Community Organizing: An Ecological Route to Empowerment and Power

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An important contribution to empowerment theory and community psychology practice can be made by examining how the concept of social power is developed and manifested in the context of community organizing. Theory and practice may be further informed through an ecological analysis of organizing processes and interventions. Lessons from a national community organizing network highlight the relationship between empowerment and power through a set of organizing principles and a cycle of organizing activity. Perhaps most important is the understanding that a reciprocal relationship exists between development of power for community organizations and individual empowerment for organization members. Implications for empowerment theory in the community organizing domain are provided in a matrix adapted from Zimmerman’s description of empowerment processes and outcomes at multiple levels of analysis.

KEY WORDS: community organizing; power; empowerment; ecology.

Empowerment theory has yet to articulate fully the relationship between empowerment and social power. Empowerment is often approached from an individualistic perspective (Riger, 1993), whereas power is understood as a social phenomenon (Alinsky, 1971; Long, 1958). Frequently,

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empowerment studies focus on development of individual empowerment, without explicating how this individual phenomenon is linked to social power. The predominance of individualistic conceptualizations of empowerment stems in part from the inherent difficulty of approaching complex phenomena from multiple levels of analysis (Wicker, 1990) and from an inadequate stock of exemplars (Rappaport, 1987) that demonstrate how personal empowerment and social power can develop concurrently.

The challenge of articulating the relationship between empowerment and power is noted in discussions and empirical examinations of empowerment theory (Heller, 1989; Kieffer, 1984; Price, 1990; Rappaport, 1984, 1987; Swift & Levin, 1987; Zimmerman, 1990, in press). Recently, theorists have described the relationship between empowerment and power as a dialectical process (Gutierrez, 1990; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1994).

We describe the relationship between empowerment and power based on research in community organizing contexts. Specifically, we conceptualize empowerment as the manifestation of social power at individual, organizational, and community levels of analysis. In this paper we highlight the efforts of one particular national community organizing network due to their explicit efforts at developing both individual empowerment and social power. By describing this network, its understanding of social power, the process it uses to develop social power, and how those processes reflect community psychology’s ecological orientation, we articulate our understanding of the relationship between empowerment and social power as well as a promising model for community psychology practice.

**A COMMUNITY ORGANIZING NETWORK**

The examples of community organizing we describe are based on work of the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations (PICO), a community organizing network with organizations in 25 cities across the United States. PICO was started in Oakland, Ca. in 1972 as a neighborhood organization (see Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987, for a history of PICO). This network uses a pressure group approach and an institutional base drawing upon faith communities.² It is useful to study these natural settings and the organizing mechanisms developed therein as exemplars of empowerment (Rappaport, 1987).

²We recognize there are several organizing networks in the United States which use this or a similar approach (Robinson & Hanna, 1994). Selection of this network was based on a research relationship and does not reflect an endorsement of any one form of organizing.
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Community organizations that affiliate with this network use the PICO model of organizing and participate in its system of technical assistance. Affiliated organizations apply a set of organizing principles and practice a cycle of community organizing using congregations as their base. Technical assistance includes staff and leadership development composed of training conferences, on-site evaluations, leadership seminars for organization members, and staff monitoring and training. The PICO model is an organizing process; local activities of PICO organizations (i.e., organizing issues and campaigns) are generated locally.

In our research with this network, we have observed the organizing process and collected data qualitatively, through attending meetings, conducting in-depth interviews, observing leadership development training, reviewing documents, and participating in staff retreats. For example, we attended, as participant observers, the network's leadership development training, a 1-week intensive training session conducted twice each year for grass-roots leaders from across the country. Quantitatively, we have collected survey and archival data from this network as part of research with a larger sample of community organizations, although these data are not presented here.

We have participated in research with 14 separate community organizing efforts. These included other national organizing networks, organizing efforts targeting specific problems such as substance abuse prevention and crime prevention, community development corporations employing community organizing, neighborhood organizations, and independent grass-roots organizations. We have worked with the PICO network for 7 years. We chose to describe this group because its methodology employs explicit organizing principles and a cycle of organizing through which both empowerment and social power are hypothesized to unfold. Our goal in this paper is to reference the PICO network for descriptive rather than evaluative purposes. We believe these descriptions help demonstrate promising concepts for empowerment theory and a potential framework for community psychology practice.

EMPOWERMENT, POWER, AND ORGANIZING

Power may be conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon; of particular interest to community organizing is the dimension concerning instruments of social power. Three instruments of power are described by Gaventa (1980) in his analysis of the oppressive use of power in Appalachian communities. The first instrument of power is manifested 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 (paralleling Zimmerman’s [in press] notion of empowered organization): Those with the greatest resources, for example organized money or organized people (Alinsky, 1971), have the greatest power. A second instrument of power is the ability to construct barriers to participation or eliminate barriers to participation through setting agendas and defining issues (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). By controlling the topics, timing of discussion, and range of discourse within a topic, those with power can effectively limit participation and perspectives in public debate. The third instrument of power is 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.

Empowerment may be conceptualized, then, as the ability of community organizations to reward or punish community targets, control what gets talked about in public debate, and shape how residents and public officials think about their community. From this standpoint, community organizations become empowered only when they have the capacity to exercise these instruments of social power. Before describing how these instruments are manifested at different levels of analysis, it is important to articulate empowerment principles and process utilized by this network.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Community organizing in the PICO network is guided by a set of organizing principles. Three principles are particularly important to the empowerment process practiced in this form of community organizing.

Empowerment Can Only Be Realized Through Organization

PICO views community functioning as the product of competing and complementary interactions by those with power — organizations — operating in their own self-interest. Communities operate, then, as a consequence of ever-changing sets of organizations who compete to enforce their self-interest and prevail with regard to various community issues. PICO organizations strive to become capable of competing adeptly in their community on issues within their organizational self-interest. This perspective draws on the organizing tradition of Alinsky (1971), who stated that social power comes in two forms: organized money or organized
people. Similarly, Galbraith (1983), asserted that social power is accessed only through organization and that organizations hold power to the extent that members collectively pursue a common goal or purpose. Application of this principle brings community organizing into contact with social science literatures which stress the role of organization in community functioning (Long, 1958) and empowerment (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Knake & Wood, 1981; Mondros & Wilson, 1994; Reitzes & Reitzes, 1987; Wandersman & Florin, in press; Zimmerman, in press).

Social Power is Built on the Strength of Interpersonal Relationships

According to the PICO model, relationships based on shared values and emotional ties between individuals produce bonds that are more meaningful and sustainable than relationships based on rational or emotional reactions to community issues alone. This focus on relationship development is also supported in the literature (Alinsky, 1971; Pierce, 1984; Robinson & Hanna, 1994; Speer, Hughey, Gensheimer & Adams-Leavitt, 1995), and corresponds to Zimmerman’s (1993) interactional dimensions of empowerment. In a case study of two pressure group community organizations, Speer et al. (1995) drew the distinction between relation-focused and issue-focused organizing. Although the two community organizations studied used a similar organizing process, one group emphasized issue development and the other stressed relationship development. Members of the relation-focused group perceived their organization as more intimate and less controlling, reported more frequent interpersonal contact with community members, had greater levels of psychological empowerment, and demonstrated a greater degree of organizational power. Relation-focused organizing is particularly meaningful when considering the principle that empowerment comes only through organization. When people come together around an issue rather than relationships, the group is more likely to dissolve after the issue is addressed. In contrast, relation-based organizing seeks to capitalize on the lasting power inherent in relationships (Robinson & Hanna, 1994).

Individual Empowerment Must Be Grounded in a Dialectic of Action and Reflection

The concept of action-reflection in the PICO network requires individuals to act in community as part of an organization. Such action
provides a context through which cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of individual empowerment (Zimmerman, in press) become manifest. Participation in a community organization provides experience that challenges individual cognitions of social power and provides a collective context through which emotional reaction to that power can be processes or reflected upon. Moreover, organizational participation supplies a behavioral avenue through which an individual's cognitive insights and emotional responses can be acted upon. Elsewhere, Freire (1970) and Kieffer (1984) described this action-reflection process as "dynamic praxis." This principle comports with two concepts within empowerment theory: empowerment as an intrapsychic phenomenon (Zimmerman, 1993) and empowerment as a process cultivated by specific settings, that is, empowering organizations (Zimmerman, in press).

THE CYCLE OF ORGANIZING

In the PICO network, these three principles of organizing anchor a cycle of organizing practice consisting of four interrelated phases: assessment, research, action, and reflection (see Speer et al., 1995, for a more complete description of this cycle of organizing). Briefly stated, assessment is the process through which critical issues affecting a community are identified and defined by organizations. Assessment is conducted one-on-one; organizational members speak face-to-face with each other, usually in their homes, to gather information about community issues and to deepen relationships among community members. One-on-one conversations are intended to reconnect individuals to facilitate dialogue and enhance relationships. Although this stage of the cycle is termed assessment, the one-on-one process is the critical feature in this stage and represents the manifestation of the principle that power flows through relationships. Issues identified through assessment focus the organization through the next three phases.

The research phase represents the mechanism through which participants examine causes and correlates of issues identified in the assessment phase. Information about the nature of the issue and its potential influences and solutions is gathered through organizational meetings with knowledgeable community entities. Key to the research process is uncovering the ways in which allocation of community resources affects a particular issue and how organizational entities or players exercise social power around an issue.
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reward or punish, shape public debates, or influence community ideologies. Nevertheless, the process of developing social power and the outcomes associated with those efforts can be understood at individual, organizational, and community levels of analysis. Adapting Zimmerman’s (in press) understanding of empowerment as process and outcome operating at multiple levels of analysis, Figure 1 displays the conceptual representation of empowerment as discussed in this paper and as we understand its application in the PICO network.

Empowerment at the Individual Level of Analysis

The manifestation of social power at an individual level of analysis is represented through the individual actions that contribute to developing an organization’s social power (a process) and changes within individuals that result from working in an organization to develop social power (an outcome). As a process, individual empowerment is expressed through membership in an organization, relationship building with community members, and practice of an action–reflection dialectic through the organizing cycle. Membership in an organization connects individuals to a setting with potential to access social power. Through organization, individuals may engage community institutions thereby gaining experience with the dynamics of social power in a community context. Relationship building, a second key process of individual empowerment, is accomplished one-on-one. As individuals within an organization meet with each other and with other community members, they listen for areas of mutual self-interest, discuss how issues affect them and their community and challenge each other to act on these issues. Relationship building is necessarily a long-term process; many one-on-ones must be conducted over time so that trust will develop, expectations will become clear, and interpersonal challenges can be made. Action–reflection, the third process in individual empowerment, is practiced through participation in the assessment/research/ action/reflection cycle.3 There are many avenues for engaging in individual action–reflection through the organizing cycle, such as conducting one-on-one conversations, researching issues, helping run a meeting, and public speaking. After each activity, a systematic, phenomenological evaluation — a reflection — is conducted with support from the organizational setting. Reflection cultivates an individual’s knowledge, emotional reactions, and critical awareness of community functioning (Freire, 1970; Kieffer, 1984; Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). Reflection also serves to develop individual understanding of organizing principles.

3Action–reflection is an individual-level process. “Assessment/research/action/reflection”, is an organizational-level process.
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Fig. 1. Conceptualization of empowerment applied to the organizing domain (model adapted from Zimmerman in press).

Empowerment outcomes at the individual level of analysis are products of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes in individuals resulting from the exercise of social power (Zimmerman, in press; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Individuals are empowered to the extent they understand that their own access to social power exists through organization, through the strength of relationships among individual members in that organization, and through active participation in their organization and subsequent reflection on their involvements. Knowledge of these principles emerges through participation in an organization, thus allowing individuals to understand, through experience, the ways in which communities function, that is, through power. The emotional dimension of empowerment is reflected in the connection members feel to others in the organization. The quality or depth of these connections allows individuals to count on each other, to challenge ideas or behaviors between one another, or to pursue a common goal or purpose. The behavioral outcome for individuals is participation in a variety of organizational roles. Therefore, the breadth of roles taken is an expression of individual empowerment.

Empowerment at the Organizational Level of Analysis

Based on the principle that power comes only through organization, the organizational level of analysis is the most critical for community organizations. Zimmerman’s (in press) distinction between empowering and empowered organizations represents a critical notion at this level of analysis. Empowering organizations serve as contexts to develop individual empowerment whereas empowered organizations wield social power (Zimmerman, in press). PICO contributes to this by stressing the reciprocal relationship between the empowering and empowered functions of organizations.
Empowerment as an organizational-level process is enacted through multiple participatory niches for individuals, development of interorganizational relationships, and a sustained pattern of organizing actions. Individual participation is the life blood of any community organization. The creation of multiple participatory niches through the organizing cycle, then, is a key process for cultivating participation in an organization. Development of interorganizational relationships, a second organizational empowerment process, is cultivated in the research and action phases of the organizing cycle. Research and action meetings are vehicles for establishing interorganizational relationships. Whether mobilizing for research or action, organizational relationships are anchored in the power wielded through mobilization of large numbers of people. These carefully targeted and disciplined meetings have, in the PICO network, mobilized as many as 5,000 participants. Perhaps most critical to the empowerment process is sustaining activity and levels of participation. Organizational activity and participation through multiple organizing cycles solidifies development of interorganizational relationships, largely through the promise of reward for organizational entities who cooperate and punishment for those that do not. In contrast, many community organizations fail to develop stable participation. Emotional issues may fuel large turnouts, but without a relational basis these events become singular efforts and social power is not developed (Robinson & Hanna, 1994).

Empowerment outcomes at the organizational level of analysis reflect the three instruments of power (Gaventa, 1980). First, the ability to reward and punish is accomplished through the numbers of participants an organization can mobilize. Although the mobilization of large numbers of people is an expression of power for community organizations, this mobilization differs from that produced by mass movements. Actions are a type of meeting held by community organizations. Actions have an agenda, time is kept, and information is presented. Most important, there is dialogue between the community organization and the individual, organizational, or institutional target about specific policy changes or resource allocations.

Second, social power is expressed through shaping topics for debate and limiting or expanding the range of discussion within a debate. For example, one PICO organization shifted public dialogue from a focus on how best to use public resources for expansion of a convention center to a focus on coordination of multiple community agencies and institutions to prevent substance abuse. Last, in the third dimension of power, shaping community ideologies, the organization seeks to reinterpret community activities and shape how communities collectively think about relevant issues. Often this is accomplished through other powerful entities within a community such as public or corporate officials and agencies that interpret issues from the
Community Organizing perspective of the community organization. For example, an organization in one city within the PICO network explicitly attempted to change the perception of substance abuse from a law enforcement issue to a public health issue. After repeated research meetings and public actions, media stories reflecting this message began to appear. Subsequently, public health language emerged in quotes from the mayor and the chair of the city's task force on substance abuse.

Empowerment at the Community Level of Analysis

At a community level, the empowerment process is expressed through the following: multisector relational development, institutional linkages across sectors, and collective attention to common community issues. Multisector relational development refers to a process wherein institutions reconnect with their constituencies (Chavis, Speer, Resnick, & Zippay, 1993). Just as religious congregations transform themselves in the organizing network we describe, organizations representing other sectors within the community (e.g., schools, law enforcement, business, health care) must undertake similar organizational processes to cultivate community empowerment. The community empowerment process also unfolds through linkages between the institutions of a community (Zimmerman, in press) and by exercising these linkages in the amelioration of specific community issues. Empowered communities exercise their linkages across sectors to optimize functioning in the face of specific community issues. For example, an empowerment process at the community level of analysis might be demonstrated by school officials, juvenile authorities, law enforcement officials, prosecutors and judicial representatives communicating together about how each sector is impacted by an increase in youth violence.

Empowerment outcomes at the community level of analysis are expressed in multiple empowered organizations within a community and collaboration across multiple sectors within a community. Ideally, communities of this sort provide multiple opportunities for their citizens to participate and shape community life. Building empowered communities is a very long-term process. One example of what might be called an empowered community is that of Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain. There, a cooperative business was launched in the 1950's. Through a democratic, participatory process brought to many sectors of the community, Mondragon evolved into a complex federation of multiple cooperatives, all of which operate under principles of broad participation and ownership (Clamp, 1987; Whyte & Whyte, 1990).
AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

To further explicate notions of empowerment and power in the community organizing domain, we describe PICO's organizing model and activities through ecological principles. Use of the ecological perspective to articulate this promising form of community psychology practice may help to blend our values for research and action. Additionally, the ecological paradigm is used to highlight demonstrations of individual empowerment and organizational power. We analyze examples of PICO organizing efforts using the ecological principles of interdependence, cycling of resources, adaptation, and succession, (Kelly, 1987).

Interdependence

The ecological principle of interdependence highlights how all persons and organizations within a community are connected or interdependent. The practice of community organizing we have described works explicitly to incorporate interdependence at individual, organizational, and community levels of analysis. At the individual level, interdependence is evidenced by building relationships among individuals through the one-on-one process. Often, individuals are out of relationship even with members of their congregations, and their network of community relationships is thin. Interdependence fostered at this level is then taken advantage of to build a congregation-based organization that addresses mutually identified concerns.

At the organizational level of analysis, organizations seek interdependent relationships through public research and action with other entities in the community. It is this nesting of individuals within an organization which is in turn nested in a larger network of community organizations and institutions that illustrates interdependence. It is also recognized that power is developed and expressed through these organization-level relationships.

To operate at a community level of analysis, individual congregations often join forces with other organized congregations to create the power necessary to move community-level issues. These federated organizations are fashioned out of coinciding organizational interests of single congregations—interdependence.
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In one example, 14 congregations worked together to pressure a city government, a parks commission, and a public school district to work together, rather than apart, to make the needs of inner-city youth their top priority. Thirty to 40 leaders from the 14 single organizations gathered several times to assess their local efforts. In some way, each organization had taken action on issues of youth (i.e., drug abuse, recreation, violence). The federated assessment led these leaders to conclude that the many problems facing youth in their neighborhoods had multiple causes. Many described local conditions that reflected a lack of community resources available to establish positive settings for youth (e.g., recreation, jobs). The organizations concluded that the issue required greater resources than any single organization could produce. Together, the 14 organizations decided to work through a cycle of assessment, research, action, and reflection.

Through research conducted jointly by congregations from across the city, participants discovered that a large supply of community resources like swimming pools, gymnasiums, computer, and health facilities was withheld from children after school hours and during the summer months due to absence of a working relationship between the public schools, city government, and recreational institutions. This federated research took place over a 1-year period. It involved participants from the 14 local congregations working together to identify public and private entities with control over resources and how the public entities did or did not work together. Participants prepared for and conducted a series of 23 public research events designed to discover the extent of resources available and how resources were controlled. On the basis of this federated research, the 14 local congregations moved to a federated action. The purpose of the federated action was to pressure for interdependence among city, school, and recreation institutions where none had previously existed. This federated action was a carefully scripted and disciplined event organized by participants from each congregation. About 1,000 persons attended. Public and private officials — the city’s mayor, the school superintendent, various board members, the news media, leaders of civic and neighborhood groups — and contingents from each local congregation attended. The action consisted of testimony from adults and children who shared personal impacts resulting from the lack of resources for youth, presentation of research conducted by organization members that documented existence of resources controlled by separate institutions, and the lack of interdependence among the institutions. The critical event of the action was a call for specific, measurable steps to be taken by the targets of action — city government, the school district, and the parks commission. As a result, these three public entities agreed to sign a formal and public agreement to share resources. Sharing of resources, and thus the beginning of interdependence, began
with appointment of high-ranking representatives from each institution to negotiate among themselves and with the federated congregations for eventual opening of school facilities for recreation and health care.

**Cycling of Resources**

A key element in the rationale of organizing for power is changing the distribution of resources within a community, and Kelly (1992) asserted that social interventions function as efforts to alter the flow of resources. Cycling of resources comes in sharpest focus during the research and action phases in the cycle of organizing. In the research phase, participants attempt to identify community entities capable of altering undesirable community conditions. Participants also attempt to discover what resources exist around an issue, how resources are transferred, and what organization or institution controls resources capable of addressing a specific issue (Trickett, 1984). Based on findings of the research phase, action is taken to alter the flow of resources.

For example, one organization uncovered a financial link between deteriorated housing owned by absentee landlords and a local social service agency. Research conducted by participants revealed payments from the agency to absentee landlords for housing the agency’s clients, newly resettled immigrants, in exceptionally substandard housing. This flow of resources from the social service agency to absentee landlords supported poor conditions for immigrants as well as homeowners living in these neighborhoods. In a research meeting with the social service agency, organization leaders asked the agency to use its financial leverage to force landlords into improvements in their deteriorated properties. The leaders were rebuffed. Next, the leaders went further in their research to uncover funding sources of the social service agency. Armed with information about the agency’s funding sources, the organization held an action attended by about 500 community members. In the action, the organization made public the relationship between the agency and the absentee landlords. The organization then presented information about the agency’s funding sources and asked for a show of hands for those who would be willing to send letters to the agency’s funders requesting termination of funding if the agency did not pressure its landlords to improve the properties. Specifically, the organization demanded the properties in question be improved to comply with city building, fire, and health codes. The collective power of a hall full of raised hands in the presence of the media and many public and private officials produced the agency’s capitulation on the spot.
Success of this tactic illustrates the potency of an ecologically sensitive approach in which resource flow within a community is tracked; organizational power was exerted to alter the flow of community resources. Social power was demonstrated in this community organization's action by punishing the agency who funded these landlords and by shifting the debate from a focus on who funded the landlords to a focus on who funded this social service agency.

Adaptation

In describing the concept of adaptation in human settings, Trickett (1984) urged us to examine "the demand characteristics of settings, the options and constraints they embody in their norms, values, structures" (p. 266). Similarly, Kelly (1987) noted that "adaptation refers to the role changes the individual goes through to become a responsive member of the organization" (p. 14). The PICO organizing method can be viewed as a naturalistic embodiment of these ideas.

In PICO organizations, there are no elected positions for members such as president, secretary, or treasurer. Specification of a finite number of available niches that elections typically entail limits development of individuals by locking them into a few, relatively permanent positions, thus stagnating individual development as well as limiting an organization's responsiveness to its local context (Vincent & Trickett, 1983). In contrast, PICO organizations identify multiple and varied roles or niches, arranged in a horizontal fashion, that are filled as the organization moves through the cycle of organizing. Examples of roles include conducting one-on-one conversations with congregation and community members, asking questions of public and private officials during meetings, arranging media coverage for the organization and its agenda, researching public records, contributing information to public records, leading public events, mobilizing organization members to attend an event, time-keeping for events, arranging venues for events, telephoning organization members, and arranging transportation. These niches are identified and developed with the clear intention of promoting participation and increasing skills among all members. In this way the range of habitats within an organization is expanded, thus creating a larger pool of participants.

Another important structural element that seeks to promote adaptation is rotation of roles among individuals. As an organization develops, individuals typically occupy a variety of roles. Individuals are encouraged and supported by other members to stretch their capabilities. For example, one member may
be exceptionally proficient at researching public records but shy about presenting the information in public. This individual might be encouraged by others to be a time keeper for a public meeting that would only necessitate him or her ringing a bell at a specified time to halt discussion. Later, during the reflection phase, the individual examines the experience in a supportive setting, and he or she may be better prepared to step forward for a broader public role at a later time. In these ways, individuals have access to many different methods of relating to others in the organization. These sorts of process are expected, according to our literature, to enhance the “quality of coping and adaptation” (Kelly, 1987, p. 15).

At a higher level of analysis, each organized congregation seeks to expand its organizational habitat to become an active and powerful player in the community (Long, 1958). PICO organizations often fill a niche that is not played among organizations acting with power in a community habitat. These organizations often pose questions to other community entities that these entities do not want asked or are unwilling to answer. For example, one organization publicly questioned the priority of expanding a city’s convention center relative to developing a comprehensive approach to addressing the community’s substance abuse problem. This shifted debate in the community, a demonstration of social power, but produced a negative reaction by other powerful players. Members of the community organization met with the highest public official in the county 1 week after publicly criticizing the need for convention center expansion. This official related to the group that he had recently met with the community’s corporate elite and that this elite was angered by such a public criticism. This official punctuated his message by pounding his fist on his desk and shouting, “Don’t ever criticize this convention expansion again!” A member of the organization responded by pointing at this official and saying, “Don’t tell us what to say!” Although the organization did not have the power to block the $100 million convention expansion (this was never an organizational aim), they were successful at pressuring city, county, and corporate entities to increase money for substance-abuse treatment and prevention by $9 million.

Succession

The principle of succession holds that environments change naturally over time; and while change benefits some populations, it is simultaneously detrimental to others. Furthermore, succession implies that resources discarded by some populations are useful to others. Succession is manifested in community organizing in several ways. First, most communities involved in this network are poor, minority, urban communities. Issues confronting these communities are often the product of deteriorating
physical and social infrastructures that accompany the outflow of many kinds of resources (e.g., Wallace, Fullilove, & Wallace, 1992). The succession in resources benefits some but runs counter to the self-interest of those who remain in a community. In contrast, remaining community residents, often viewed as a discarded resource, represent the fundamental resource for organizing.

Organizationally, PICO works to take advantage of what Park (1936) called the “serial character” of succession through intentional rotation of roles among participants to prevent entrenchment of individual leaders in the organization. When individuals stay in one role for a substantial period, their perspective on community functioning and organizational development can become calcified. This often leads to their assuming a gatekeeper role which can discourage participation, thus limiting the extent to which the organization is capable of renewing itself. Kelly (1987) noted this can result in leaders who focus their energy on control rather than development of resources.

Within the community, succession is taken into account through awareness of shifting equilibrium in relationships over time between community organizations and their targets of action. This aspect of succession is recognized in the notion that there are no permanent allies and no permanent enemies — a notion articulated by Alinsky (1971). This is an extension of Long’s (1958) assertion that communities are the product of ever-changing sets of players who combine and recombine around issues within their organizational self-interest. It is also consistent with Trickett’s (1984) description of succession in which he noted the value of “couching decisions about immediate action within a longer range time frame” (p. 267).

CONCLUSION

For our field, community organizing can be looked upon as a found object (Newbrough, 1992) — a naturalistic embodiment of our orientation toward empowerment, community, and social change. This paper highlights issues that we believe are useful to both the development of empowerment theory and the practice of community psychology.

First, empowerment phenomena must be linked with social power. Empowerment is a term that has been applied so broadly as to diminish its value and usefulness. Often the phenomena described as empowerment are more closely related to self-efficacy, sense of achievement, personal adjustment, or similar constructs (Riger, 1993). As noted in definitions of empowerment (Rappaport, 1984; Swift & Levin, 1987), subjective feeling is an important aspect of empowerment; however, the dominance of conceiving empowerment in this light avoids linkage to power, social change, and the
values of community psychology. When considering the relationship between empowerment and power, our field needs to more closely examine the phenomena of social power. Within community organizing, power is posited as influencing communities not by intervening directly at individual levels, but by influencing economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, which, in turn, affect individuals. This understanding is what leads to the blending of such seemingly contradictory notions of community and psychology. The key implication for empowerment theory in the community organizing domain is that there must be a clear connection between empowerment phenomena and the development or exercise of social power.

The second issue of importance to empowerment theory and community practice is the emphasis on a reciprocal or dialectical feature to the empowerment process. For example, PICO's method stresses a dialectical process between individual development and organizational action. Translating this notion from community practice to empowerment theory suggests a coupling of Zimmerman's (in press) distinction between empowering and empowered organizations. That is, interventions that attend to cultivating individual development in the context of exercising organizational power exemplify this empowerment principle and what Newbrough (1992) termed "both psychology and community pursued at the same time" (p. 20). Similarly, Trickett (1994) argued that "it makes no sense to search for particular constellations of empowering qualities of people unless those qualities are linked to specific contexts in which they are effective in accomplishing specific empowerment goals" (p. 588).

Third, community psychology practice may be informed by the principles and cycle of organizing we have chosen to highlight here. Activities that stress building organization, cultivating relationships among members, and engaging in an action-reflection dialectic emerge as critical empowerment principles. Likewise, connecting community residents to share critical concerns (assessment), uncovering the allocation of community resources related to a community issue (research), mobilizing residents to act on contradictions between expressed values and actual practices (action), and consideration of lessons learned throughout the process (reflection) offers specific steps for use in community practice.

Lastly, the methods used to develop individual and organizational empowerment are important to view ecologically. Ecological principles illuminate both the relationship between empowerment and social power as well as the interplay or reciprocity between levels of analysis for empowerment phenomena (Gutierrez, 1990; Rappaport, 1987). Bringing an ecological or contextual sensitivity to the study of human behavior is, perhaps, the hallmark of our field. As community psychology looks to empowerment as its phenomenon of interest, community organizations such as those in the PICO network, which are sensitive to an ecological perspective of community functioning, provide models for the advancement of community psychology practice.
REFERENCES


Zimmerman (1993, June). *Empowerment theory: How do we know it when we see it?* Paper presented at the fourth biennial Conference on Community Research and Action, Williamsburg, VA.

