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Empowerment Praxis in Community Coalitions[1]

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Community coalitions address a wide variety of community problems, espousing a community development processes that promotes individual and collective self-determination. They offer a promising venue for the study of empowerment of individuals and organizations. This study utilizes data from members of 35 community coalitions organized for the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems to address the following questions: What individual characteristics are related to the psychological empowerment of coalition members? What organizational characteristics are related to the collective empowering of members? What organization characteristics are related to a coalition being organizationally empowered to succeed in achieving its objectives? At the individual level, psychological empowerment was most strongly related to individuals' participation levels, sense of community, and perceptions of a positive organizational climate. At the group level, the strongest predictors of collective empowering (our operationalization of the empowering organization) were net benefits of participation, commitment, and positive organization climate. Psychological empowerment and positive organizational climate were the two predictors of organizational effectiveness (the empowered organization). Implications and limitations of these findings are discussed.

KEY WORDS: empowerment; community coalition; multilevel; prevention; participation.

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Community coalitions are an increasingly visible force for addressing a diverse array of seemingly intractable community problems, such as crime, violence, substance abuse, delinquency, and so on (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993; Kaftarian & Hensen, 1994). Coalition efforts are being supported through initiatives at the federal, state, private foundation, and grass-roots level, and have been promoted forcefully with arguments that are infused with the language of empowerment (Butterfoss, *et al.*, 1993; Chavis & Florin, 1990; Fawcett, Paine, Francisco, & Vliet, 1993). Community coalitions, it is reasoned, can promote a community development process that builds confidence, competencies, and social connections among participants. They can engage broad participation, which increase local ownership, thereby expanding resources and increasing commitment to sustaining activities long term. Finally, community coalitions can expand health promotion and prevention activities beyond individual life-style change by collectively influencing key decision makers and social policy within the community. Although funding of community coalitions is ahead of clear scientific evidence of their utility, commitment to collaborative problem solving and to local ownership of solutions put this movement squarely at the cutting edge of empowerment praxis, or the practice of translating ideas and theories about empowerment into action and results.

However, empowerment is a concept that is often as elusive as it is compelling. As others have indicated in this volume and elsewhere, translation of the rhetoric of empowerment into concrete terms often reveals different notions about what empowerment entails. Empowerment can refer to values, processes, or outcomes (Zimmerman, 1995), as well as to activities at the level of the individual, the organization, or the community (Swift & Levin, 1987; Zimmerman 1995). Coalition planners who are concerned with psychological empowerment may focus their technical assistance and evaluation resources on understanding and bolstering individual changes in the experience of empowerment (e.g., providing information and/or skills; recruiting individuals with characteristics associated with psychological empowerment). In contrast, leaders concerned about the degree to which they are creating empowering organizations may focus more of their evaluation and technical assistance capital on the organizational characteristics presumed to promote empowerment (e.g., coalition climate, decision-making processes, communication patterns). The focal question becomes, what organizations are most successful in empowering the people who participate in them, and why? The notion of the empowered organization turns the spotlight on the ultimate products or results of coalition efforts. What are the characteristics of coalitions that are empowered in the sense that they have successfully achieved their desired outcomes (e.g., policy changes in schools, redistribution of municipal resources)? Finally, the most

ambitious set of questions look at the interrelationships among all of these levels (e.g., Are empowering organizations also most likely to be empowered organizations). Unfortunately, there has been, little empirical work addressing these issues.

The purpose of this paper is to take a multi-level approach to examining three broad questions raised by the above discussion: (a) What factors are associated with *psychological empowerment* among members participating in a community coalition? We present our particular conceptualization of psychological empowerment in the context of community coalitions and a working model of influences on psychological empowerment. (b) What characteristics of a community coalition are related to its being an *empowering organization,* that is, successful in the collective empowering of its members? (c) What characteristics of a community coalition are related to its being *organizationally empowered,* that is, successful in influencing its environment? We use data from 35 community coalitions organized for the prevention of alcohol and other drug problems to answer these questions. We think this work is significant in several ways. First, we provide evidence of the utility of a multidimensional approach to conceptualizing empowerment. Second, we hope to demonstrate the practical utility of this approach in a way that helps to clarify for coalition planners the implications of different conceptualizations of empowerment. Finally, we hope that this work serves as a heuristic for efforts to address questions involving influences at the group and the individual level.

UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY COALITIONS

We share the view of others that psychological empowerment is best conceived of as a higher order construct that subsumes other constructs nested within it (Kieffer, 1984; Rappaport, 1981; Swift & Levin, 1987; Wallerstein, 1992; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). But what should guide our choice of the nested constructs that serve as the foundation for psychological empowerment? We concentrated on two important themes that run through much of the empowerment literature, each reflecting our emphasis on empowerment as action. The first theme casts empowerment as ongoing social action, a process linking perceptions of past and future efficacy and control (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Swift & Levin, 1987; Wallerstein, 1992). The second theme treats empowerment as interactional process, both multilevel and context specific (Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995). The second theme links the individual with the collective, that is, with the particular group, organization, or community unit most appropriate for the specific context under study, in this case the community

coalition. Figure 1 represents schematically our view of psychological empowerment, linking the two dimensions through five interrelated constructs. Because our coalition context leads to a focus on empowerment praxis, we assume in Figure 1 that an individual is participating in a goal-oriented group or organization. The five constructs we conceptualize as incorporated under psychological empowerment are Perceived Knowledge and Skill Development, Perceived Participatory Competence, Expectancies for Future Individual Contributions, Perceived Group/Organization Accomplishments, and Expectancies for Future Group/Organizational Accomplishments. Each of these variables is described below in more detail. [Some constructs employed here reflect certain aspects of what Zimmerman (1995) calls the interpersonal and interactional components of psychological empowerment. We have, however, made no systematic attempt to measure all aspects of these components. Indeed, we take a more circumscribed approach to operationalizing this construct (e.g., treating participation as a construct separate from empowerment), and even considered calling our construct something different (e.g., "individual empowerment"). Future work should help determine the utility of more or less inclusive definitions of the empowerment construct, and the degree to which different operationalizations are tapping into similar themes.]

Perceived Knowledge and Skill Development: The degree to which individuals feel that participation in the group or organization has served to increase their own knowledge and skills ("I have been given what I need to do it"). The construct is similar to the oft-mentioned self-efficacy component of empowerment but differs in that it reports on perceived increases in self-efficacy that are directly attributed by the individual to participation in the group. This group as resource for personal development may also be viewed as one aspect of what Zimmerman (1995) has called the interactional component of psychological empowerment. This construct also taps the extent to which individuals themselves perceive the group or organization as personally empowering (Swift & Levin, 1987).

Perceived Participatory Competence: Taps individuals' judgment of their ability to participate in and contribute to the operations of the group or organization ("I can do it"). This construct is the direct equivalent of a situation-specific perceived self-efficacy or the individual's self-judgment about their ability to organize and execute actions necessary to attain a goal (Bandura, 1982). The referent actions here involve some aspects of what has been called participatory competence (Kieffer, 1984) and leadership competence (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991), behaviors that allow the individual to be involved with the group or organization and build the group or organization's efficacy.

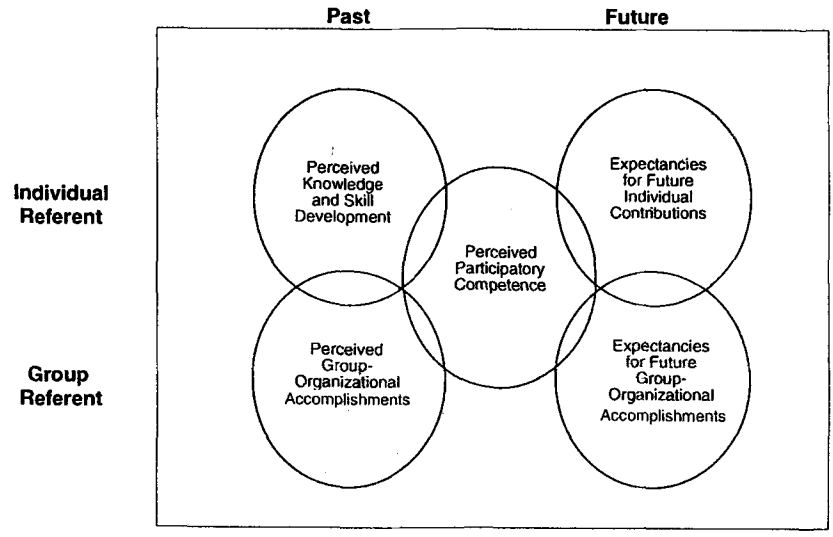

Fig. 1. Individual level psychological empowerment.

Expectancies for Future Individual Contributions: Measures individuals' expectations of contributions to the group or organization in the future ("I will do it"). This construct is an aspect of empowerment that combines intention and belief in one's ability into a personal outcome expectation (Bandura, 1982; Mischel, 1973). It reflects the extent to which individuals have been both personally engaged by the group or organization and mobilized sufficiently to project expectations for themselves relevant to the group into the future.

Perceived Group/Organizational Accomplishments: Individuals' perceptions of the extent to which the group or organization in which they are participating has accomplished things in the past vis-à-vis its goals and objectives ("We have done it"). This construct is the equivalent of the individual's perception of the extent to which the group or organization has been an empowered organization in the past, successfully coping with and affecting its environment (Swift &Levin, 1987).

The final variable, *Expectancies for Future Group/Organizational Accomplishments,* is individuals' judgment of the likelihood that the group or organization will achieve its objectives ("We will do it"). This aspect of empowerment reflects outcome expectations (Bandura, 1982; Mischel, 1973) for the collective effort of the group or organization and a perceived control aspect of what has referred to as the interpersonal

component of psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, Isreal, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992). Such expectations are built upon an individual's combined assessment of the collective capabilities of the group or collective efficacy and perceived responsiveness of the environment. (Bandura, 1982).

Our conception of psychological empowerment reflects several aspects of what Zimmerman has called the intrapersonal and interactional components of psychological empowerment. Although we have not systematically included all aspects of psychological empowerment in our operational definition (we treat participation behavior as an independent variable), we feel the similarities warrant consistency of terms more than the differences justify the introduction of a new term into the literature.

For the purposes of this paper, we limit our conception of the relationship among these five variables to the supposition that these constructs are all contributing elements of a higher order construct, psychological empowerment. We recognize that many possible patterns of reciprocal relationships exist among the five constructs we have identified, but we do not pursue them here.

EXPLORATORY MODEL OF VARIABLES THAT INFLUENCE PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Our exploratory model consists of four major categories or sets of independent variables that work together to influence psychological empowerment. These four major categories of variables are presented in Figure 2 and described briefly here. More specific operationalization of variables within each category is found in the Method section.

We posit that when individuals come to a group or organization to participate, they arrive with at least two categories of preparticipation personal attributes that influence the subsequent empowerment process, either directly or through mediating variables, such as demographic variables and community perception variables.

Demographic variables describe individual characteristics such as age, education, home ownership, and so forth. Such variables have been linked theoretically and empirically to community perceptions and attitudes as well as to participation in voluntary organizations (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990. Florin & Wandersman, 1984; Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Serrano-Garcia, 1984; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992).

Community perceptions and attitudes involve individuals' perceptions and feelings about their community. In our work, the community is a crucial aspect of the context, representing the cause toward which individual and collective action may be directed. These perceptual and attitudinal variables have as their referent the physical and social context of that community and are seen to influence the level and intensity of individual participation and to color the individual's perceptions of the organization in which he or she participates. Variables such as an individual's sense of community and perceptions of community problems have been theoretically and empirically related to citizen participation (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Wallerstein, 1992; Zimmerman, 1995; in press). For example, Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, and Chavis (1990) have shown how "catalysts" in the physical environment (such as poorly maintained properties) and "enablers" in the social environment (such as neighboring behavior) can influence an individual's participation in a voluntary organization.

As an individual becomes involved in an organization, two other sets of variables further shape the evolution of psychological empowerment: participation and social climate variables. Participation involves the amount of time an individual devotes to the organization, the different roles that an individual plays for the organization and the proximate benefits and costs experienced. The time and energy an individual devotes may provide opportunities for building participatory competence, developing or refining knowledge and skills, and contributing to collective accomplishments. A developing empirical literature has associated participation with various aspects of empowerment (Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992). For example, Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988), using data collected from participants in a variety of community organizations, found greater participation associated with higher scores on several measures reflecting the desire for and actual experience of personal and political efficacy. Chavis, Florin, Rich and Wanderman (1987) found that members of block associations were significantly more likely than nonmembers to demonstrate expectations of collective efficacy such as thinking that residents could solve block problems. Participation is also promoted and maintained to the extent that it produces benefits and avoids costs for the individual (Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich, Chavis, 1990; Rogers, Howard-Pitney, Feighery, & Altman, 1993).

Organizational perceptions and attitudes involve the individual's perceptions and feelings about the organizational context. All organizations arrange their human resources into certain structural configurations (e.g., authority hierarchy, standard procedures, and specialized subunits)

and also perform functions that focus their activities both quantitatively and qualitatively. Assessing organizational or social climate perceptions assumes that members within an organization are participant observes in the group milieu and are uniquely qualified to appraise it. Individuals have perceptions of relationships among members, leadership, and group efficiency. They also experience a certain level of satisfication with these and other aspects of the organization and develop a certain level of identification with and commitment to the organization. Organizational perceptions and participation may reciprocally influence each other in many ways (e.g., decreased satisfaction leads to decreased participation; increased participation leads to more commitment). Organizational perceptions and attitudes also have been linked to participation and suggested as influencing empowerment (Florin & Wandersman, 1984; Kieffer, 1984; Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Riger, 1984; Serrano-Garcia, 1984; Swift & Levin, 1987; Wallerstein, 1992; Zimmerman, 1990, 1995. Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992). For example, feelings of satisfaction and commitment lead to intentions for future participation or an organizational social climate that creates feelings of involvement leads to greater development of participatory competence and more identification with the accomplishments of the collective.

BEYOND PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT: USING THE MODEL TO ANSWER OUR MULTILEVEL QUESTIONS

This study used the model described above as a basis from which to address the questions of this study, extending our conception from the individual to the organizational level. First, the relationship of each of the separate sets of variables in the model to psychological empowerment was examined, in order to answer the question. "How is participation in a community coalition related to psychological empowerment?" Next the variables from individuals within each community coalition were aggregated and a multilevel data analysis method was employed (Kenny & LaVoie, 1985, described below) to determine whether there had been group-level effects. We then identified which group-level predictor variables were associated with group-level or collective empowerment, which we regarded as indicating an organization empowering of its members. Finally, the same multilevel analysis was used to relate the group-level variables to a completely separate measure, gathered 1 year later, which reflected how organizationally empowered the community coalition had been. In our model, the extent to which a coalition was able to effect the policy decisions

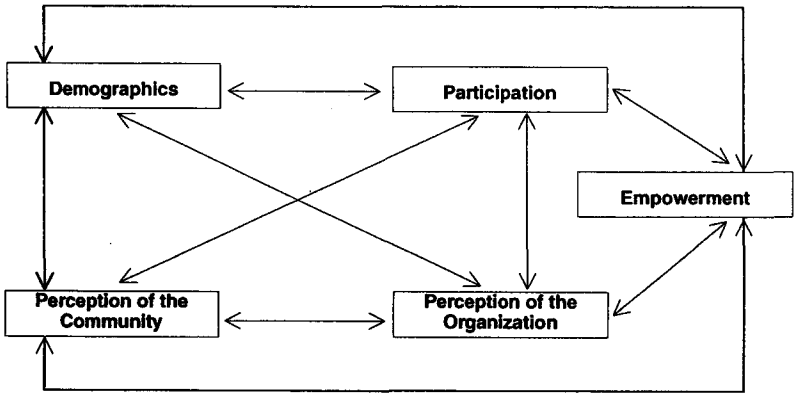

Fig. 2. Factors influencing empowerment.

and resource allocations of other influential community institutions was used as a definition of organizational empowerment. This definition or organizational empowerment reflects an important aspect of a coalition's ability to impact and modify its own environment—the influence it can exert on local decision makers (Swift & Levin, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995). Further, increasing coalitions' attempts to mobilize and exert such policy influence was also an explicit objective of the "Consortium for Community Initiatives," a 5-year Community Partnership grant from the federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention that involved 22 of the coalitions examined in this study.

We have left more complex modeling (e.g., of reciprocal interactions among constructs and mediating relationships) for future work, choosing to begin by building a credible conceptual and empirical foundation for our approach to empowerment. Clearly, reciprocal interactions among the categories of variables illustrated in Figure 2 not only are possible, they are likely, and ultimately (with more data across multiple time points) we expect to examine these possibilities.

METHOD

Setting and Context

In 1988, the Rhode Island state legislature passed the Rhode Island Substance Abuse Prevention Act (RISAPA), whose purpose was to "promote the planning and implementation of comprehensive local substance

abuse prevention programs in Rhode Island communities" by supporting community efforts to form broadly representative task forces. (The community coalitions in Rhode Island are termed "task forces" and that designation is used hereafter to refer to the groups from which we collected our data) The task forces were charged with generating comprehensive prevention plans sensitive to the unique combination of risk factors and resources present in each community. All cities and towns in Rhode Island agreed to participate, forming 35 local community prevention task forces. In 1991, a subgroup of 22 of the task forces came together with several support organizations and created the "Consortium for Community Initiatives," which obtained a 5-year Community Partnership grant from the federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention to build participating task force capacity. The Consortium provides a wide variety of training, technical assistance, and other support services, organized as an overall support infrastructure or "enabling system" (Chavis, Florin, & Felix, 1992). The Community Research and Services Team gathered data from all 35 task forces as part of this evaluation. This includes the mailed survey to task force members and the telephone interviews with key informants described here.

Instruments

The instruments employed for the purposes of this study were a Task Force Member Survey and a Key Informant Telephone Survey. The member survey contains 173 items assessing demographics, participation level, prevention knowledge and expectations, perceptions of social climate and a variety of other dimensions. It was administered in 1992 to all the members of the 35 community task forces in Rhode Island. The key informant interview was a brief, highly structured telephone interview with three central community figures (President of town council, Chief of Police, and Superintendent of Schools) from the municipalities served by each of the 35 task forces. The overall purpose of the interview, conducted in 1993, was to provide independent confirmation of task force existence, visibility, acceptability, and perceived impact of task force activity in their respective communities.

Data from the member survey were used for all variables except for a single indicator of the extent to which each task force was empowered, which was derived from two items of the key informant survey.

Participants

Respondents to the Member Survey. The Task Force Member Survey was sent to the 830 current members of the 35 community task forces across the state of Rhode Island and 350 responded for an approximate response rate of 41%. Of the subjects who responded, 38% were male and 61% female. Their ages ranges from 15 to 76 years, with the majority of respondents (64%) falling within the ages of 30 to 50. Fifty-nine percent had been on their task force between 1 and 3 years. Highest level of education attained ranged from high school to some postdoctoral work. Most respondents (84%), however, had received anywhere from high school diplomas to master's degrees. Ninety percent described themselves as Caucasian, 4% as African American 1% as Asian American, 1% Hispanic/Latino, 1% American Indian, and 1% were classified as other. Sixty-seven percent were married, 12% single, 11% divorced, 2% separated, 3% widowed, and 1% cohabiting. Most respondents had an annual income between $30,000 and $80,000. Finally, 71% worked full-time, 16% part-time, 1% were unemployed, and 4% were retired. Unfortunately, demographic information was not available for nonrespondents, and we were therefore unable to determine the representativeness of our respondents as a sample of the entire task force membership.

Respondents to the Key Informant Interview. There were 106 respondents to the Key Informant Telephone Survey (35 council chairs, 33 police chiefs, and 38 school superintendents) for a 93% response rate from the 114 individuals targeted. To keep the interview short, only a few demographic questions were asked of the key informant. The average age of the key informants was 51, their average tenure in their role was 7.2 years, and their tenure working in the town was 16 years. Of these respondents, 39% had a child 18 or younger living at home and 73% of the respondents resided in the community about which they were commenting.

Dependent Variables

Variables from the member survey and key informant survey that were used in the current study are described below, along with relevant psychometric information such as alpha reliability coefficients for scales. (Information regarding scale construction, response formats, and psychometric information as well as copies of survey instruments can be obtained from the first author.)

Psychological Empowerment

The major dependent variable, psychological empowerment, comprised the following five scales. As discussed later in this paper, these five scales held together in a principal components analysis.

Perceived Knowledge and Skill Development. A 7-item scale (α = .91) that asked members to rate, on a scale from 1 (no change) to 4 (major increase), the extent to which they felt participating in the task force had changed their knowledge (e.g., Knowledge of risk and protective factors related to alcohol and Other Drug Abuse), their beliefs (e.g., Belief that prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems is possible) and their skills (e.g., Skills in conducting a community planning/problem-solving process).

Perceived Participation Competence. A 6-item scale (α = .76) adapted for this specific context from Florin and Wandersman (1984) where respondents rated their level of agreement, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with statements about their skills. The statements included both those about generic participation skills (e.g., I find it had to speak up at task force meetings; I can organize people in the Task Force to get things done) and skills directly related to Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention (e.g., I can contribute expertise in the implementation of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse prevention programs to the group).

Expectancies for Future Individual Contributions. A 4-item scale (α = .79) where respondents rated, on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely), the likelihood that they would engage in each of four different kinds of activities as a member of their community task force over the next 12 months. The items included personal participation (e.g., I will devote time outside of meetings to the Task Force), as well as intentions to personally produce outcomes in one's own organization (e.g., I will influence my group or organization to devote, resources to increase community Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse prevention activities).

Perceived Group/Organizational Accomplishments. A 7-item sale (α = .89) where respondents rated, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the extent to which they felt their task force had produced a variety of effects in their community. Community effects included general ones (e.g., Increased community-wide awareness of Alcohol and other Drug Abuse), effects on services (e.g., Improved services and programs for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse prevention in this community), proximal outcomes (e.g., Helped organizations working for prevention to increase their joint influence over community decisions), and long-range impacts (e.g., Increased the chance that children and youth will avoid developing Alcohol and Other Drug problems).

Expectancies for Future Group/Organizational Accomplishments. This 5-item scale (α = .85) asked respondents to rate, on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely), the likelihood of different potential task force accomplishments. Potential Task Force accomplishments included both general (e.g., The Task Force will continue to expand and strengthen AODA prevention activities in the community) and specific statements (e.g., The Task Force will increase its resources for prevention programming in this community).

Organizational Empowerment

The other dependent variable, organizational empowerment, was derived from two items in the Key Informant Telephone Survey. The two items were chosen to reflect the task force's ability to influence its environment by impacting decisions in important community systems and by accessing resources for prevention from these systems. (cf. Heller, 1989; Swift & Levine, 1987) Each key informant was asked two questions concerning the impact of the task force on his or her "own organization" (e.g., the superintendent commented on the school system, police chiefs on police department, and council chairs on the town council/government). One question asked how much impact the task force had on "your organization's policies or procedures concerning alcohol and other drug use." The other question asked how much impact the task force had on "the resources your organization devotes to preventing alcohol and other drug problems." Responses were on a scale of 1 (none), 2 (some) 3 (moderate), and 4 (a great deal). Responses were averaged across the two items and aggregated across the key informants for each community to create a single overall organizational empowerment variable for each of the 35 task forces. Although restricted to a specific aspect of organizational empowerment and limited by the self-report nature of the data, this organizational empowerment variable is strengthened by aggregating ratings of task force impact on both "loot" and "clout" (Rappaport, 1977) from three key informants in top leadership positions. It is also important to note that these top leadership positions represent three different community sectors central to task force prevention activities.

Independent Variables

Demographic

The *first set* of independent variables looked at in this study consisted of demographic variables including age, gender, education, income, marital status, and home ownership. Ethnicity was discarded as a possible covariate

due to its relatively low variance and inability to discriminate (93% of those surveyed were of Caucasian origin). All of the above variables were measured either dichotomously (e.g., male/female, homeowner/renter), used a range of possible categorical responses (such as income), or were simply tabulated (such as age).

Perception of the Community Variables

The *second set* of independent variables contained two variables. These two variables were entered separately in the multiple regression analysis (see below for more details).

Sense of Community. A 5-item scale (α = .84) where respondents rated their level or agreement, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with statements about their feeling about their community. The statements were designed to capture several of aspects of Sense of Community identified by McMillan and Chavis (1986) including feelings of connection (e.g., A place I feel at home in), support (e.g., A place where people help each other out) and collective problem solving (e.g., A place where people work together to solve community problems).

Perceived Severity of Community Problems. Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale from 1 (not a problem) to 5 (very great problem), the extent of severity of each of different kind of problems facing their community. A wide range of 11 specific problems was listed including Alcohol and Other Drug problems (e.g., Drug Abuse, Drunken Driving), problems often cooccurring with Alcohol and Other Drug problems (e.g., Family violence/child abuse, School dropout), and problematic community conditions (e.g., Inadequate social services, Lack of recreational opportunities). In addition, the use of an "other" category allowed respondents to supply and rate a specific problem not mentioned. Ratings on the 12 items were highly interrelated (α = .89) and were therefore treated as a scale.

Participation Variables

The *third set* of independent variables were related directly to an individual's participation in the task force. As will be shown, principal components analyses (PCAs) indicated that hours of participation and kinds of participation roles formed one factor (called Participation Level in this study), and costs and benefits of participation formed another factor (called Net Benefits of Participation). All of the participation variables in this set included:

Hours of Participation in the Average Month. Respondents were asked to estimate the number of hours they devoted, "in an average month," to each of four different kinds of participation activities. An alpha coefficient was *not* calculated because these items were *not* expected to form a scale. A measure of participation in an average month was created by summing across respondents' reports of the number of hours devoted in the average month to four different kinds of participation activities (e.g, hours for subcommittee work outside of meetings).

Kinds of Participation Roles. Respondents were asked what kind of roles they play in the task force. They responded yes or no to nine different roles which included general participatory roles (e.g., serve as a member of a committee), to structural leadership positions (e.g., chair a committee, chair the entire task force). The variable was created by summing the number of yes responses across the nine different roles.

Benefits to Participation. A 6-item scale ($\alpha = .84$) where respondents rated, on a scale from 1 (very much a benefit) to 4 (not all a benefit) [the scale was reverse scored for analyses], the extent to which their participation produced personal (e.g., Gain personal recognition and respect from others) and social (e.g., Fulfills a sense of responsibility to contribute to the community) benefits.

Costs of Participation. A 7-item scale ($\alpha = .71$) that asked respondents to indicate, on a scale from 1 (very much of a difficulty) to 4 (not at all a difficulty), how much their participation produced either personal difficulties (e.g., Demands too much of my personal time) or difficulties related directly to task force functioning (e.g., Feeling that the task force never gets anything done).

Organizational Variables

The *fourth and final set* of independent variables assessed respondents perception of the Task Force's internal atmosphere (or organizational climate) and feelings about the task force organization. The first three scales mentioned below formed one factor in the principal components analysis (which we called Organizational Climate). Commitment did not fall on this climate factor and was entered separately in the multiple regression analysis. Information on all of these scales is provided below:

Involvement/Inclusion. A 5-item social climate scale ($\alpha = .85$) where respondents rated their level of agreement, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with statements about member involvement (e.g., Everyone is involved in discussions, not just a few) in task force operations.

Task Focus. A 5-item social climate scale (α = .84) where respondents rated their level of agreement, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with statements about order (e.g., The Task Force was disorganized and inefficient) and organization (e.g., The group needs more formalization and structure) in the task force.

Satisfaction Level. Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction, on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) with four different aspects of the task force (e.g, The programs proposed to meet objectives). The four items were interrelated (α = .90) and were therefore treated as a scale.

Commitment: A 4-item scale (α = .86) which asked respondents to rate their level of agreement, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with statements reflective of pride in (e.g., I feel a strong sense of pride in Task Force accomplishment) and commitment to (e.g., I really care about the future of this Task Force) the task force.

RESULTS

This study analyzed data in several stages. We first describe preliminary PCAs, followed by analyses and results for each of the three major questions. (Details of quantitative analyses may be obtained from the first author.)

To construct the dependent variable of individual empowerment, a PCA on the five variables hypothesized to compose the higher order psychological empowerment construct was performed. This analysis produced a single factor, accounting for 50% of the total variance. Loadings on the five component scales ranged from .520 to .844, supporting the construction of a composite variable of psychological empowerment incorporating all five scales.

To refine the predictor variable set, two PCAs were performed. A PCA on the set of variables relating to individual participation in task forces yielded two significant factors: Net Benefits of Participation, comprising benefits and costs of participation (accounting for 39% of total variance), and Participation Level, comprising average hours of participation per month and the number of roles played (accounting for 27% of total variance). A PCA on the member's perceptions of the task force as an organization led to the construction of two predictors: Organizational Climate (incorporating involvement, task forcus, and satisfaction), and Commitment.

How is Participation in a Community Coalition Related to Psychological Empowerment?

A hierarchical stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed next, with the composite psychological empowerment variable as the dependent variable. The 12 independent variables were arranged in four sets, entered hierarchically in the sequences: 1, demographic variables; 2, community variables; 3, participation variables; and 4, organizational variables. Variables within each set could only enter if they contributed significant unique variance ($p < .05$) to the regression equation. The sequence was chosen because of our working model of psychological empowerment described in Figure 2, which assumed that demographic and community variables that might be associated with psychological empowerment precede and influence participation and should therefore be treated as possible covariates, entered before participation. Participation is entered before the organizational variables to determine if an individual's view of the organizational qualities of the task force contributes to the prediction of psychological empowerment over and above the other three sets of variables. Table I presents the results of the regression equation.

None of the six variables from the demographic set was significantly associated with psychological empowerment and thus none entered the equation. However, all six of the independent variables in the other three sets were significantly associated with psychological empowerment. Further, all contributed significant unique variance to the regression equation. Although all six variables were significant contributors to the final regression equation there were differences in the magnitude of their contribution to the equation. The strongest contributors to the final regression equation were organizational climate and participation level, which were of approximate equal weight. This is a clear indication of the importance of the individual's degree of involvement and view of task force functioning to psychological empowerment. Furthermore, as described above, these variables contributed unique variance over and above other variables. The commitment and net benefits variables came next and contributed approximately equally to the equation, with the two community variables contributing much less to the overall equation.

What Characteristics are Related to Community Task Forces That are Empowering of Their Members?

Although we can describe factors that are associated with psychological empowerment, what are the characteristics of task forces that are organizationally empowering of their members? As we described earlier, many individuals who have committed themselves to a community coalition

Table I. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Individual Empowerment

Set	Step/variable		Initial entry steps		Final weights	
			R^2	R^2 change	β	*t* test
Demographics	No variables entered					
Community	Step 1:	Sense of community	.18		.13	3.19[b]
	Step 2:	Perceived severity of community problem	.19	.01[a]	.09	2.44[b]
Participation	Step 3:	Net benefits of participation	.44	.25[b]	.22	4.43[b]
	Step 4:	Participation level	.54	.10[b]	.28	7.80[b]
Organizational	Step 5:	Organizational climate	.62	.08[b]	.30	6.17[b]
	Step 6:	Commitment	.66	.04[b]	.25	5.65[b]

[a] $p < .05$
[b] $p < .01$.

approach are concerned with whether they are helping to create empowering organizations. To address this question, we aggregated the variables from individuals (n = 260) within each of 34 community task forces and employed a multilevel data analysis method (Kenny & LaVoie, 1985) to identify group level variables and their relationship with the degree of group level empowerment. Since one task force had only one respondent (and thus, no intraclass or group level variance), it was dropped from further analyses.

First, we employed intraclass correlation (ICC) to determine if a group level analysis was warranted. When individuals are aggregated within groups that are thought to influence their individual members, such as in these community task forces, observations within each group may be nonindependent. For example, to the extent that individuals from different task forces collectively demonstrate different levels of psychological empowerment at the group level, the task forces may be said to differ in how empowering they are of their members. The ICC indicates the percentage of variance in a measure that is attributable to group membership. Our analysis of the data indicated that psychological empowerment and all six of the independent variables had a significant ICC. Psychological empowerment had an intraclass correlation of .128 (F = 2.134, $p < .001$) Intraclass correlations for the six independent variables ranged from .051 to .302 (all were significant at the $p < .10$ level adopted to minimize vulnerability to Type II errors of not identifying relationships where they might exist due to small group level sample size (Kenny & La Voie, 1985); indeed, all of them with the exception of Participation Level and Sense of Community were significant at the $p < .001$ level].

Thus task forces did significantly differ in their empowering of members, in the organizational climate perceived by members, and in all other variables. The sizes of the ICCs indicate the percentage of the variance in these variables attributable to group membership, which range from the modest to moderate. For example, less than 13% of the variance in psychological empowerment was attributable to group membership, while approximately 30% of the variance in members' perception of organizational climate was attributable to group membership. The presence of group-level effects, even modest ones, is of interest to those who study social organizations such as community task forces. We therefore used the statistical program LEVEL (Kenny & Stigler, 1983) to examine group-level relationships between the independent variables and collective empowering, which for us represents how much the task force has been an "empowering organization" (Swift & Levin, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995).

LEVEL adjusts group level correlations for the presence of individual effects. That is, when researchers aggregate scores within groups and then use the group as a unit of analysis, it is not known how much of the observed relationships were caused by an actual interaction process that affects the member's response and how much by the mere sum of individual effects. LEVEL adjusts correlations at one level for the effects of the other. To the extent that a correlation among aggregated variables confounds variance due to the individual level relationship, the adjusted correlation will change. When the individual level variance is removed from the group level relationship, the adjusted correlation may be attenuated (Kenny & Lavoie, 1985). There are no tests for the differences between adjusted and unadjusted correlations, as they result from different formulas representing different operationalizations of group level latent constructs. This analytic approach has yielded results that contrasted with conventional analyses, even detecting relationships at adjusted levels that were not seen in the conventional analyses (Florin, Giamartion, Kenny, & Wandersman, 1990).

At the group level examined here, these adjusted correlations represent relationships between group-level variances (*an adjusted mean square cross-product formula is used,* not *the group's arithmetic mean*): For psychological empowerment then, the adjusted group correlation indicates the group-level relationship between the task forces' collective empowering of their members and other group level phenomena. In Table II these adjusted correlations are presented along with correlations making use of unadjusted averages Note that in Tables II and III we report on correlations significant at the .10 level. Given the lack of information about relationships in this area, we chose a less conservative criterion level for significance.

Column A in Table II contains the results of the conventional aggregated group-level analysis. Moderately high correlations are observed with net benefits, organizational climate, commitment, and sense of community (range r = .47 to .79). When adjusted in the LEVEL analysis, these correlations increase (range r = 58 to .95), revealing the influence of the individual level confounding variance, but all the basis relationships, relative magnitudes, and significance levels remain constant. Overall then, we can conclude that the extent to which a task force is an empowering organization for its members is in part dependent upon group-level net benefits and organizational climate, as well as with the collective levels of commitment and sense of community among the task force members.

Table II. Group Level Correlations Between Independent Variables and Psychological Empowerment

	Psychological empowerment (collective empowering)	
	A	B
	Conventional/unadjusted	Level/adjusted
	(n = 34)	(n = 34)
Participation level	.25	.01
Net benefits of participation	.79[c]	.95[a]
Organizational climate	.74[c]	.85[a]
Commitment	.75[c]	.90[a]
Sense of community	.47[c]	.57[b]
Perceived severity of community problems	.04	.01

[a] Approximate Z test greater or less than ± 1.96 indicating 95% confidence cutoff (Gale, 1987). No significance tests have been universally accepted for correlations among latent variables, but the Z test has been suggested and used by some.

[b] Approximate Z test greater or less than ± 1.64 suggesting that the correlation is significantly different from zero at less restrictive 90% confidence level.

[c] $p < .05$.

What Characteristics of a Community Task Force are Related to its Being Organizationally Empowered to Influence its Environment?

We also used the LEVEL analysis to examine which group-level characteristics would be related to our second dependent variable, the organizational empowerment of the task force. Recall that this variable was derived from our key informant interview, a separate measure conducted at a time later than the member survey. The composite variable of organizational empowerment, derived from reports from the school superintendent, police chief, and town or city council chair for each task force, reflects the task force's ability to impact decisions and resource allocation in important community systems. Table III shows the conventional unadjusted and LEVEL adjusted correlations between organizational empowerment and the six independent variables as well as individual level empowerment. Using the liberal 90% ($p < .10$) confidence level, two significant relationships were found between the unadjusted aggregate task force variables and the key informants' perceptions that the

task force had influenced important local power sources. Task forces' average amount of psychological empowerment measurement in 1992 was correlated .30 with our operationalization of organizational empowerment measured in 1993. Aggregate perception of organizational climate was also related .27 with organizational empowerment. The adjusted analysis in column B confirmed there results after isolating true group-level effects, again producing somewhat enhanced magnitudes of correlation. The extent to which a task force was empowering of its members was related to the task force later being organizationally empowered. Similarly, task forces whose organizational climate was more focused, inclusive, and satisfactory to members in 1992 were reported to produce greater impacts by key informants in 1993.

DISCUSSION

We believe that the results of this study confirm and bolster the findings of several prior studies of empowerment (Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Kieffer, 1984; Rappaport, 1984; Serrano-Garcia, 1984; Swift & Levin, 1987; Wallerstein, 1992; Zimmerman, 1990; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992) and contribute new empirical findings that may enlarge our theoretical understanding of empowerment. We also see some practical implications for community organizations engaged in empowerment praxis. At the same time, we acknowledge that the study suffers from important limitations that offer useful directions for future work. We take up each of these points briefly.

This study was conducted in a context of empowerment praxis, adding ecological validity to the empirical work of several previous empowerment studies. First, we explicitly hypothesized that psychological empowerment was a higher order construct composed of five variables linking the past with the future and the individual with the group. That this hypothesis was confirmed is consistent both with prior studies or psychological empowerment (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Kumpfer, Turner, Hopkins, & Librett, 1993; Swift & and Levin, 1987; Wallerstein, 1992; Zimmerman, 1990; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992) and also with the theoretical stance that empowerment is context specific (Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995), since variables used here were operationalized specifically for the context of a community task force engaged in empowerment praxis. Second, participation variables and community variables, consistent with previous studies, were associated with psychological empowerment. Community variables (e.g., sense of community and perceived severity of

Table III. Correlations Between Organizational Empowerment and Other Group-Level Variables

	Organizational empowerment	
	A	B
	Conventional/ unadjusted	Level/ adjusted
	(n = 34)	(n = 34)
Individual empowerment (collective empowering)	.30[b]	.42[a]
Participation level	-.09	-.17
Net benefits of participation	.23	.28
Organizational climate	.27[b]	.31[a]
Commitment	.26	.34
Sense of community	.03	.06
Perceived severity of community problems	.17	.20

[a] Approximate Z test greater or less than ± 1.64 indicating 90% confidence cutoff (Gale, 1987). No significance tests have been universally accepted for correlations among latent variables, but the Z test has been suggested and used by some.

[b] $p < .10$.

community problems) were significantly related to psychological empowerment in this study. In fact, however, these two community variables together contributed less to the final regression equation than participation level contributed by itself. This does not mean that community variables are unimportant for psychological empowerment. They are important in their own right and may play an important role as a catalyst for participation (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). It does mean that there seem to be some very strong relationships between psychological empowerment and participation variables, beyond any contribution from community variables. Individuals who spend more time and play more roles in the task force tend to be those who report more psychological empowerment, as do those who perceive higher net benefits from participation. Active individual participation is a major route to achieving psychological empowerment, at least as defined in this study. Achieving would seem to be the key word here, for empowerment appears not to be a spectator sport. The experience of being empowered seems less likely to accrue to "free riders" or bystanders.

We believe that this study contributes three new empirical findings to the study of empowerment. First, this study establishes the importance of the organizational context to psychological empowerment. The organizational Climate variable was the strongest independent variable associated with psychological empowerment. Moreover, the organizational variables

contributed significant unique variance to the regression equations, over and above all other independent variables, including participation. This finding is especially interesting since, although several authors (Clark, 1989; Gruber & Tickett, 1987; Kieffer, 1984; Riger, 1984; Serrano-Garcia, 1984; Swift & Levin, 1987; Wallerstein, 1992; Zimmerman, 1990; 1995; Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992) have suggested such a relationship, there has been little empirical evidence directly relating organizational factors to psychological empowerment, and none that we are aware of that has done so while controlling for several other covariates. The data here indicate a strong association between psychological empowerment and perceiving oneself part of an inclusive and focused group effort with which one identifies and to which one commits. This is yet another way of *contextualizing* psychological empowerment within the group or organization, another way of reminding us that it is always person-in-situation units with which we are dealing.

A second new empirical finding of interest is the identification of organizational variables related to the task forces empowering of their members. Task forces significantly differed in their collective empowerment of members, our indicator that they were indeed "empowering" organizations. Further, we identified organizational characteristics that were strongly related to this collective empowerment. Most notable here were having an organization that promoted participation benefits and reduced participation costs for members and having an organization perceived by members to be both task-focused and inclusive of all members in discussions and decisions. Both of these variables had a moderate proportion of variance (19 and 30 respectively) attributable to group membership and both of these variables may be manipulated as the organization attempts to produce more collective empowerment. As such, they reflect the kind of structural and procedural characteristics mentioned in typical definitions of the "empowering organization" (Swift & Levin, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995). We submit that a fully articulated view of the "empowering organization" identifies both the *fact* that empowering has indeed taken place (by documenting collective empowerment) and, in addition, identifies which particular empowering mechanisms and processes are invoked to bring about collective empowerment.

Finally, the third new empirical finding of some note in this study is the relationship between the collective empowering of members by a task force and the task force itself being organizationally empowered. Although the liberal confidence level we employed underscores the need for replication of this finding, we still see it as a very promising indication of meaningful cross-level connections. Distinctions have long been made

between organizations that were empowering of members and those that were influential or empowered organizations (Swift & Levin, 1987), and the point has often been made that organizations could be one without the other (Zimmerman, 1995). The relationship demonstrated in this study between empowering and empowered, especially in that it was demonstrated longitudinally and with different measures, provides empirical support for those who wish to create positive organizational "spirals" by nurturing members who will build organizational capacity (cf. Florin, Chavis, Wandersman, & Rich, 1992). This empirical relationship thus offers the promise of a genuine empowerment praxis, even while calling our attention to the many mediating mechanisms that remain to be discovered.

This study employed a multilevel analysis approach. We believe community psychologists might benefit from examining multilevel data using intraclass correlations when their conceptual models assume the potential nonindependence of some variables. Comparing conventional and LEVEL adjusted correlations for collective empowering and organizational empowerment indicated the enhanced size of estimated relationships produced by the isolation of group-level variance, and provided reassurance that obtained relationships were genuinely group-level results. The LEVEL program was among the first to several kinds of multilevel analyses now available (Bryk & Raudenbusch, 1992; DiPrete & Forrestal, 1994; Murray & Wolfinger, 1994) and such analyses will certainly become more common in the future. We believe they are especially useful in studying variables like empowerment, which may occur at several different levels simultaneously.

Do the results of this study have practical implications for organizations engaged in empowerment praxis? First, this study implies that those practitioners who want to promote psychological empowerment directly have several paths of influence represented by targeting any of the variables making up the psychological empowerment construct. Participatory competencies might be built directly through training, organizational progress, and achievements celebrated or expectations raised through sharing success stories from elsewhere. Obviously, targeting several variables simultaneously increases the probably of producing a synergistic effect. This study also points to organizational climate and participation variables as areas to which practitioners should certainly attend. Since psychological empowerment is related so strongly to participation variables, practitioners in organizations such as community task forces would do well to first provide a variety of participation options for members. A greater variety of participation options provide more opportunities to engage or "hook" members' energies and inter-

ests. Practitioners should also make well-delineated participation demands on new members to reduce fears of open-ended, free-wheeling commitments, and allow the reinforcements from participation to work. Concerning reinforcements, practitioners should always be attempting to increase the benefits of participation for members such as getting them personal recognition in local news media. They should also attempt to reduce the costs of participation for members such as needing to find caregivers for family members. When they increase benefits and reduce costs for their members, practitioners are engaged in what is known as "incentive management." Voluntary organizations that practice incentive management have been shown to promote more participation among members and be more organizationally viable over the long run (Prestby *et al.*, 1990). Finally, practitioners should particularly strive to create an inclusive and task-focused organization. Organizational climate was not only the strongest variable associated with psychological empowerment, it was also related to the extent to which a task force was empowering of its members and was also itself empowered. Several studies have found that participatory decision making (involvement/inclusion) and structure/formalization (task focus) within voluntary organizations promote involvement and more time spent working for the organizations (Milburn & Barbarin, 1987; Prestby & Wandersman, 1985). In addition, to the degree that more structure relates to more organizational empowerment in accomplishing tasks and achieving goals, psychological empowerment is reinforced and amplified.

The limitations of this study can also be seen as providing promising directions for future work. Limitations in the variability of our sample may have limited our power to detect relationships and our ability to generalize to other contexts. For example, the community coalitions examined here are at a particular organizational level (municipal) with a certain amount of built in resources (yearly state funding allocations) and a certain composition of membership (representatives of multiple community sectors). The respondents to the Task Force member Survey were relatively homogenous in many of their demographic characteristics and this lack of variance might have accounted for the fact that no demographic variables were associated with individual empowerment. The response rate of 41% to our member survey also resulted in a sample that contained a high proportion of the more active members of the coalitions, also possibly reducing the range of variability in the data. These facts point to the need for studies with a wider diversity of both organizations and participants.

Limitations in the data include an exclusive reliance on self-report data. For example, aggregate measures of individual members' perceptions

(i.e., degree of commitment, and sense of the benefits of participation) were related to the degree to which an organization was empowering of its members. Integration of these self-report with non-self-report data (e.g., decision-making patterns, degree of horizontal vs. vertical structures) would provide a better sense of the organizational profiles that are most conducive to empowering their members. In addition, observational or social indicator data relevant to task force functioning or accomplishments should be added in future studies. Further, with the exception of the data from the Key Informant Telephone Survey, the data are across-sectional, so that inferences about causality are limited. We make the standard plea for more longitudinal work, but are also aware of the complexity of planning such work within a community context. For example, we believe that our ability to detect a significant relationship between self-report measures of individual empowerment and key informants' reports of "organizational empowerment" a year later were due in part to (a) selection of a specific outcome that was really central to the goal of the coalitions; and (b) selection of a time interval between measurements that was appropriate for the kinds of changes coalitions were attempting. Future longitudinal work will challenge researchers like ourselves to outline the "logic models" behind their linking of multilevel empowerment constructs over time.

Finally, although the results of the hierarchical multiple regression clarify the relevant strength and unique variance contributed to individual empowerment by each of the independent variables, more complex models of causal relationships among the independent variables must be tested through methods such as structural equation modeling. Indeed, our model of these relationships would be ideally suited to a more rigorous structural equation modeling approach now that the exploratory analyses presented here have lent support to our initial hypotheses.

Despite these limitations, we believe the empirical results of this study strengthen both our conceptual understanding of empowerment as a dynamic, multilevel, temporal process and our ability to turn ideas into praxis for community change.

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