

PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IN GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY ORGANIZING: RELATIONAL INTERVENTION FOR INDIVIDUAL AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

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Building relationships among participants has become a strategic lynchpin of many community organizing initiatives. Although the relational work of organizing is often mentioned in studies on community change, it has not been studied as a process or model for community intervention. This article positions the development of a specific type of relationships—public relationships—as a transactional intervention aimed at both individual and systems change. Interpersonal relationship development through semistructured, one-to-one conversations is highlighted as a key to effecting change at both the individual and the systems level, through broadening individuals' networks of relationships, developing new understandings of the social world, and strengthening commitments to civic involvement. This model for transactional, relational intervention provides insights into the development of grassroots infrastructure for increasing sense of community and capacity to engage in civic life. Strengths and limitations of relationship building as an approach to community intervention are discussed. © 2010 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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The importance of relationships for the formation of a civil society is being recognized across disciplines. For instance, Van Til (2007) pulls together the emerging emphasis on relationships across civil society organizations (Sirianni & Friedland, 2005), groups working toward deliberative democracy (Gastil & Levine, 2005), attempts at international and interracial conflict resolution (Saunders, 2005), and groups involved in local grassroots community organizing (Gecan, 2002). Relationships are components of many constructs of interest to community psychologists, including relationships between community members and participants in settings (Sarason, 1974; Seidman, 1988). In addition, community psychology research has examined relationships between researchers and community members (Brodsky et al., 2004), youth and adults (Zeldin, Petrokubi, & Macneil, 2008), individuals in different community settings (Maton, 2008), and individuals and society (Newbrough, 1973). Moreover, community psychologists are using social network analysis (Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, & Labianca, 2009) to understand the impact that relationships—between individuals and organizations—have on various outcomes of interest (Neal, 2009; Nowell, 2009).

Despite this considerable momentum in examining the nature and impacts of relationships, we have relatively few methods for intervention in systems of relationships or relational interventions. Marriage and family counselors have developed relational interventions for intimate relationships (Glade, Bean, & Vira, 2005), and public health interventions sometimes work through relationships (Chen & Liao, 2005). When grassroots community organizing is conceptualized as an intervention (e.g., Rothman, 1996), it is most often understood as a systems-level or community intervention. This is for good reason: The missions of most organizing groups explicitly involve instrumental goals such as local and societal change. However, community-organizing processes also facilitate changes in individual participants and their relationships. Indeed, evidence points to higher levels of psychological empowerment (Speer & Hughey, 1996), self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Ohmer, 2007), and sense of community (Peterson & Reid, 2003) among participants in community organizing. Although such transformations are important for building the capacity of organizing groups to make systems change, practitioners often consider them as ends in themselves. Perhaps paradoxically, practitioners of community organizing insist that efforts to achieve systems change must treat the interpersonal relationships between participants as ends and not means. Understanding this model for relationship building brings community organizing into focus as a multilevel—or transactional—intervention (Altman & Rogoff, 1987; Schensul & Trickett, 2009).

Among social change organizations, grassroots community organizing initiatives are distinguished by their explicit focus on relational work. In a study of 16 social change organizations, Chetkovich and Kunreuther (2006) observe that “most... social change organization leaders reported essentially no preparation for relational work within the organization, and some found it challenging and frustrating” (p. 67). The development of relationships in grassroots community organizing is a model for relational intervention that has emerged from practical experimentation on the part of organizers and community leaders. Practitioners and observers of the field of community organizing have noted that the development of relationships is central to the process of building grassroots power to pursue community change (Warren, 1998; Wood, 1997). Speer and Hughey’s (1995) study of the PICO (People Improving Communities through Organizing) National Network posits relational organizing as a route to empowerment and social power. Similarly, in an exposition of the Industrial Areas Foundation’s (IAF) organizing process, Robinson and Hanna (1994) claim that

the “relational, or one-to-one, meetings are the source of the organization’s power and its basic method for finding and acquiring energy, talent, and ideas” (p. 80). Further, the authors identify one-to-one meetings, which are brief semi-structured conversations between participants in organizing, as among the key skills for successful community organizers. “Careful listening and the judicious use of probing questions” (p. 85) are components of mastering the one-to-one. Similarly, Osterman (2002) emphasizes the centrality of one-to-ones to IAF community organizing, claiming that the relationships built through this process “are connections that survive any particular victory or defeat on an issue” (p. 45). And IAF national director Ed Chambers (2003) writes, “power takes place in relationships” (p. 28).

Grassroots community organizing groups have developed specific techniques for building interpersonal relationships among participants. Practitioners claim that the relationships built through community organizing, known as public relationships, are different from private or intimate relationships and professional relationships (Reed, 2008). This article elevates public relationship-building in grassroots community organizing as a community phenomenon of particular interest and delineates the process of relationship development. It focuses specifically on the principal technique for building public relationships, semistructured conversations between two people known as one-to-ones.¹ The strategy of conducting one-to-ones for the development of public relationships has been described in studies of organizing processes (e.g., Osterman, 2002), but it has not previously been the focus of an empirical study.

INQUIRY INTO THE SUBSTANTIVE DOMAIN OF PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IN GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

The observations in this study are drawn from more than 7 years of participatory action research with community organizing efforts. I have collaborated with nine different local groups in seven states, the majority of which were affiliates of the PICO National Network. These groups have organized to improve neighborhoods and education systems and increase access to housing and healthcare. They have also worked to address local issues including predatory lending and violent crime. This ongoing research collaboration has involved observing organizing processes, attending meetings, conducting in-depth interviews, collecting survey data, participating in local and national training on organizing, and analyzing archival documents, such as training manuals, sign-in sheets, and meeting minutes. The descriptions of public relationship building in this paper represent an ecological analysis (Wicker, 1989), drawn from this ongoing research collaboration.

This article identifies public relationship building in grassroots community organizing as an important substantive domain for understanding community change processes. In describing this domain, observations are accompanied by quotes from interviews with participants in the organizing groups. Quotes are taken from 56 in-depth interviews of participants in six PICO organizations conducted over the last 7 years by several research collaborators and myself. Interviews lasted between 37 and 82 minutes and were transcribed and selectively coded for relevance to public

¹The groups participating in this study call the meetings designed to build relationships “one-to-ones.” Other community organizing initiatives have similar meeting types that are referred to by different names, such as “house meetings” or “listening campaigns.”

relationship building for the current study. Themes discussed in this article were identified from the coded interviews. Interviewees are local leaders who were identified by staff organizers at each location as having the greatest depth of experience and insight on the organizing process. Several interviewees were paid staff of the organizations at the time of the interview. Interviews were semistructured and included questions on the organizing process, education and leadership development, relationship development, and faith and spirituality. Human subjects approvals were granted and guidelines were followed in the data collection processes.

THE PROCESS OF BUILDING PUBLIC RELATIONSHIPS

The PICO model of community organizing posits that isolation prevents people from understanding their shared self-interest with others—it keeps their problems private and personal. The problems that people regularly face (e.g., physical and mental health problems, crime or lack of safety, lack of education, debt, divorce, unemployment, job dissatisfaction, death, incarceration, and community deterioration) are typically experienced as private pain. In describing this phenomenon, Reed (2008) suggests that society fosters the privatization of pain. As long as pain is privatized, citizens are isolated in their experiences of hardship. They are also isolated in their attempts to make change, and that isolation prevents them from operating with power. The PICO model seeks to build relationships and break isolation so that individuals can effectively operate with social power.

Describing the distinct type of interpersonal relationships they aim to cultivate, organizers distinguish public relationships—those intentionally built through the organizing process—from private relationships (Medellin, 1997). Public relationships are not intended as intimate, forgiving, or loving relationships, but as respectful and civil relationships that build trust over time through action and that work to serve converging self-interest (Reed, 2008; Robinson & Hanna, 1994). Accountability and challenge are stressed in the development of a public relationship. Describing the initial phases of development in such a relationship, a community organizer writes: “You try to gauge whether or not you and the other can build the kind of public relationship that is mutual and respectful and capable of withstanding the tension that all healthy relating tends to generate over time. You challenge them in a way that you can only do effectively when you are face to face, one to one” (Gecan, 2002, p. 25).

The principal technique for building public relationships is a semistructured conversation between two participants called a one-to-one. One-to-ones may be initiated by paid organizers or volunteer leaders. A typical one-to-one begins with a credentialing process in which the volunteer leader or organizer briefly shares information about the organizing initiative and himself or herself, which sets the stage for a conversation to last around 30 minutes. For the organizer or volunteer leader, a central goal of this one-to-one conversation is listening to the other person’s story. In this context, understanding a person’s story means the emergence of three basic elements. First, what is the person’s history—what were their formative experiences? Second, what is their present situation? How do they deal with work, education, health, family, faith, passions, and threats? Third, what do they think about their future? What are their hopes and dreams and what are the future threats they perceive? The one-to-one meeting should be held to the allotted time, and it ends when the initiator asks their conversational counterpart if he or she thinks that there are other people that the leaders should meet. Would they be willing to serve as a

reference for others? This system of referrals is crucial to the organizer's exploration of preexisting social networks (Reed, 2008).

When a one-to-one is conducted according to the PICO model, it creates a context geared toward several relational and developmental goals. It pushes participants to embrace their human dignity and power as a part of a larger social whole. The relational context of the one-to-one is intended to function as a key component of what Medellin (1997) calls a "transformation to leadership" (p. 6). Empowerment is stressed as a developmental process. Power and relationship are the themes of the relational work of organizing, which seek to develop indigenous local leaders capable of operating with power in the political realm. The one-to-one does not encourage an introspective focus on self-improvement. Instead, it is focused on the development of trusting interpersonal relationships that advance understandings of the ways in which self-interests connect. In a one-to-one that is done effectively, the relationship that is being formed is valued above any potential instrumental or organizational gains that might result from the meeting. Experienced practitioners of one-to-ones in community organizing emphasize that their role is not to promise immediate fixes for the issues that the participant is facing, but to push back on their conversational counterpart—asking them what they are going to do to improve the situation in their neighborhoods or communities.

Many people interviewed for this study discussed the formation of relationships as a key strategy in the practice of community organizing. For example, one interviewee stated succinctly: "The power is in the one-to-one." Three themes emerged from participants' discussions of relationships in the grassroots organizing process. Relational components of grassroots community organizing processes can be summarized as follows: (a) broaden participants' networks of relationships, (b) develop new understandings of the social world, and (c) strengthen commitments to civic involvement.

Broadening Networks of Relationships

The community organizing process as carried out by the PICO model and other similar models has been noted as a process that "is driven by the desire to identify and train local leaders in relational skills and to have them build ever-widening circles of relationships (McCarthy & Walker, 2004, p. 101S). Participants in this study explained that the organizing process broadened their networks of interpersonal relations by facilitating interactions with people they would not encounter or engage in ordinary circumstances. This is consistent with the goals of grassroots community organizing, which seek to build demographically diverse coalitions and, therefore, put participants in contact with people that they might not otherwise encounter in a meaningful interpersonal way.

[Community organizing] puts me in relationship with a lot more people who are of different economic status than I am that I wouldn't normally come into contact with—and that's been very life giving.

This exemplifies what is often described as *bridging* social capital (Gittel & Vidal, 1998; Stolle & Rochon, 1998). Wood (1997) claims that it is the formation of bridging social capital that allows grassroots community organizing to claim so many successes relative to other mobilizing efforts. Grassroots organizing facilitates relationship development between individuals who might not ordinarily form meaningful

interpersonal relationships. The additional breadth that community organizing builds into participants' networks of relationships is not limited to one-to-one interpersonal relationships; it also extends to relationships with representatives of institutions involved in community life.

[Building relationships] is critical because we're looking at these people as people, and we're building relationships with the city, and we're building relationships with the state, and making these people understand we are people, caring people.

Caring for others is an outgrowth of the relational organizing process and a component in establishing community (Dokecki, 1992). Yet, the relationships built among individuals in community organizing also emphasize challenge and accountability. Challenge, conflict, and accountability are emphasized even more in discussing relationships built with institutions and actors outside the organizing groups. Public relationships developed through community organizing processes do not preclude conflict (Christens, Jones, & Speer, 2008). In fact, participants stress the role of conflict in achieving instrumental goals, but they do so in the context of relationships. Speaking about the strategies that the groups pursue, which involve conflict with other institutions, one participant said, "I do think that confrontation is just almost necessary in the way things work." Although participants are realistic in their expectations about the need for conflict to achieve change, they do not initiate conflict without first seeking to build collaborative relationships with actors outside their organizations.

Even though we have a feeling about what [other actors] should have done or what they didn't do ... when we go in there, we have to go with an open heart. Even though they did this, you don't know what will come out of your new situation if you don't go in with an attitude to work with them.

This perspective demonstrates political pragmatism and reflects the continued influence of early grassroots organizer Saul Alinsky (1971), who stressed a perpetual need for openness to both conflict and compromise in the intentional exercise of power. This posture means that participants broaden their social networks to encompass those who differ not only demographically but also ideologically.

It must be acknowledged that one-to-ones are not carried out evenly in practice across organizations or across time. Even within PICO organizations, some organizers stress the importance of building relationships more than others. Some organizations keep records of the one-to-ones that are conducted, sometimes holding volunteer leaders accountable to conducting a certain number of one-to-ones with other participants in organizing. In other groups, relational processes are relatively deemphasized and conducted much more sporadically. Within each organization, different parts of the organizing process are emphasized more at particular times; the importance of relationships is typically emphasized after major action on a particular issue or leading into research on a new issue.

In community organizing with young people, the one-to-one features less prominently than it does in adult organizing. Many young people involved in organizing prefer a less formal approach to building relationships. A young leader in a PICO organization explained this approach as "building a friendship, just getting to

know them. Over time, you get to know what they're interested in ... and it's not like just one time, maybe next week I'll talk to them again." Youth organizing is growing as a model for community engagement (Christens & Zeldin, in press) and increasingly being adopted by affiliates of national organizing networks. Despite the difference in approach to relational work, youth in organizing likewise expand their networks of relationships. For example, one young person estimated that he has built relationships with 200 youth across several different high schools through involvement in organizing (Christens & Dolan, in press).

Developing New Understandings of the Social World

Having a broad network of public relationships advances participants' understandings of social systems, a phenomenon sometimes described as developing critical consciousness (e.g., Gutierrez, 1995). By forming connections with others, participants in grassroots organizing gain an understanding of how they and others fit into and interact with local government, the marketplace, organizations, and various social systems. In addition to the relational components of organizing, the attempts to make systems change enhance this understanding. As Keddy (2001) writes: "Through participation in public life, they [participants in community organizing] expand their own identity, and develop a public self, which in turn transforms their private self" (p. 50). The transformation of the private self and the development of a public self is a highly personalized process that is brought about through dialogue and narrative.

The one-to-one is where you talk with the person and say, "What is it in your neighborhood that you'd like to see changed? Are you happy with the neighborhood?" And most of them would say, "No." "Well, what would you like to have changed?" So, it's just a dialogue between the person and drawing the information out of that person that would be of interest to all of us that share that same interest or that same value.

At an aggregate level, the one-to-ones bring issues to the surface for the organizing group to begin to research for potential future action, thereby acting as a communication channel between the numerous volunteer members of the organization and the smaller committees of volunteer leaders and paid staff organizers. The effectiveness of these channels of communication depends on the strength of the networks of relationships between participants. In the best cases, they form a structure that allows organizing efforts to truly be grassroots or bottom-up and to avoid the issues of centralization of control² that plague most social movement organizations over time. Through many one-to-one conversations, the most pressing issues for residents of a neighborhood or a city are identified. One participant explained: "This whole thing is about relationships—relationships with the people. The issues come from the bottom."

Sets of relationships that have produced collective capacity for action, such as mobilizing structures (e.g., McAdam, 1986) or connective structures (Tarrow, 1998), have been studied in social movements. Although most accounts of effective movements focus on the economic and historical conditions that allow movements to

² See Osterman's (2006) work on community organizing and the iron law of oligarchy.

arise, there is important variance in the deployment of different models for mobilization. The PICO model and other grassroots organizing models that emphasize relationships involve dialogue and narrative, which have been noted as important components of other processes that are empowering or build community (Newbrough, 1995; Rappaport, 1995; Rossing & Glowacki-Dudka, 2001). Forming relationships and listening to other people's narratives push participants toward a systemic understanding of social issues, and a systemic understanding provides the motivation for the groups to pursue systems change. As one participant said: "We're all moving to the point of wanting to impact the systems that are creating the problems for the people that we care about."

In addition to one-to-ones with other community leaders in grassroots organizing, participants form relationships with local decision makers and elected officials. These relationships are formed during the research phase of the organizing process and involve a small group of participants who meet with those who hold responsibility for, or have specialized knowledge regarding, the particular community issue that is to be addressed. These relationships range from collaboration to conflict, but they provide participants with new understandings of the social and political world. For instance, many participants describe the realization they have had that many decision makers have refused to follow through on their promises and must be held accountable. In conjunction with the research components of the organizing process, these relational experiences create contexts for sociopolitical development (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003) for participants in grassroots organizing.

Strengthening Commitments to Civic Involvement

With few exceptions (e.g., Ladd, 1999), research has shown that residents of the United States have become more isolated and less engaged in community life in recent decades. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) suggest this is a cause for concern for three categories of reasons: participation in community life develops individual capacity, it creates community, and it promotes equal protection of interests. Other research and writing echoes this assertion, pointing to engagement's role in the promotion of trust (Levi & Stoker, 2000), citizenship, good governance (Ray, 2002), and democracy (Boyte, 2003).

The grassroots community organizations highlighted in this study engage hundreds or thousands of people annually in attending meetings on community issues, making phone calls, writing letters, or attending various types of demonstrations. Many of these people have episodic or sporadic attendance patterns, but the participants who become highly involved often attribute their commitment to involvement to the relationships they have built. Specifically, many describe one-to-one meetings as pivotal moments in their involvement. One grassroots leader who has been involved in organizing for 15 years said: "So, that's how [my husband and I] got started. We did this one-to-one, and we didn't really know the purpose of that ... but after that, we knew that we weren't going out on a limb or wasting our time with this organization." Participants often situate their commitment to civic participation in terms of the relationships that are built through organizing processes.

But when we're serious about something, we're serious. We can get it done, and [other participants in community organizing] know that if they phone me and they need some help, I'm going down there to help them, and vice versa.

The relationships built through the community organizing process develop reciprocity among participants and a commitment to sustained civic participation. The grassroots community organizing process strengthens commitments to civic involvement, and effective organizing initiatives will often demonstrate growth in the breadth and frequency of volunteer participation over time (Speer, Peterson, Zippay, & Christens, 2010). However, an increase in attendance at events does not fully capture the richness of this strength of commitment. One participant in this study said: "I think I have a very strong relationship with just about everybody. It doesn't mean I agree with everyone. I don't." Public relationships build a commitment among participants that supersedes differences and disagreements.

Relational approaches to community organizing emphasize the importance of challenge and accountability within public relationships. The relationships formed by the respondents in this study indicated that the capacity existed within public relationships to withstand tensions. The ability to have differences, disagreements, and challenges and yet remain in relationship is a key component of civility, which is necessary for a peaceful, pluralist, and civil society (Hunter & Milofsky, 2007). Through fostering public relationships between participants, grassroots community organizing contributes to the development of the civic infrastructure necessary for deliberative democracy (Fishkin, 1991).

To be able to have a conversation, a civil conversation about that, where you respect people's differences, where you can see people struggling ... even though they believe one thing, they're willing to listen to somebody's different opinion and come to a conclusion. That's social capital. That's a network of relationships among us where we can have those conversations and come out with an agreement that everybody can live with.

Strengths and Limitations of Relational Approaches to Community Intervention

Many models of grassroots community organizing emphasize, to varying degrees, the importance of developing a certain quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships as a way to build power to achieve systems change. Practitioners of these relational models of community organizing are engaging in praxis from the perspective that systems change occurs simultaneously at multiple levels of analysis in a transactional way between systems and inhabitants (Altman & Rogoff, 1987). Systems change efforts too frequently focus only on systems change to the exclusion of individual change, and attempts at individual change too frequently focus only on individuals. In contrast, relational community organizing operates with an understanding that individuals and systems change in concert (Christens, Hanlin, & Speer, 2007; Dokecki, Scanlan, & Strain, 1972). The community organizing process employed by the organizations in this study provides a practical transactional model for relational intervention as a method for achieving both individual and systems change.

The relational organizing model's strengths include keeping current members motivated and involved. Organizers and leaders are taught to invite challenge and accountability in their relationships with each other, with the idea that a public relationship will naturally develop tensions and resentments. The responsibility in a relationship is to ask questions, listen, and uncover these tensions so that they can provide room for growth and the relationships can endure. Medellin (1997) compares

this process with a commitment to a journey with another person. The journey involves both individuals in the roles of teacher and learner. As a partner in such a relationship, one must recognize and accept the other's current condition, as opposed to measuring the other person against an ideal. The relational model also advocates that both participants in the relationship remain open to change, both in the perspectives and personal identity of the other person, and in the relationship itself. Part of this change should be a greater realization of the possibilities for systems change, as reflected in the PICO principle, "the first revolution is internal" (Medellin, 1997, p. 131).

The paradox of public relationships in grassroots community organizing is that relationships that are treated as ends in themselves may work better as means to other ends. Put differently, organizers and leaders in the power-based organizing process learn about how to engage each other as members of a civil society, and this provides the organizational foundation for instrumental wins (Keddy, 2001). The web of relationships that is created in the process is what allows participants to be successful at achieving systems change and sustaining organizational involvement. This process of simultaneous individual and organizational development mirrors understandings of empowerment as a multilevel construct (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). As public relationships develop, participants in the organizing process co-produce something that is rare in a consumer culture that breeds isolation.

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

With such a breadth and diversity of relationships, it is unsurprising that community-organizing initiatives have been considered as empowering community settings (Maton, 2008; Zimmerman, 1995). Grassroots voluntary organizations such as these have been identified as mediating structures (Hughey, Speer, & Peterson, 1999) that community psychologists should seek to strengthen in a quest for "the participating society" (Newbrough, 1980, p. 15).

On the other hand, there are limitations to relational approaches to organizing as a strategy for community intervention. A focus on building relationships can supplant a sharp-edged political focus, directing more of the group's energy inwards. Rather than challenging community power structure, participants in relational models of community organizing may, in some cases, be drawn to more depoliticized or collaborative forms of social action. Issue-focused or political organizing groups often critique groups that are focused on building relationships for their perceived docility and political moderation. In fact, it does appear that more issue-focused forms of organizing are better at moving toward action on certain issues. It must be noted, however, that the groups in this study and similar groups around the country are frequently engaged in conflict-based tactics as a part of their relational process. In this way, they are clearly distinguished from approaches that truly eschew conflict, such as consensus organizing (Beck & Eichler, 2000).

Another critical perspective on relational approaches to organizing is that community intervention efforts are more effective when directed toward specific

policy goals or toward modifying relationships between institutions rather than individuals (Zippay, 1995). At an extreme, relational approaches could amount to a deficit-based orientation to community change. For example, some could argue that if a solution for communities seeking improvement is to build only social networks and empower individuals, then must it not logically follow that the origin of the community problems was with these individuals and their lack of perspectives, commitment, and connection? The relational organizing initiatives in this study kept a sharp organizational focus on community problems and community change. Some relational organizing initiatives, however, have veered closer to a focus on individual-level change.

Finally, the focus on relationships, which often involve an expressive dimension, within the context of a more instrumental, community-level process can raise the question of manipulation. Skilled leaders in relational organizing approaches listen more than they speak. The interpersonal relationships they build are often deeply expressive and meaningful. Leaders in organizing are often averse to the term "recruitment." Ultimately, however, their goal is to involve others in a campaign for community-level change, and they must, therefore, carefully consider the expressive and instrumental aspects of their approach. Describing the linkages between interpersonal relationships and social power, Speer and Hughey (1995) write: "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" (p. 733). The enhanced meaning and sustainability, however, can occur only when expressive and instrumental aspects of the process are skillfully balanced. For instance, there is a risk of overemphasizing relationship building in the community organizing process. Relational models of community organizing cannot succeed in efforts to change systems if a focus on relationship building comes at the expense of other core elements of the process, such as collaborative research on unjust or oppressive local policies and practices.

CONCLUSIONS

Grassroots community organizing initiatives build a distinctive type of relationships among participants: public relationships. Networks of public relationships between participants have been critical for the achievement of both individual and community-level change in local organizing processes. The model for building public relationships relies heavily on a specific technique for conducting one-to-one meetings. This article has delineated the process and impacts of building public relationships in a model for grassroots community organizing, and it has presented findings from qualitative interviews that highlighted the role of relational organizing in broadening networks of relationships, developing new understandings of the social world, and strengthening commitments to civic involvement.

This model for relational intervention may be of heuristic value to other organizations seeking to build civil society and make social change (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2006). Insights from relational organizing models may be useful in other attempts to build relationships between residents as part of efforts to increase capacity for collective action and collective decision making (Graf, 1995). The instrumental goals of nonprofit organizations as conveyed in their missions often create tensions with more expressive dimensions of activity within voluntary organizations. The

balancing of expressive and instrumental functions has been identified as one of the key challenges facing organizations across the nonprofit sector (Frumkin, 2002). Public relationships in grassroots organizing provide a model for navigating this tension. Future research should examine differences in orientations to relationship development across different types of grassroots organizations, and it should more clearly link relationships to other constructs of interest, such as psychological empowerment and sense of community. Methodologies geared toward the study of relationships, such as social network analysis (Wasserman & Faust, 1994), also provide a promising avenue for further investigation of this topic.

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