comparable number of articles written about both organizations (CBO, 15; NBO, 14), many more ideas promoted by CBO (79) were noted in articles than ideas promoted by NBO (13).

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[3] Whereas measures of empowerment, organizational process and perceptions of power were important to examine, we also believed it was important to include an indicator sensitive to the way organizational power might be expressed at the community level.

Discussion

The power associated with mobilized collectives is an expression of a complex mosaic of multiple individual relationships within that collective, and relationships between that collective and other organizations. Knowledge of processes used by community organizations to develop power is important to our field, particularly if it is to achieve its goal of influencing macro-level forces which create many of the individual problems we seek to ameliorate (Rappaport, 1981, 1987; Swift & Levin, 1987). The common organizing process employed by CBO and NBO was based on mobilization of many individuals into organizations seeking power in the community, thus providing a setting through which individuals could become empowered, and through their organizations, affect conditions of their community. Two key concerns for community psychologists studying this "domain" (Zimmerman, 1993) are the psychological processes of individuals working through power-based organizations to shape their environments and the effects of becoming organized at both the individual and community levels of analysis (Riger, 1993).

The process of community organizing described here is very similar to what Newbrough (1992) prescribed as combining research and action. As shown in our description, the organizing process employed by each organization clearly involves research, action and reflection components. But there is a second and perhaps deeper lesson for community psychology. Community organizing for power can be described as a "found object" that in Newbrough's words, "allows for psychology and community to be pursued at the same time" (Newbrough, 1992, p.20). This has been, for a very long time, both the opportunity and the frustration of our field (Lehmann, 1971). In our experience there are an abundance of intriguing and challenging psychological processes to be investigated in concert with the largely unexplored realm of community level processes which exist in and around these natural community systems. Community organizing for power was a part of the fabric of community before the advent of community psychology and will likely be around for a very long time to come whether we choose to participate or not. Settings such as the ones we have described afford vast opportunity for collaborative action to simultaneously advance our discipline and our values. The present case study has scratched just the surface of possible research questions and as such is more descriptive and suggestive than it is confirmatory.

Contrasting Organizing Processes

Although the two organizing efforts employed the same overall process of assessment, research, action and reflection, the two differed in how the organizing cycle was applied. Perhaps the clearest distinctions were in emphasis placed on different components of the cycle. Our observations indicated that CBO devoted more and a different kind of effort to the assessment phase than NBO. Fundamental to CBO's assessment component was the "one-on-one" process which involved a comparatively large number of CBO members over a duration of months. Development of interpersonal relationships among organizational members appeared to be as important in the assessment phase as the issue identification process. In contrast, the NBO assessment phase, characterized by a group discussion methodology over a period of weeks, focused on issue identification with relatively little emphasis on relationship development.

The research process was also different for the two organizing efforts. NBO's research effort sought to uncover a contradiction which, when made public through action, was capable of mobilizing the community, rather than mobilizing the community to examine the issue. For NBO, speed, through reliance on existing knowledge and experience of officers, was stressed. Alternatively, CBO viewed research as a slower process of educating members about how and why an issue negatively impacted them and as a process to strengthen skills of members in community mobilization, dialogue with public officials, asking focused questions and demanding specific answers.

The most critical component of both efforts was action. NBO's action process was based on devising multiple tactics -- tactics which would produce the desired response from the target of the action. Whether executing actions by a small group of leaders, the predominant mode, or a larger assembly of members, the purpose of the action component was to produce public scrutiny of a target, thus forcing the target into negotiations with NBO. NBO action was based on public disturbances designed to take advantage of emotions around an issue. On the other hand, CBO actions were characterized by mobilization through networks of relationships built through "one-on-one" assessment and heavy reliance on knowledge generated through the research process. The purpose of an action was to obtain commitment from targets to take tangible steps to meet CBO demands. CBO viewed size of "turnout" for an action as its primary vehicle to enforce demands.

The reflection component of the organizing cycle was manifested differently by each organization. For NBO, reflection involved mostly elected officers meeting within about a week of an action while CBO sought to include all participants in reflection over the several weeks following an action. The NBO reflection format varied, but it primarily focused on future negotiations with targets and further development of issues. The CBO reflection format was consistent and focused on organizational development and on evaluating effects of action on the target.

Perceptions of Organizing

The apparent differences in organizing process were reflected in perceptions of participants. Members of the congregation-based effort perceived their organization to be more intimate and less controlling. They also reported more frequent overall interpersonal contact and more frequent interaction outside organizing events. Members of CBO also reported greater levels of psychological empowerment. These data compliment observed differences in organizing processes. It is possible to speculate that the CBO process of in-depth one-on-one conversations, multiple and rotating roles, and greater depth of reflection created a more intimate and less controlling organizing environment that resulted in greater levels of empowerment than found with NBO. It is also possible that CBO's base of organizing, i.e., an institution, provided a setting already conducive to interaction which led to perceptions of intimacy and less control. We are not confident enough in the generalizability of our data to attempt to separate effects of organizing base and organizing process nor are we in a position to suggest causal links between these variables and empowerment. That should await further empirical studies and advances in empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 1993).

What does seem important to us is to assert that community organizing should not be characterized monolithically. Efforts to organize communities, even those using the same generic process, may vary significantly in internal processes and, relatedly, the experience of participants. We suggest one way to characterize differences is to examine community organizing from the perspective of whether a specific effort is relationship focused or issue focused. Organizing efforts, whether geographic- or institution- based, may wish to establish processes that promote interactions, both organization and extraorganization focused, that are more intimate than they are controlling. Organizations which allow individuals access to a variety of roles and that reach out to community members and create a climate of intimacy may, at an individual level, facilitate expression of inherent competencies and thus psychological empowerment (Rappaport, 1981). The results point to considerations of organizational characteristics, particularly processes supportive of relationship development. Though this study focused on the community organizing domain, the importance of processes which develop interpersonal relationships may be a consideration across a diversity of empowerment settings (Riger, 1993).

Expressions of Power

Differences noted in members perceptions of organizational processes did not carry over to perceptions of organizational power in the larger community. There were, however, intriguing differences in two of three archival measures of power. In the first dimension of power, the ability to reward or punish, CBO was reported to have had ten times the participants of NBO. Parenthetically, both groups likely had far greater participation rates over the three year period than documented in the newspaper. Nevertheless, the ten to one ratio seems accurate based on our observations with these organizations. Both organizations were able to enter the public debate at about the same rate, the second dimension of power. Despite its smaller reported number of participants, perhaps NBO's actions attracted newspaper coverage. For example, NBO often picketed properties, stormed offices of bank presidents to protest lending practices and bodily blocked movement of public buses to oppose fare increases. Frequently, the tactics themselves were reported in the newspaper. However, the position NBO advocated, though acknowledged, could well be obscured by the action itself. In newspaper articles NBO's perspective may have been marginalized because articles focus more on NBO tactics and opposing perspectives than on NBO's agenda, so that the way power is described can lead paradoxically, as suggested by Rappaport (1981), to diminished effectiveness. This focus on tactics may have been reflected in large differences found for specific organizational ideas reported, the third dimension of power. Perhaps the CBO more effectively communicated details of issues and solutions by demonstrating a knowledge of the nature and causes of community problems uncovered in the research phase. It is also possible the measure of organizational power employed here was incomplete. We acknowledge the public debate is broader than that occurring in newspaper coverage, and power of a community organizing effort is likely expressed in a variety of ways. Future research should endeavor to devise better measures of how power is expressed in the community organizing domain. Another challenge to research in this area is accounting for differences across the same type (e.g., neighborhood, congregations) and across locales. Only then will a more complete understanding of community organizing emerge.

Another important consideration for future research is the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational power. Specifically, can one be psychologically "empowered" without connection to "power"? Though one may increase individual competencies within an organizing setting, our rhetoric (Heller, 1989; Rappaport, 1981, 1987; Swift & Levin, 1987; Zimmerman, 1990) suggests there must be some connection to the macro-level processes impacting micro-level settings and the individuals who inhabit them. Recent advances in conceptualization of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1993) which include elements like "resource mobilization" and "understanding of causal agents" are large steps in this direction. Access to psychological empowerment may come from any number of sources, but as community psychology articulates an empowerment theory, it must carefully explore the relationship between psychological empowerment and social power.

Table 1

Comparisons between CBO and NBO Member Perceptions about Organizational Relationships, Organizational Participation, Empowerment and Power

Dimension	CBO		NBO		F Ratio
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Organizational Relationships					
Intimacy	21.1	2.8	19.3	2.5	11.17[a]
Control	17.3	2.7	18.6	2.8	6.03[a]
Stratification	17.8	3.1	17.6	2.8	.96
Organizational Participation [b]					
Interpersonal Contact	2.23	.81	1.50	1.26	12.40[a]
Organizational	1.10	.77	.81	.79	3.52
Extraorganizational	1.13	.74	.67	.73	10.18[a]
Telephone Contact	1.73	1.13	1.69	1.11	.30
Meeting Attendance	.62	.75	.81	.74	1.74
Psychological Empowerment	48.8	5.78	45.7	4.92	9.08[a]
Organizational Power	2.12	.09	1.94	.09	1.59

[a] $p < .05$

[b] Measures of participatory behaviors were coded originally as frequency data; however, because of positively skewed distributions, data were subsequently collapsed into three categories: frequency of 0, 1 to 3 and 4 or greater.

Table 2

Frequencies of Archival Power Indices

Variable [a]	NBO	CBO
Total Number of Individuals	279	3,050
Number of Newspaper Articles	14	15
Number of Organizational Ideas [b]	13	79

[a] Numbers reflect frequency count from review of all articles about each organization appearing in the city's major newspaper for a three year period.

[b] Examples of Organizational Ideas: Police policy of brutality, illegal drugs are a health epidemic, lack of coordination among city agencies dealing with drug abuse has increased the drug problem.

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