

Chapter Two: A Review of Relevant Literature



“ . . . Things can be different because you see yourself differently. You can get water and sewer lines in your neighborhood because you see yourself differently. . . And there’s a direct connection between the two.”

- Sister Judy Donovan,
Lead Organizer, Valley Interfaith

“Perhaps most important is the understanding that a reciprocal relationship exists between development of power for community organizations and individual empowerment for organization members.”

- Speer and Hughey, 1995

Chapter Two:

Despite the recognition that citizen participation -- individual participation, is at the root of a healthy and functioning democracy, there is a noticeable absence of work bringing the bodies of community development and human development theories together. Few writers directly address the connection between individual and community empowerment; none that I have come across do so through an empirical study of individual development. In this section I begin by discussing some of the leading proponents of individual change as key to social change. I proceed to review the current literature on community organizing followed by an overview of human development theory. This literature review concludes with a brief discussion of the limited literature relating to the intersection between individual and community development.

The Individual and Social Change:

The role of the individual in social change crosses several disciplines—from psychology to theology, from political science to pedagogy. One example of an analysis which cuts across these fields is The Aquarian Conspiracy, by Marilyn Ferguson. Ferguson is a strong advocate for the relationship between the individual and the society in which s/he lives. She writes, “Self and society are inseparable. *Eventually, anyone concerned with the transformation of the individual must engage in social action.*” (1984, p.191, sic.) Ferguson discusses the historical basis for an emphasis on individual growth and transformation. She presents the doctrine of the sixties, “We must change society through changing ourselves,” as part of a larger legacy of American individualism (see Bellah, et.al. 1985). Ferguson goes as far to assert that “Personal transformation, in effect, is an enactment of the original American dream.” (1984, p.124) Stephen Brookfield also acknowledges this relationship in his work on critical thinking, “The histories of the labor movement and of civil rights activism graphically demonstrate the connection between individual improvement and social change. (1991,

p.63) The work of Ferguson and Brookfield is based on a belief in the citizen's capacity to self-govern, the principle premise of democracy.

Since Aristotle, advocates of participatory democracy have argued that participation contributes to the intellectual and moral growth of citizens (Mill, 1991, Dahl 1989, Mansbridge, 1980). Recent efforts to rebuild participation at the neighborhood level have drawn on these earlier works, arguing that face-to-face participation is essential to making democracy meaningful at a daily level (Berry, Portney, Thompson, 1993, Boyte, 1980, Moore-Lappe, Dubois, 1995). These advocates of civic renewal argue that participation extends beyond voting to “ a set of attitudes and behaviors that makes common decision-making possible.” (Moore-Lappe, Dubois, 1995) Stressing the notion that citizenship is an art that can be learned and cultivated, they describe a role for community organizations to serve as a “school for democracy”, whereby the organizations teach social and civic skills (Putnam, 2000, Moore-Lappé, Dubois, 1995). When a direct discussion of the relationship between democracies and individuals is addressed, however, most theorists argue that *democratic experiences lead to individual development*.

To understand the inverse of this relationship, the role of individual development in bringing about democracy, I turn to the theory of progressive education. From the time of Dewey, education for citizenship has been understood as critical to social change (Dewey, 1916). While much of the earlier work on democratic pedagogy focused on children, later theories spawning social movements looked to adult education as a potential catalyst for democratizing society. The relevant literature on individual transformation is rooted in popular education theory first expounded on by Paulo Freire in his revolutionary work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. According to Freire, social change will come about as individuals realize their oppression, and transform their world as they transform themselves (Freire, 1982). Likewise, Myles Horton, who founded the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, claimed that individual development was central to democratic change (Horton, 1998). The lessons of progressive pedagogy and participatory democracy, while directly relevant to this work, often operate on a theoretical level removed

from the realities of urban areas. They do not look specifically at the community as a unit analysis. To what extent is the recognition of the role of the individual integrated into contemporary community organizing and development?

Community Organizing as a Means to Community Development:

Community organizing is a term that has taken on a multiplicity of meanings as it is applied, adapted, and utilized in a variety of contexts. For the purposes of this paper, I refer to the model of community organizing typically known as Alinsky-style organizing, after the late Saul Alinsky, or broad-based organizing. The Industrial Areas Foundation, PICO, the Gamaliel Foundation, and DART are four national networks that promote and train organizers in the model that Alinsky developed in the late thirties.¹ Beckwith, Stoecker, and McNeely define community organizing as “...the process of building power that includes people with a problem in defining their community, defining the problems they wish to address, the solutions they wish to pursue, and the methods they will use to accomplish their solutions.” (Beckwith, Stoecker, and McNeely, 1997 in Stall and Stoecker, 1997) Although the focus on individual *development* is negligible, the community organizing literature presents three distinct, yet related explanations for organizing’s success. While not presented in these terms, each explanation directly relates to the individuals active in the organizations: organizations serve as a source of social capital, impacting individuals through relationships; they draw on a moral tradition, impacting individuals through faith; they teach democratic skills, impacting individuals’ capacity to act.

Broad-based organizing, typically operating through congregations and existing institutions within a community, is differentiated from *issue-based organizing* in that rather than focusing energy around any one area, the ultimate goal of the organization is to build power. Power is gained as the

¹ Chapter three provides a deeper discussion of the Alinsky-model of organizing.

organization builds relationships among its members. Part of the attention that community organizing efforts have garnered is due to recognition that more than merely starting programs or obtaining funds, community development processes must involve a shift in both power and other resources (Warren, 1998, Wood, 1997). Many community organizations explain their approach to power, both internally and externally, in the term Robert Putnam made popular as “social capital”. Social capital, according to Putnam, “. . . refers to connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” (2000, p.19) In this past decade, as community based organizations have met with success using relational tactics, theoreticians have further developed the role of social capital as key to civic renewal and community development. (See Gittel and Vidal, 1998, Warren 1995, Byrd, 1997, Wood 1997) They argue that organizing serves to rebuild relationships in churches that suffer from a lack of cohesiveness in the face of poverty and political pressures (Slessarev, 2000). These explanations are based on earlier works, such as de Tocqueville’s classic study examining the role of associations in democracy (de Tocqueville, 1969). Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, among other recent advocates of associational democracy, further support the role of “mediating” institutions as a means to democratic engagement (Cohen and Rogers, 1995, see also Bellah, et.al. 1991).

Others argue that not only do religious institutions function as a resource for institution building, they also provide a moral foundation upon which to act (see Wood, 1997, Byrd, 1998). In this analysis, organizations draw on faith a *motivator* for action. For example, Mark Warren writes:

The IAF unlocks that capacity by searching for the community welfare traditions within religious denominations and by stressing the active engagement of those beliefs. Since community can be conceived of quite narrowly, the IAF emphasizes a broad, inclusive interpretation of the meaning of "God's children." Unleashed in that way, religious beliefs can serve as an inspiration for political action and provide a moral foundation for the organization.

- Warren, 1999, p. 2

According to this analysis, individuals are motivated by and reconnected with their moral and religious traditions through their participation.

Beyond the building of social capital, beyond the call of a higher moral authority, analysts present a third explanation for broad-based organizing's accomplishments—a meticulous and comprehensive dedication to leadership development through the teaching of civic skills. Brady, Verba, and Scholzman make the distinction between developing social capital and developing individuals' capacity. They argue that religious institutions serve to teach the skills of public life (Brady, Verba, and Scholzman, 1995). Wood also makes this distinction and writes,

Religious institutions also contribute powerfully to the success of community organizing efforts in a second area: by developing their members' capacity in the simple skills useful in the practice of democracy. Such democratic skills are an element of human capital rather than social capital, because they are carried by individuals rather than residing in the relationships between individuals.

- Wood, 1997, p.2

While the elements of social capital, moral agency, and civic skills are indubitably at the heart of the broad-based organizing model, they only tell part of the story. Just as relevant are the multiple stories that lie behind each community organization. What happens to individuals as they form new public relationships? As they are exposed to a faith that calls for action? How do people change as they gain the "skills of public life"? What is the relationship between the power that exists in a community, and the power that individuals possess as believers in themselves? Beginning to answer these questions requires turning to a body of literature examining the individual as a unit of analysis.

Human development:

How does one go about measuring and documenting individual change? The development of a human being reflects the complexity and diversity of humanity itself. From Kohlberg's theory of moral development to Carol

Gilligan's model of feminist psychology, there are numerous lenses through which to consider the complex questions of human growth and capacity. Each uses different terminology to refer to the process of adult growth. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the terms "change", "development", and "transformation". *Change* refers to a new set of beliefs, understandings, or behaviors. *Development* refers to the stages through which individuals come to make meaning of themselves and their world. *Transformation* refers to the intersection of change with development, the points at which adults shift in their relationship to themselves and the world around them. According to these definitions, individuals may experience both changes and transformations in their developmental experience. In order to ground and contextualize the rich stories I heard in the Rio Grande Valley, I draw upon three approaches to human development: empowerment psychology, developmental constructivism, and social constructivism.

Empowerment psychology looks at the individual as a level of analysis, while acknowledging the interdependency of the individual with his/her community. It is therefore a useful construct for this research in that it directly addresses the development of the individual in the context of public life. Zimmerman describes this approach "that integrates perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of the socio-political environment" in terms of three categories: The first, the *intrapersonal*, looks at how people think about themselves. The second, the *interactional*, addresses people's way of understanding their community and related sociopolitical context. The last, *the behavioral*, considers people's actions, the activities that they participate in. In other words, empowerment psychology considers changes in terms of what people believe, what they understand, and what they do (Zimmerman, 1995).

Another perspective on empowerment psychology is offered by those who examine the type of learning that takes place within the Freirian pedagogy of "conscientization". Educators interested in transformative learning also articulate the relationship between emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes (see Osterman and Kottkamp, 1993). Griff Foley, for

example, discusses how the participants in an Australian informal education program learned not only new skills and knowledge, but a transformation of “meaning perspectives” that involved self-awareness, an awareness of structural factors affecting their lives, and a new recognition of the complexity of interpersonal relationships (Foley, 1999). What empowerment psychology and transformative learning do not explicitly consider, however, are the different stages of development that can occur within each one of these realms, the increasingly complex ways that people come to know themselves and their worlds.

In order to consider how people’s meaning making systems develop, therefore, I turn to the work of Robert Kegan and other developmental constructivists. Developmental constructivists believe that there are distinct stages of consciousness that humans experience transcending different aspects of our lives. Kegan presents five orders of mind in his work. In the initial stages, individuals externalize all responsibility and are unable to differentiate their own emotions from the emotions of others. Human development represents a shift from subject to object, in which individuals increasingly take ownership of their worlds, and become “self-authoring” agents of their realities. As they process through these stages, adults are increasingly able to hold “object”, or outside of themselves, what was once inseparable from their sense of self, or “subject” (Kegan, 1994). While the intent of this analysis is not to present a developmental constructivist analysis of the data, this lens is helpful in that it may suggest the changes individuals experience as a result of their participation in Valley Interfaith represent a shift in meaning-making systems.

What Kegan's theory less explicitly discusses, however, is how the development of the individual is both grounded in, and potentially fostered by, his/her relationship to the collective. Elliot Mishler writes, “I found it ironic that the study of individuals isolated from their social and historical contexts was assumed to be the basis for a scientific understanding of human behavior, when it seemed obvious to me that we are social beings from the beginning of our lives. “ (1999, p. 16) The gender based models place a

larger emphasis on the social nature of development. Mary Belenky et.al. set forth a different stage model in Women's Ways of Knowing. Their model looks specifically at how the development of women's voice emerges as they learn to take control over their own lives. (Belenky, et.al, 1986) They, like Kegan, present a developmental model as well as discussing how our society can both hinder and foster women's development. Belenky's work, influenced by Carol Gilligan, offers a unique perspective in that it examines how women's development can be supported through their interactions with others, a "connected way of knowing".

The feminist approach to development also builds on the work of Vygotsky and other social constructivists. The social constructivists, like the developmental constructivists, see individuals as actively constructing and reconstructing their experiences. They differ, however, from pure constructivism in that they present a dialectical model through which the individual and his or her environment are mutually transformative. Like Dewey, who emphasized the social nature of development, Nager and Shapiro write, "As individuals participate in or come to internalize practices, they transform them. They reproduce them not exactly, but uniquely, and so continue the development of the culture." (Nager and Shapiro, p.79) Individuals, therefore, can impact their society just as a society impacts individuals.

The individual in the community:

Feminist approaches to organizing, in concordance with feminist theory, often hone in on developing voice and power at the individual level. Based on the mantra that "the personal is political", feminist organizers have traditionally focused on consciousness raising and empowerment (see hooks, 1984, Stall and Stoecker, 1997, Belenky, et.al 1999). Stall and Stoecker contrast the "women's centered" model of organizing with Alinsky based organizing, suggesting that traditional "male-centered" tactics do not pay attention to the development of individual actors (Stall and Stoecker, 1997). Such a contrast, I would argue, presents a simplified and outdated view of

contemporary Alinsky-organizing, which I will later demonstrate invests great effort in fostering individual growth.

Beyond the feminist literature, it is only in the past decade that community development theory has directly addressed the role of individual development in the context of community power. Recent research on community development acknowledges the limitations of traditional sociology, Randy Stoecker, one of the leading academic voices advocating community organizing writes, “When we study collective identity, we must also consider individuals. . .” (Stoecker, 1995) Witting et.al. also move from pure sociology to psychology in gaining a deeper understanding of the process of community change,² They acknowledge the changes that occur in individuals through organizing.

“While the mobilization of people has traditionally been viewed as a sociological phenomenon, it also involves psychological components that operate at the individual, interpersonal, intergroup, and cultural levels. . . Perceptions of self-esteem and self-efficacy may improve, new social identities may be formed, attitudes toward the political system may be altered, and skills and resources maybe acquired.”

- *Wittig, et.al., 1996, p.5*

These findings, however, suggest that changes in the individual come about as a *byproduct* of community change. They do not look at how intentional efforts to foster adult development may in fact contribute to community development efforts. In order to do so, I look south, to the Rio Grande Valley. It is here where the Industrial Areas Foundation provides a context to examine the intersection of individual and community development.

² Speer and Hughey also merge empowerment theory with social power through a case analysis of PICO, the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations. (Speer and Hughey, 1995)