

ORGANIZING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
A Dialectic Journey of Theory and Praxis

Michael J. Papa
Arvind Singhal
Wendy H. Papa



SAGE Publications
New Delhi • Thousand Oaks • London

A dialectic approach to organizing for social change

Great truths are those truths the opposite of which are equally true.

—Carl Deutch (quoted in Johnson, 1996, p. 249)

Consider the actions of commercial sex workers in Kolkata, India. Although these women experience disempowerment and oppression on a daily basis, through their organizing actions they have carved out spaces of control and found paths to empowerment.¹

The capital of West Bengal is a city with a history of powerful labor unions and a leftist (Communist) government. Some 6,000 commercial sex workers (CSWs) in the Sonagachi red-light district in Kolkata (previously Calcutta) are organized in a strong labor union, the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (Women's Collaborative Committee), formed in 1995. This unique organization has 30,000 members who each pay dues of 50 cents per year. This labor union of CSWs in Kolkata fights against police harassment, provides schools for the children of commercial sex workers, and creates savings plans for its members (Plate 1.1). The labor union is enterprising; in 2001 it smuggled Raja family planning condoms from Bangladesh, a neighboring country, into Kolkata, so that CSWs would have adequate supplies for use with their customers. The typical CSW in Kolkata keeps a small stash of condoms under her pillow.

Initially guided by Dr. Smarajit Jana, the slight mustachioed epidemiologist in-charge of the Sonagachi project, the Women's Collaborative Committee has taken the lead in promoting condom use, which increased from 1 percent in 1992 to 82 percent in 2001 (Figure 1.1). As a result, prevalence of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) in Sonagachi is relatively low. Some 11 percent of Kolkata's

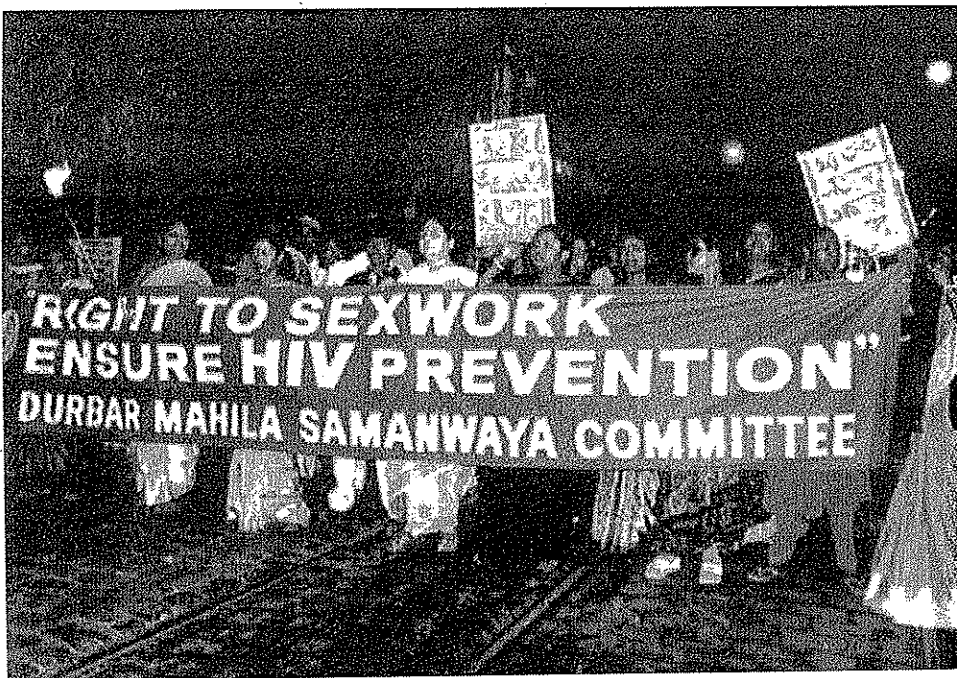


Plate 1.1

Kolkata's commercial sex workers organize for social change

Commercial sex workers in Kolkata's Sonagachi red-light district collectively fight against harassment by police and the mafia, routinely rescue under-age trafficked girls, and crusade against HIV infection. Armed with banners, torches, and placards they collectively demand their rights as sex workers, including the right to be HIV-free.

Source: Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

CSWs are HIV-positive, while in Mumbai, India's big port city on the west coast, the comparable figure is 70 percent.

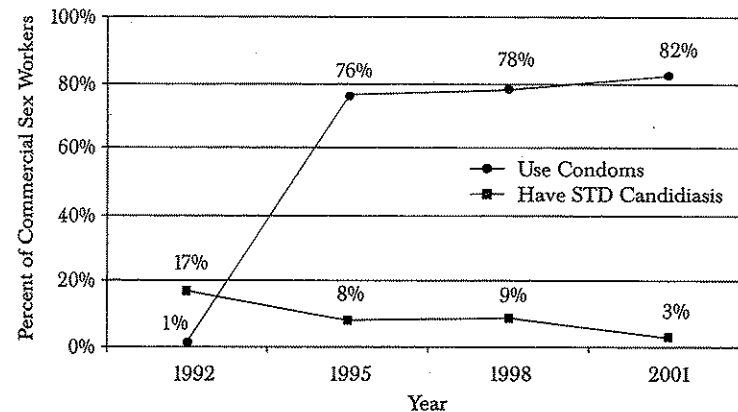
The HIV-prevention program in Kolkata employs 180 CSW opinion leaders and 100 other outreach workers, each paid about \$1 a day, and operates 12 health clinics for CSWs, funded by the Indian ministry of health. Wearing green jackets over their saris, CSW opinion leaders tell brothel "madams": "If you are to enjoy the fruits of the tree, you must keep the tree healthy" (Dugger, 1999, p. A1). The total cost of the intervention program with CSWs is \$210,000 per year. Through the Committee, CSWs in Kolkata have become leading crusaders against HIV infection (Singhal & Rogers, 2003). They were the first group in India to ask for legalization of commercial sex work and dignity for their profession.

It is instructive to contrast the empowered Kolkata CSWs with CSWs in Mumbai. In Kolkata, CSWs talk openly in front of their

Figure 1.1

Rising condom use and declining STD rates among Sonagachi commercial sex workers

As a result of empowered commercial sex workers who routinely use condoms, and the availability of locally-available STD treatment, Sonagachi has a relatively low prevalence of HIV and other STDs when compared to commercial sex districts in Mumbai and Delhi.



Source: Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

brothel madams; in Mumbai, CSWs listen attentively or speak quietly. In Kolkata, CSWs wear "decorous saris in muted colors and look like office workers waiting impassively at a bus stop." In Mumbai, by contrast, CSWs wear "shiny red lip gloss, midriff-bearing halters, skintight velvet pants, and gaudy saris. They pose aggressively with their faces set in a sulky come-on" (Dugger, 1999, p. A1).

The CSWs in Kolkata are *organizing for social change*, the process through which a group of individuals orchestrate their skills, resources, and human potential to gain control of their future. An individual sex worker in Kolkata has little power to change her life conditions; but organized collectively, the female CSWs accomplish a great deal. Hundreds of CSWs regularly *gherao* [encircle] the local police station, demanding action against pimps, hoodlums, and criminals who harass them.

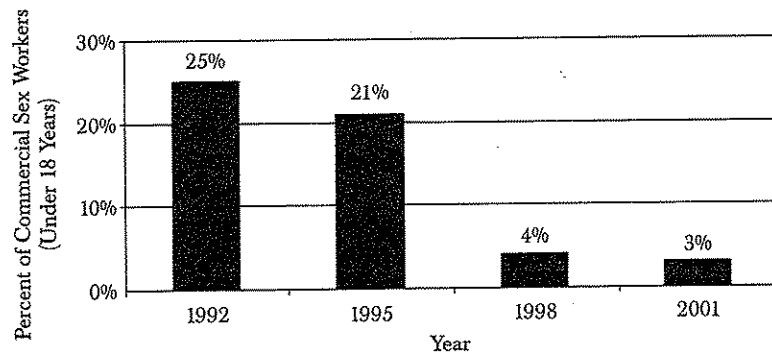
When author Singhal visited Sonagachi in 2004 with officials of the West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society, the

empowerment among Sonagachi CSWs was palpable. Minaal Kanti Dutta, the Project Director of the Sonagachi Project extended his hand in welcome and said: "I am Minaal K. Dutta, son of a commercial sex worker." Then he smiled and added: "And I am proud of it." Escorted by two outreach workers (both CSWs), author Singhal walked the narrow alleyways of Sonagachi, stopping to meet madams at Prem Kamal and Neel Kamal, two high class brothels, and then jostled across Inaam Box (I.B.) Lane. "This is the *mast* [sexy] lane," the outreach workers noted: "Here a prostitute charges about 50 rupees [one U.S. dollar] for a quickie." And, then instantly, they said: "Look, all the girls here are above 18 years of age." Sonagachi CSWs routinely intervene to rescue child prostitutes who are sold into the sex trade. In 1992, child prostitutes, under the age of 18 years constituted 25 percent of CSWs in Sonagachi. In 2001, with the organized interventions of CSWs, this number has dropped to 3 percent (Figure 1.2).

The present chapter frames our discussion of organizing for social change from a dialectical perspective. By taking such a perspective, we focus on the struggles and tensions that characterize individual and group efforts to betterment. We describe the main tenets of the

Figure 1.2
The decline of child prostitution in Sonagachi, Kolkata's commercial sex district

Sonagachi commercial sex workers regularly intervene in rescuing child prostitutes who are sold into the sex trade.



Source: Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

dialectical approach, provide an overview of the various contexts of organizing for social change explored in the present book, and introduce the dialectical tensions embedded in these social change efforts.

Organizing for Social Change

In aggregate terms, the world has progressed in alleviating poverty, promoting literacy, and improving health and sanitation. In the decade of the 1990s, the world's poor declined from 29 to 23 percent, primary school enrollments increased from 80 to 85 percent, 800 million people gained access to improved water supply, and 750 million to improved sanitation (UNDP, 2002). Further, in the past 25 years, 81 countries have taken significant steps to democratization; with 33 military regimes replaced by civilian ones.

However, the aforementioned numbers mask stark inequalities. Of the 6.5 billion people living in 2005, 2.8 billion people live on less than \$2 a day; and 1.2 billion survive on less than \$1 a day. The richest 1 percent of the world's population earns the equivalent of the poorest 57 percent (UNDP, 2002). The richest 10 percent of Americans (28 million people) earn as much as 2 billion of the world's poorest (UNDP, 2002). Further, in 2005, over 73 countries still do not hold free and fair elections, and 106 governments still restrict civil liberties and political freedoms.

How can the poor, vulnerable, silenced, and marginalized people of the world gain in political, economic, and social power? How can they achieve freedom and equality through democracy and participatory governance? How can they express their views and participate in decisions that shape their lives? A poor farmer in Niger who cannot send his children to school, but has to send them to work in the fields, lacks agency, efficacy, and choice. So does a wealthy educated woman in Brunei, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, whose gender excludes her from casting a political vote (UNDP, 2002). Dignity comes from exercising some form of choice. For instance, in Porto Alegre, Brazil, poor citizens, since the early 1990s, have been participating in preparing local municipality budgets, and reallocating government spending to address *their* social problems. In the first seven years of this experiment in participatory democracy, households with access to piped water supply increased

from 80 to 98 percent; and households with access to sanitation increased from 46 to 85 percent (UNDP, 2002). The tide can turn when the marginalized and the disfranchised collectively organize, thereby gaining in efficacy and agency.

■ What is Organizing?

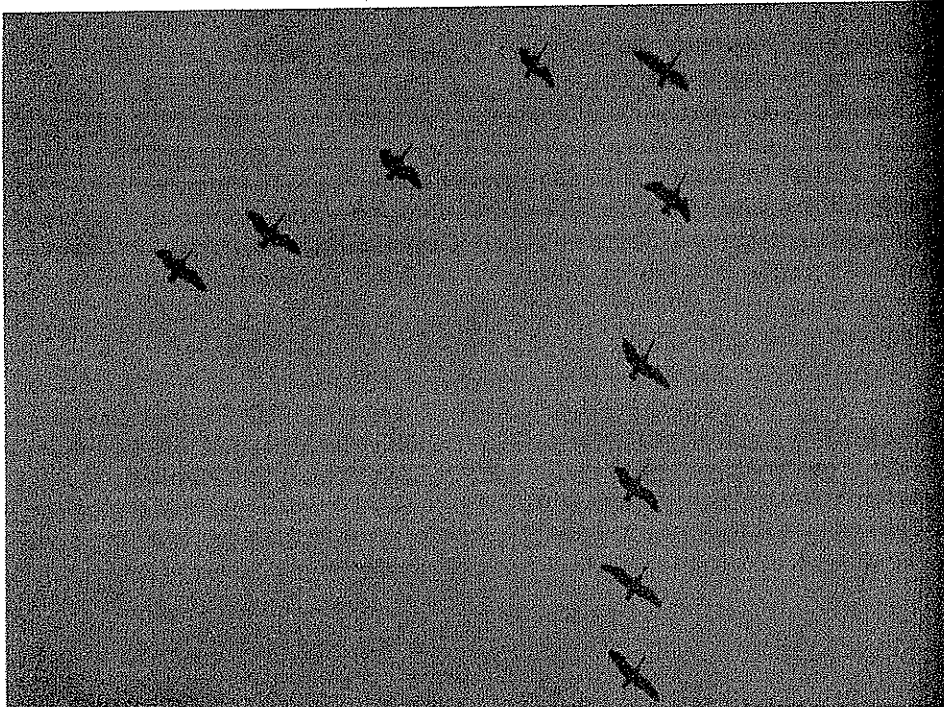
A flock of geese, flying in a V-formation, provides important lessons in organizing (Plate 1.2). A goose flock can fly up to 1,000 miles without resting; whereas a single goose is exhausted after flying about 500 miles. The geese flying in the back utilize the air currents coming from the wings of the geese in front to lift themselves (Taylor, Taylor, & Taylor-Ide, 2002). The lead bird, which tires easily, routinely drops

Plate 1.2

A flock of geese flying in a V-formation provides important lessons for collective organizing

A flock of geese can fly up to 1,000 miles without resting whereas a single goose can fly only about 500 miles. The geese nurture, encourage, and support each other to reap collective gains.

Source: Personal Files of the Authors.



Box 1.1: Organizing a Holiday Feast

Humans are essentially organizing beings. Organizing is at the core what we do on a daily basis—whether in school, on the playground, in the workplace, or at home. Organizing is as much a part of routine events (e.g., preparing a family dinner) as it is of special events (e.g., preparing a holiday feast). Preparing a family dinner and/or a holiday feast involves a complicated set of organizational tasks: Processing inputs, making decisions, coordinating the efforts of diverse people, sequencing and timing activities, managing hierarchical relationships, addressing conflict, and generating synergistic outcomes.

Consider the holiday feast as an act of organizing based on author Wendy Papa's reminiscences while growing up in Indiana. Admittedly, the holiday feast described here is characteristic of middle-to-upper class U.S. households.

The process of organizing a holiday feast often starts with a family cook who takes a leadership role in planning and executing the dinner. Family members may be consulted about what they wish to eat. At the group level there may be negotiation as choices are considered, accepted, and rejected.

The next stage might represent a plan for purchasing and storing ingredients. A list might be drawn and decisions may be made regarding who will purchase what ingredient and when. Purchases may be spread over a few days. Fresh cream for strawberries, for instance, may be picked up only hours before the dinner. As ingredients come into the house, some go to the pantry, some to the refrigerator, and some to the kitchen counter.

The day before the feast, the cook may mentally rehearse a plan for cooking the dishes, including appetizers, soup, entrée, dessert, and wine. Recipes might be organized and placed in the kitchen for easy reference.

The day of the meal, the cook may assign roles to different family members. Some may chop vegetables; others may prepare a specialty dish. During this phase, the cook displays leadership, accomplishing tasks and coordinating the activities of others.

As time for the feast gets close, one or more family members will prepare the table, placing a tablecloth and distributing glassware, utensils, napkins, and serving dishes. Flowers or candles might be placed on the table, and a musical score may be selected for the evening. The cook may then direct family members in the final presentation of the various dishes, ensuring they are served in a way that is pleasing and appetizing to the eye—a parsley garnish on the pasta, a touch of cilantro on the sauce.

Box 1.1: Organizing a Holiday Feast*(continued)*

In the flurry of activities in the last hour, unexpected difficulties may arise. Perhaps someone forgot to put dinner rolls in the oven; or the champagne was not chilled. Tensions may rise as the celebration nears. Under these circumstances, spontaneous solutions to problems are hatched, and meal preparations come to a close.

What do we learn about organizing from the process of organizing a holiday feast? Organizing involves planning, and it is helpful if someone with experience guides the process. This planning and directing may be done by a single leader, who coordinates the actions of others, or may be more diffused as decisions and actions are implemented collaboratively. Complex organizing requires coordination and management of resources—both material and human. The execution of a plan requires focusing on the task at hand to achieve outcomes in a timely manner. However, one should expect difficulties to arise and prepare to resolve problems judiciously. The solution may not be optimal, but perhaps works to satisfy most people. Further, effective organizing should result in people enjoying one another's company at the holiday feast, including the fruits of collective labor. That is, the whole should become more than the sum of its parts.

behind in the formation to ride the draft, and the geese at the back sequentially move forward. If a goose moves out of formation, the increased drag on its wings encourages it to fall back into position. Further, geese honk loudly while flying to encourage others and to identify their respective positions in the V-formation. A tired, wounded, or sick goose is never left alone. Two or three geese descend with it to the ground to protect, nurture, and nourish it back to health, before joining another passing flock.

A flock of geese in flight can illustrate the distinction between *organization* and *organizing*. An *organization* is composed of a group of individuals who engage in interdependent cooperative actions. Organizational members take inputs (materials, energy, and information) from the environment, process them, and return them to the environment as outputs (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977). So a flock of geese constitutes an organization (as does Harvard University, Dow Chemical, and the United Nations). However, the term *organization* is used in a static fixed sense without taking time into account.

Organizing, on the other hand, refers to the process-oriented, time-varying nature of the behaviors of members in an organization (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977). So a flock of geese flying in a V-formation and regularly rotating its leadership is engaged in organizing. In essence, an organization results from the results of organizing.

■ Organizing for What Purpose

Organizing can serve various purposes. Under Hitler, Germany was good at organizing. The Nazis murdered six million Jews in the highly organized death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Dachau, Sobibor, Belzek, and Majdanek. Hitler's insidious Final Solution involved a highly rational, systematic, and organized process of identifying Jews in Europe, transporting them to concentration camps over an intricate network of railroad junctions, gassing them, and disposing their remains with cold efficiency (Aly, Heim, & Blunden, 2003).

The insidious slave trade, which transported 30 million slaves from Africa to the New World from 1450 to 1850, was also carried out by cold, rational, organizing efficiency (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). Africans made for "ideal" workers in colonial plantations: They were physically strong, experienced in farm work and raising cattle, used to hot, muggy climates, and resistant to tropical diseases (Thomas, 1999). They were transported like cattle—chained, packed, and stacked in tight straight lines to minimize wasted space in the ship's hull (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997). The barest minimum food and water was provided in a regimented schedule on these long, hot, oppressively stifling journeys over the Atlantic. Sick or dying slaves were tossed overboard for a water burial.

In the present book, our interest lies not in such cold, rational, oppressive organizing processes. Our book is about *organizing for social change*, the process through which a group of individuals gains control of its future. We focus on organizing for social change processes that are pro-poor, pro-disempowered, pro-homeless, pro-hungry, pro-women, and pro-vulnerable. Organizing, in this sense, is empowering and transformative: It orchestrates people's talents, resources, and skills to enhance their collective power. We believe

Box 1.2: Stickball in the Bronx Playing as Organizing

Today, in the United States, when a child wants to play soccer or baseball, they join an organized neighborhood league. These leagues enlist the help of adults (often parents) who serve as coaches and referees. Children wear uniforms, often sponsored by local merchants, and are driven by parents ("Soccer Moms" or "Soccer Dads") on pre-determined days and times to a designated location for practice or play. For instance, when author Singhal's son, Aaryaman, played soccer in the Athens Recreation League in Spring 2005, the family drove over to West State Side Park's Field Eight each Monday and Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. Parents took turns bringing drinks and snacks during the games, and sat on colorful lawn chairs (carried from home), cheering their respective wards. A referee's long whistle signified the completion of the game, making room for another set of teams to take the field.

Contrast the aforementioned experience of organized play with author Michael Papa's experiences in the Bronx. Papa played thousands of games of baseball while growing up in the Bronx during the 1960s and 1970s. Only a fraction of these involved organized competition. One popular game was "stickball," played with a rubber ball and a bat made out of a broom handle. The rules governing these games were negotiated impromptu. A sewer cap on a street corner served as home plate. The next sewer cap located 100 feet away was second base. The door handles of parked cars often served as first and third base. If one hit the ball the distance of roughly two sewer caps (200 feet), a home run was scored. These games were played daily on Bronx city streets where play would temporarily halt to allow a car to pass by. The players made the best of limited resources. The idea of wearing uniforms was alien.

A game would start spontaneously, not at a pre-determined hour, by choosing two teams from available players. Player positions would be determined based on how many players were available. There were no whistles; the umpiring of games was left up to the players. Disagreements about "strike outs" and "run outs" were quickly resolved—through altercation, negotiation, or accommodation. Rather than being told by adults in authority, the players co-negotiated rules. Most of the time was spent playing; often multiple games were played until the daylight turned to darkness.

Author Papa's stickball experiences in the Bronx embody a dialectic of *improvisation* and *institutionalization*. Improvisation occurred when roles were negotiated based on the number of available players, when play

Box 1.2: Stickball in the Bronx (continued)

halted due to passing cars, when participants served as umpires, and when balls bounced off cars, cracked pavements, and apartment walls. This improvisation, however, occurred within the framework of institutionalization, as most of the basic rules governing baseball were followed. For example, establishing a lineup of hitters, the number of outs in an innings, and how outs were recorded were all based on rules established over 100 years ago. Despite the established rules, playing on busy city streets required both improvisation and spontaneity.

"Organized play" and "playing as organizing" represent two contrasting approaches to organizing. What different lessons do children learn from each of these approaches?

that both the means and ends, or the processes and outcomes, of organizing should be just and humane.

Organizing for social change involves more than just mobilization, service, or charity. Handouts and charity are anathema to people's dignity. The Government of Mexico once decided to pay tribute to Mexican mothers. A proclamation was issued that every mother whose sewing machine was being held by the Monte de Piedad (the national pawnshop of Mexico) would have her machine returned as a gift on Mother's day. There was tremendous jubilation after this announcement. However, within a few weeks, the same numbers of sewing machines were in the national pawn shop (Alinsky, 1971). Saul Alinsky, a noted community organizer from Chicago, coined the dignity-centered "iron rule" of community organizing: Never do anything for anyone that they can do for themselves.

Dialectical Tensions

When a group of disempowered people organize for social change, the complexity of the enterprise becomes apparent. Those in power sustain their privileges by reinforcing control or further denying rights to the poor. A bit of empowerment in one sphere may lead to oppression in another sphere. Dialectic struggles between competing opposites are fundamental in organizing for social change processes.

Rhythm and blues artist Smokey Robinson wrote one of his most popular songs in the early 1960s entitled, "You Really Got a Hold on Me." This hit song expressed the dialectic tensions that people often experience in romantic relationships (Table 1.1). Although each pair of statements in Robinson's song is contradictory, being in love unifies these opposites into a single experience that many experience and understand. The people we love may cause us pain. However, romantic relationships often flourish through the co-existence of these contradictory impulses, as the pain is often subsumed by the joy of staying connected.

Table 1.1
The dialectics of romance in Smokey Robinson's song

<i>Negative Feelings</i>	<i>Positive Feelings</i>
I don't like you	But I love you
You treat me badly	I love you madly
I don't want you	But I need you
You do me wrong now	My love is strong now
Don't want to stay here	Don't want to leave you

Dialectical tensions also characterized the work Arthur Miller (1916–2005), noted playwright and author of *The Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*—hailed by many as the great American Domestic Tragedy and the great American Political Tragedy, respectively (Mamet, 2005). Miller's plays are tragedies as the protagonists are powerless, allowing us to participate in dilemmas of the repressed. For instance, in *The Death of a Salesman*, the protagonist Willy Loman, an elderly salesman, cannot bring home enough money. After 34 years of employment, his company discards him. The drama ends without solutions, allowing the audience members to reconcile that the destiny of the human lot is to try and fail. In so doing, Miller nurtures contradictory impulses finding beauty in sadness, hope in loss, and dignity in failure (Mamet, 2005).

Sports fans of the Boston Red Sox baseball team provide us further insight into the tensions, pushes and pulls of dialectics. Despite a stream of strong players, the Red Sox did not win the World Series until 2004, their first win since 1918, an 86-year dry spell. Part of their misfortune was being in the same Division as the most successful professional sports team in U.S. history: The New York Yankees.

Box 1.3: Leonardo da Vinci Embracing Dialectics

Why did Microsoft founder Bill Gates pay \$31 million for 18 hand-scribbled sheets from Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks in 1994? For one, da Vinci was no ordinary person (Bramly, 1991). As art critic Bernard Berenson, aptly noted: "Everything da Vinci touched turned to eternal beauty" (cited in Gelb, 1998, pp. ix–x).

A contemporary of Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Magellan, and Christopher Columbus, da Vinci (1452–1519) is best known as the artist of two of the most famous paintings ever produced—the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. However, painting was only a small part of da Vinci's repertoire (Gelb, 1998): As an inventor, da Vinci drew diagrams for a flying machine, a helicopter, a parachute, the extendable ladder (used today by all fire departments), the adjustable monkey wrench, a snorkel, folding furniture, and a water-powered alarm clock. As military engineer, da Vinci designed weapons that would be deployed 400 years later—the armored tank, the machine gun, precision guided missiles, and submarines. As scientist, da Vinci was the first to draw body parts in cross sections. He pioneered modern botanical science, noting that a tree's age can be measured by counting the number of rings in its cross section. He was the first to document the phenomenon of soil erosion, noting: "Water gnaws at mountains and fills valleys" (Gelb, 1998, p. 44).

What made Leonardo tick? Gelb (1998) attributes da Vinci's genius to various attributes, especially *curiosità*, an unrelenting quest for continuous learning, and *dimostrazione*, the testing of knowledge through experience and experiment. However, Gelb argues that da Vinci's true genius lay in his engagement with *sfumato* (literally "going up in smoke"), a willingness to embrace ambiguity, paradox, and contradictory dialectic impulses. His search for beauty, for instance, led him to explore ugliness. He carefully observed "ugly" people, mapping their facial expressions, gait, and bodily contortions. Further, while painting, he would routinely use a flat mirror to look at unfinished images in reverse. The ongoing, iterative back-and-forth between the real and the mirror image, helped move his pictures along.

Da Vinci believed in exploring topics, beliefs, or objects from opposing points of view: To understand joy, one must know sorrow; and to understand change, one must know constancy (Gelb, 1998). That is why da Vinci dissected each body part from at least three different angles. He drew flowers, birds in motion, and the locks of his subject's hair, from several different angles.

Box 1.3: Leonardo da Vinci*(continued)*

Da Vinci privileged dialectical thinking. To him, multiple and opposing perspectives yielded deeper understandings of any phenomenon. Further, da Vinci's work embodied dialectical thinking. Freud (1961), for instance, noted that *Mona Lisa's* smile "lies on the cusp of good and evil, compassion and cruelty, seduction and innocence, the fleeting and the eternal" (Gelb, 1998, pp. 146–147).

Some attribute the Red Sox's decades of failure to "The Curse of the Bambino"—referring to the questionable sale by the Red Sox of one of the greatest baseball players of all-time, Babe Ruth, to their arch rivals, the Yankees.

A championship drought lasting over eight decades involves countless factors including quality of team management, player abilities, good luck, or misfortune. However, what explains the deep allegiance that Red Sox fans continue to hold for their team despite 86 years of failure?

The answer lies in dialectics. Red Sox fans love their team dearly while they simultaneously experience heartbreaks as the team allowed a championship to slip through their fingers. The Red Sox were in the World Series Championship in 1946, 1967, 1975, and 1986 and each time they lost in the final seventh game. Further, they recorded many second place finishes to the New York Yankees in the American League Championship whose winner competes in the World Series. Nonetheless, Red Sox fans returned by the millions every year. Even in years when the Red Sox team was mediocre, the faithful would turn out for games cheering their players. For these fans, love and disillusionment, joy and anguish, pride and embarrassment were not separate emotions. These dialectical tensions co-existed, simmered, and reinforced themselves over time. What happened to these tensions when the Red Sox finally won the World Series in 2004? Were they resolved?

The depth of the dialectic tension felt by Red Sox fans is exemplified in the reaction of one fan soon after the victory. He recounted to us: "I felt numb. I didn't know what to feel. I never thought this would happen in my lifetime. I'm happy but I'm also confused. What am I supposed to feel next year?"²

■ Dualisms versus Dialectics

Dialectics are not dualisms. Dualisms are characterized by mutually antagonistic realities which cannot co-exist together. So, hot and cold represents a dualism. Dualisms are binary opposites that are characterized by an either/or relationship (Miller, 2002). In describing dualisms no assumptions are made about the interdependence, simultaneity, or possible unification of opposing forces (Fairhurst, 2001). From a dualistic perspective we come to understand "what something is by focusing on what it is not" (Fairhurst, 2001, p. 380). In contrast, a dialectic perspective focuses on simultaneous existence of each force, and the tensions that exist between opposing forces. Simply stated, rather than reducing tensions to binary decisions (either/or), a dialectical perspective urges us to think in terms of "both/and."

The distinction between a dualism and dialectic can be understood with the analogy of the difference between catching a ball and juggling multiple balls. When a ball is thrown at a person, he/she either catches it or not. However, when juggling multiple balls, a person has to simultaneously manage the interdependent tension of opposite actions—throwing and catching with each hand. Throwing from the left hand to the right requires an opposite action of throwing from the right hand to the left (Johnson, 1996). In order for juggling to occur, each hand has to throw and receive balls at the same time and on an ongoing basis.

■ Elements of Dialectics

The concept of dialectics has been conceptualized in various ways. Central to most of these conceptualizations are the following *four* elements: (1) contradiction, (2) motion, (3) totality, and (4) praxis (Conville, 1998; Dindia, 1998; Rawlins, 1992, 1998; Van Leer, 1998).

Contradiction refers to the co-existence of oppositional forces. For example, in human relationships the forces of independence and dependence co-exist. Although these forces are antagonistic, they characterize the interdependent relational dynamics between participants. *Motion* refers to activities, movement, or changes that occur as people shift between the competing poles of action. *Totality* refers to the "constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individual, interpersonal, and social factors" (Rawlins, 1992, p. 7).

Totality implies that multiple dialectics can operate at once, each shaping and being shaped by the other. Totality also draws attention to relational interdependence, implying that a person's actions in a social system impact others within that system. *Praxis* "describes the human communicator as an ongoing producer and product of his or her choices within an encompassing cultural matrix" (Rawlins, 1992, pp. 7-8). Put differently, human beings are simultaneously subjects and objects of their own actions. They influence their environment and, in turn, their environment influences them.

■ A Short History of the Dialectic Perspective

Dialectical perspectives were advanced by Chinese philosophers some 3,000 years ago. The ancient Chinese symbol of *Yin-Yang* embodies dialectical thinking (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The interlocking black and white shapes within the circle represent the interaction of two energies—*yin* (black) and *yang* (white). While *yin* signifies the dark, passive, downward, cold, contracting, and weak forces, *yang* signifies bright, active, upward, hot, expanding, and strong forces. These energies are in continual, simultaneous movement, shaping outcomes and being shaped by them.

Some 3,000 years ago, Lao-Tzu (1988), a contemporary of Confucius in China, in his classic treatise, the *Tao te Ching* [Book of the Way], further emphasized the importance of contradiction-riddled dialectical tensions in our daily lives: "When people see some things as beautiful, other things become ugly" (p. 2); or "Because she has let go of herself, she is perfectly fulfilled" (p. 11).

In Western contexts, the concept of dialectics can be traced back to Plato and Socrates. However, it was Hegel in the late 18th century who significantly advanced the dialectic perspective in philosophy. Hegel, a professor at the University of Heidelberg, placed everything—logical, natural, human, and divine—in a dialectical scheme that repeatedly swung from thesis to antithesis and back again to a higher and richer synthesis (Rossi, 1989). He strongly opposed the view that human beings and nature are unidimensional, unconnected, and static phenomenon. To Hegel, the dialectic represents a unifying metaphysical process that underlies the apparent diversity of the world.

In abstraction, Hegelian dialectics can be understood by examining the dialectic of "being" and "nothingness." "Being" (thesis) can be contrasted to its opposite "nothingness" (antithesis). However, just to do so oversimplifies the relationship between the oppositional tensions. The more accurate observation according to Hegel is that there is an interaction or movement between being and nothingness which is "becoming" (synthesis). As Hegel (1969, p. 176) explained: "Becoming is the unseparatedness of being and nothing, not the unity which abstracts from being and nothing; but as the unity of being and nothing it is this determinate unity in which there is both being and nothing" (Hegel, 1969, p. 176).

Hegel's dialectics influenced German intellectual life in general, and in particular he impacted the thinking of his student Karl Marx. Drawing upon Hegel's work, Marx developed his treatise on material dialectics, a philosophical approach to emancipation of the oppressed by overturning the structures of oppression. In Marxist terms, the current structure (thesis) is overthrown (anti-thesis), leading to a resolution of structural inequities (synthesis).

Marx's views on dialectical materialism were developed fully in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Marx (1977, p. 78) argued:

At times, people complain in frustration that they lack the *means* to achieve their *ends*, or alternatively, that they can justify their corrupt methods of work by the lofty aims they pursue. For dialectics, *means* and *ends* are a unity of opposites and in the final analysis, there can be no contradiction between means and ends—when the objective is rightly understood, the material conditions [*means*] for its solution are already present.

According to Marx, thoughts were not passive and independent reflections of the material world. Rather, thoughts were the products of human labor. Furthermore, he believed that the contradictory nature of our thoughts had their origin in the contradictions within human society. From Marx's perspective, dialectics were not something imposed on the world from outside. Nor could dialectics be discovered by the activity of pure reason. Instead, dialectics were a product of human labor trying to change the world. Substantive changes occurred through the practical struggle to overcome the contradictions between means and ends. Thus, by overturning the structures of oppression, structural inequities could be overcome.

Russian philologist and social theorist Mikhail Bakhtin extended and reshaped Marx's conception of dialectics. According to Bakhtin (1981, 1984), dialectic tensions are inevitable and present in all personal relationships. Further, Bakhtin believed that communication prompted by dialectic tensions allows partners to grow individually and together. Consequently, each relational impulse needs a contradictory one. By focusing on the idea of process in dialectics, Bakhtin (1981) argued that change is the only paradoxical constant in human relationships.

Bakhtin (1981) noted that everyday human action occurred at the confluence of a "contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies" (p. 272). These are forces of unity (the centripetal tendency) and forces of difference (the centrifugal tendency). Bakhtin (1981) explained: "Every utterance participates in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)" (p. 272).

Extending Bakhtin's centripetal/centrifugal thinking, Leslie Baxter (1988, 1990, 1992, 1993; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998) developed and tested a dialectical theory of communication, explaining the inherent oppositional tensions in relationships. According to Baxter, *three* main dialectics exist in relationships. Each of these dialectics exists both between the individuals in the relationship (internal) and between the relationship itself and the larger context within which the relationship exists (external).

First, the dialectic of *integration* and *separation* focuses on the tension between wanting to be connected and separate in a relationship. The internal form of this dialectic is *connection* and *autonomy*. In a relationship this dialectic refers to the simultaneous desire to be close to another person while also wanting to retain a sense of autonomy. The external form of the integration/separation dialectic is *inclusion* and *seclusion*. This involves the tension between wanting to include others, such as friends, in the time spent together as a couple while also wanting to spend time secluded as a couple.

Second, the dialectic of *expression* and *privacy* involves the tension between wanting to be open and closed in a relationship. The internal form of this dialectic is *openness* and *closedness*. This dialectic refers to the tension of wanting to self-disclose to a relational partner while also wanting to remain private. The external form of this dialectic is

revelation and *concealment*. This involves the tension to reveal the details of a relationship to others external to the relationship, while also wanting to conceal relational details from others.

Third, the dialectic of *stability* and *change* involves the tension between wanting both sameness and variety in our relationships. The internal form of this dialectic is *predictability* and *novelty*. This dialectic refers to the tension of wanting some degree of predictability so we know what to expect from our relational partner. However, too much predictability may become boring so we also want some novelty in our relationship. Too much predictability or too much novelty may both lead to relational dissolution. The external form of this dialectic is *conventionality* and *uniqueness*. This dialectic involves the tension between wanting a relationship to conform to social norms while also wanting a relationship to be unique.

One of the central tenets of Baxter's perspective on dialectics is praxis. According to this tenet, humans are simultaneously actors and objects of their own actions: "People function as proactive actors who make communicative choices in how to function in their social world. Simultaneously, however, they become reactive objects, because their actions become reified in a variety of normative and institutionalized practices that establish the boundaries of subsequent communicative moves" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, pp. 13-14). Thus, Baxter argues that everyday social realities are outcomes of concrete practices informed by our actions of the past. So the past informs the present and our present actions will inform our future actions. These linkages among actions occurring at different points in time make us both subjects and objects of our own actions.

Another prominent perspective on relational dialectics is advanced by William Rawlins, Stocker Professor of Communication Studies at Ohio University and a colleague of author Singhal. Focusing on interactional dialectics in friendships, Rawlins (1992) identified *four* primary tensions.

The first dialectic is between the *freedom to be independent* and the *freedom to be dependent*. The freedom to be independent refers to the pursuit of one's interests without help or interference from a friend. The freedom to be dependent is being able to rely on a friend in a time of need. This dialectic tension exists when one person needs to rely on another yet also wishes he/she could solve the problem independently.

The second dialectic involves the tension between *affection* and *instrumentality*. Affection occurs when caring for a friend is an end in itself. Instrumentality is present when caring for a friend is a means to an end. Dichotomizing these tensions is difficult because one may derive utilitarian rewards from a friendship regardless of the original purpose for engaging in that friendship.

The third dialectic focuses on *judgment* and *acceptance*. Judgment refers to evaluating another person's failings, weaknesses, or mistakes. Acceptance refers to liking someone who has strengths and weaknesses as well as charming and irritating qualities. These two forces exist in dynamic tension with one another because we often value acceptance from friends while also appreciating judgment from people who genuinely care about us.

The fourth dialectic is between *expressiveness* and *protectiveness*. When we are expressive in friendship we reveal personal thoughts and feel free to comment on the messages and actions of that friend. When we exhibit protectiveness we shy away from self-disclosures that may make us vulnerable. We also may choose to preserve a friend's confidence or exercise restraint in commenting on sensitive issues. The tension between these forces may arise in many situations. For example, if a friend engages in potentially harmful behavior, we may be expressive in describing the problem yet restrain ourselves from commenting upon the most sensitive aspects of that behavior.

In summary, the concept of dialectics has been explored by many scholars. In philosophy, Hegel advanced a perspective that placed everything in a dialectic scheme that swung repeatedly from thesis to antithesis and back again to a higher and richer synthesis. Marx took this perspective into the material world by advancing the argument that current political and economic structures (thesis) may be overthrown (antithesis), leading to a resolution of structural inequities (synthesis). Bakhtin extended and reshaped Marx's views by looking at how dialectic tensions are present in all personal relationships. Finally, Baxter and Montgomery and Rawlins developed specific perspectives on how personal relationships involve dialectic tensions between competing poles of communicative action.

In the next section, we outline why it is important to examine the process of organizing for social change from a dialectic perspective.

■ Dialectics and Social Change

To describe the process of organizing for social change requires consideration of the nuances, contradictions, and dialectics that emerge when people attempt to change their behavior at the individual or collective level. Social change is seldom a neat and tidy process that flows linearly or can be predicted. It rarely flows directly and immediately from participation in organizational activities that involve a specific group of people. Rather, social change emerges in a non-linear, circuitous, and dialectic process of struggle between competing poles of communicative action. It is a rather complex process, if not downright messy.

While organizing for social change, people often create a social learning environment in which new behavioral options may be considered only to later discover that what seems possible in theory may not work so easily in real-life. Certain community members may develop a sense of collective efficacy in solving a social problem, but the solution they devise may not be effective. A person may say that they believe in performing a certain action, yet these beliefs may not be reflected in his or her actions.

Leading organizational and communication scholars share this viewpoint. Many scholars have drawn attention to the dilemmatic character of organizational life and how change processes of any sort must be understood from a perspective that recognizes contradictions, paradoxes, ironies, and dialectics (e.g., Ashcraft, 2000, 2001; Ashcraft & Trethewey, 2004; Handy, 1994; Harter, 2004; Harter & Krone, 2001; O'Connor, 1995; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989; Putnam, 1986; Stohl & Cheney, 2001; Tracy, 2004; Trethewey, 1999; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004; Wendt, 1998). Furthermore, struggles between competing poles of communicative action may be intensified with a social justice mission or with the turbulent and complex environments characteristic of post-modernity. Such a focus disrupts the myth of rationality that has traditionally supported much theorizing about how people work interdependently in organizations. Simply stated, any contemporary theory of organizing for social change must account for the struggles and tensions that surface as people act together to accomplish individual and collective goals.

Contexts of Organizing for Social Change

In the present book, in chapters 2 to 5, respectively, we focus on four different contexts of organizing for social change. These include: (1) Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, (2) dairy cooperatives of India's National Dairy Development Board, (3) entertainment-education and community organizing in Indian villages, and (4) community suppers in Appalachia, U.S.A. In each of these social change contexts, we identify a set of dialectical tensions (discussed later in this chapter).

■ Grameen Bank in Bangladesh

The Grameen [rural] Bank in Bangladesh is an international icon of grassroots organizing, which mobilized the poor, landless, and vulnerable rural populations to come together, generate incomes through self-employment, and improve their socioeconomic conditions (Auwal & Singhal, 1992; Fuglesang & Chandler, 1988; Yunus & Jolis, 1999). The Grameen Bank provides its poor clients with collateral-free loans, loan utilization training, and various other social services, maintaining a loan recovery rate of 99 percent. Currently, 4.2 million families (comprising an estimated 25 million individuals) directly benefit from Grameen Bank's operation in Bangladesh (Grameen Bank, 2005). The Grameen Bank believes that credit represents a fundamental human right, allowing the poor an opportunity to unlock their own potential. Over 500 Grameen Bank replication efforts are underway in dozens of countries, including about 150 micro-enterprise based initiatives in the United States.

The Grameen Bank was the brainchild of Muhammad Yunus, a professor of development economics at Chittagong University in Bangladesh. In doing research in Jobra village (in the vicinity of Chittagong University), Yunus realized how poor people worked as "bonded" laborers to local moneylenders, who charged exorbitant interest rates—as high as 10 percent a day. Poor women with marketable skills (such as weaving, handicrafts, or sewing) had little hope of breaking the shackles of poverty without access to credit at reasonable rates of interest. So, in 1976, Yunus launched the Grameen Bank action research project in Jobra village to (a) provide collateral-free

micro-loans to the poorest-of-the-poor women, (b) eliminate the exploitation by moneylenders, (c) create self-employment opportunities for the poor, and (d) organize the poor into a framework for their empowerment (Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1995, 1997).

Initially, Yunus borrowed money from a local bank to lend to the poor women, as the bank was reluctant to lend to them for lack of collateral. The first loan recipients received very small loans for self-employment and repaid the loans with conventional interest in weekly installments. Initial successes led to expansion of the project to different poverty-gripped districts in Bangladesh. Eventually, in 1983, seven years after the beginning of the action research project, the Grameen Bank became an autonomous organization authorized by the Bangladesh government.

The Grameen Bank has since grown in magnitude and importance, continuously experimenting with new ideas to solve social problems and devising and adapting its policies to meet local needs. In the late 1990s, for instance, the Grameen Bank launched the innovative village mobile telephony project with the idea of placing one mobile telephone in each of Bangladesh's 68,000 villages, providing telephone access in remote areas that were previously unserved or underserved. By 2005, over 51,000 villages, comprising some 100 million rural people, who had previously never used a telephone, had achieved access to telephony.

In chapter 2, we examine in-depth the dialectic tensions in the Grameen Bank's efforts at organizing for social change in Bangladesh.

■ Dairy Cooperatives of India's National Dairy Development Board

The National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), the umbrella organization for 112,590 village-level dairy milk cooperatives in India with a membership of 12.1 million farmer members, is perhaps one of the world's biggest programs in organizing for social change. Its charismatic founder, Dr. Verghese Kurien started as an employee of dairy farmers in Gujarat's Kaira District, and launched the NDDB in 1965, on the insistence of the then Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, to replicate the famous Anand dairy milk cooperative in Kaira

District. Starting from a small cluster of dairy cooperatives in Kaira District, Kurien slowly expanded the network of dairy cooperatives to include 12.1 million dairy farmers in 2005, directly influencing the livelihoods of 70 million people.

The village-level dairy cooperatives are networked in mutually supportive networks with district level milk unions and state and national level dairy cooperative federations (Kurien, 1997a). Together, these unions market close to 15 million liters of milk everyday, delivering clean, hygienic milk and milk products to urban consumers, and providing steady incomes and support services to the rural poor. Nearly \$1 billion is paid out annually to these milk producer families, many of whom represent poor, landless, and small and marginal farmers.

In 1988–89, NDDDB launched the Cooperative Development (CD) program to create stronger and more viable dairy cooperatives that were responsive to the needs of its millions of farmer members. The CD program (and its many incarnations) have since endeavored to strengthen village-level dairy cooperative societies in India through member education and leadership training, especially concentrating its educational activities on women dairy farmers. The money that dairy farmers receive from milk sales is generally controlled by men, who are usually the official members of the village-level dairy cooperative society (DCS) and make up most of the elected officers at the village, district, state, and national levels. The patriarchal dominance of Indian dairy cooperatives results from the prevalence of traditional Indian rural values and cultural norms (Chen, Mitra, Athreya, Dholakia, Law, & Rao, 1986; Sen & Grown, 1987; Sharma, 1991; Papa, Singhal, Ghanekar, & Papa, 2000; Wayangankar, 1994). Although some 85 percent of the daily dairy tasks associated with dairying are carried out by women, they constituted about 10 percent of the total membership in India's dairy cooperatives in the late 1980s (Philip, 1994; Wayangankar, 1994). Thanks to the CD and other affiliated programs, these numbers have risen to about 25 percent in 2005. In fact, of the 112,590 village-level dairy cooperatives in 2005, 18,500 are all-women dairy cooperatives, where women are not just members but also its elected leaders.

In chapter 3, we examine in-depth the dialectic tensions in NDDDB's social change efforts at empowering women dairy farmers in India.

■ Entertainment-Education and Community Organizing in India

Entertainment-education (E-E) media programs are designed purposefully to both entertain and educate audience members. The educational objectives involve increasing audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, creating favorable attitudes, shifting social norms, and changing overt behavior. All India Radio (AIR), the Indian national radio network, has been responsible for developing and airing a number of E-E soap operas—which are then disseminated to a mass audience. We were involved in studying the community mobilizing aspects of two of these E-E radio serials: *Tinka Tinka Sukh* [Happiness in Small Things] broadcast during 1996–97; and *Taru* (named after the female protagonist) broadcast during 2002–2003.

The starting point for social change linked to E-E programming occurs when audience members become interested in the storylines and characters of the media program. Many audience members may strongly identify with media role models and begin to emulate them. Many become so attached to certain characters that they develop relationships with them that simulate face-to-face interpersonal relationships. This phenomenon is called *parasocial interaction* (Singhal & Rogers, 1999).

Audience members' interest and involvement with an E-E storyline, including identification with certain characters, is not sufficient to prompt social change, however. E-E programs appear to have their strongest impact on audience members when the messages embedded in the programs spark conversations and debate about the topic among listeners. For instance, listeners to the *Tinka Tinka Sukh* radio soap opera in Lutsaan village of northern India said that they were "emotionally-stirred" by Poonam's character in the program. Poonam, a young bride, is beaten and verbally abused by her husband and in-laws for not providing an adequate dowry, the payment by a bride's parents to the groom's parents, in whose home she lives after marriage. In recent decades, dowry payments in India have become exorbitant, usually including cash or gold, a television set, or a refrigerator (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). If the dowry payments are inadequate, the bride may be mistreated by the husband's family. In extreme cases, the bride is burned to death in a kitchen "accident," called a "dowry death." In the radio soap opera, Poonam was

humiliated and sent back to her parents after incorrectly being accused by her in-laws of infidelity to her husband. In desperation, she commits suicide. These episodes generated a lot of discussion and debate among the radio listeners of Lutsaan village, who then wrote a letter to AIR, outlining their discussions and actions: "It is a curse that for the sake of dowry, innocent women are compelled to commit suicide. Worse still...women are murdered for not bringing dowry. The education we got from 'Tinka Tinka Sukhi', particularly on dowry is significant.... People who think differently about dowry will be reformed; those who practice dowry will see the right way and why they must change" (Singhal & Rogers, 1999, p. 5).

Our examination of E-E sparked community organizing was centered in several rural communities of India, including Lutsaan village in Uttar Pradesh State (during 1997-98), as also Abirpur, Kamtaul, Madhapur, and Chandrahatti villages in the state of Bihar (during 2001-2004). The organizing appeared to be prompted by conversations among peers that stimulated social learning. People learned from one another possible options for changing their behavior and improving their communities. We also learned about collective actions taken by community members to address social ills (e.g., establishing schools for *dalit* or lower caste children). *Unlike other social change contexts discussed in the present book, these community-organizing activities were created solely through the initiatives of disempowered community members.*

In chapter 4, we examine the dialectic tensions in community organizing sparked by E-E media initiatives in India.

■ Community Suppers in Appalachia, U.S.A.

Community suppers are held each day in thousands of locations across the U.S.—in churches, neighborhood pantries, and community centers. Typically, volunteers prepare meals alongside the poor and the homeless, viewing community suppers as a community building process. Community suppers usually incorporate certain rituals that may help network and inspire the poor. Grace might be said collectively to thank God for the meal. The poor may participate in meal preparation, in laying the table, or serving food—giving them a sense of dignity and agency. Community building occurs as the

poor and the homeless form relationships with others who are experiencing similar problems. Such connections may raise collective possibilities. For instance, two homeless people may be able to pool resources to afford an apartment jointly.

The poor and the homeless also forge new connections with other well-to-do community members, who serve as volunteers or participants in the community supper. When people from different socioeconomic classes connect, the poor person may potentially access ideas, resources, and possibilities for action that they may have never considered. Perhaps even more important for the rehabilitation of the disconnected is the realization that the poor and the well-to-do, at a certain level, are one community. Social change becomes possible only when the poor and oppressed recognize that they have a support network much broader and deeper than they thought was possible. When well-to-do community members show their willingness to work alongside their poorer neighbors, there is a restoration of hope among the poor. The poor people's fear of failing may be lessened if they are assured that there are others who support their cause.

Social change is also prompted by the specific nature of the support provided by organizers of the community suppers. Help may be given to the homeless in finding shelter. Guidance may be given concerning job training and employment opportunities. Available medical care services may be identified. Through such assistance, the homeless are able to concentrate less on day-to-day survival and more on planning for the future. Being able to plan for the future represents an important step toward self-sufficiency.

In chapter 5, we examine the dialectical tensions in organizing the poor and the homeless through community suppers in the Appalachian region of the United States.

Dialectics in Social Change Processes

Our investigations of the four organizing for social change contexts (described in the previous section) suggested that many dialectic tensions surface as a group of disempowered people attempt to change their thinking and behavior with or without the assistance of external agents. Based on our analysis, we argue that four dialectic tensions are central to the process of organizing for social change: (1) *control* and *emancipation*, (2) *oppression* and *empowerment*, (3) *dissemination* and

dialogue, and (4) *fragmentation* and *unity*. The dynamics of these dialectic tensions are described next.

■ Dialectic of Control and Emancipation

Organizing for social change efforts embody a dialectic tension between *control* and *emancipation*. The process of organizing for social change requires the disempowered to embed their actions in some control system that guides them to move from dependence to self-sufficiency. Although the control system may vary, the poor must engage in coordinated activities that are embedded in some organizational structure. The activities the poor perform are guided by rules and expectations that are reinforced by organizational members and the organizational structure in place. Although rules and expectations limit freedom on the one hand, emancipation becomes possible as the poor act together to build capital (economic and social) and free themselves from oppressive relationships.

The relationship between control and emancipation is not a simple one, however. Control systems make emancipation possible, but can simultaneously be problematic. If membership within the organization brings with it rewards that outweigh the costs of internalizing the control systems, then continued membership is justified. Alternatively, even in emancipatory systems control may be exercised in ways that raise questions about fairness and human dignity. If emancipation carries with it the requirement that one work 14 hours a day, 7 days a week, is one really free?

To illustrate the dialectic of control and emancipation, consider the case of Tasmiah, a Grameen Bank member in Bangladesh who experienced difficulties in loan repayment. Shortly after receiving her first loan Tasmiah's husband took her loan money. When she told her story to a friend who was also a Grameen member, she received criticism rather than sympathy. Tasmiah's friend was concerned that her own loan request would be jeopardized if Tasmiah failed to repay her loan in a timely manner. Tasmiah felt so humiliated and accountable to her other group members that she went to a village moneylender for a loan. Although Tasmiah's emancipation is linked to her membership in the Grameen Bank, the Bank's control mechanisms—that are unsympathetic to loan defaults—inadvertently oppress her further.

■ Dialectic of Oppression and Empowerment

Organizing for social change efforts also embody the dialectic between *oppression* and *empowerment*. This dialectic tension emphasizes that the process of social change is seldom linear or unidirectional. A person may act in a way that is empowering in one context but simultaneously oppressing in another. Alternatively, a plan that seems to have the potential to empower actually backfires and a person becomes further oppressed. Further, external forces may deny access to power no matter how well a strategy for empowerment is devised. So, to understand social change requires us to look at the tensions that pull people back and forth between forces that both empower and oppress.

Importantly, the experience of being pulled between the competing poles of oppression and empowerment is not an isolated experience for the poor; rather it is a central part of how the social change process unfolds. For example, the practice of *purdah* [veiling] in some parts of India demonstrates how women struggle with enabling and constraining forces to empower themselves. While the system of *purdah* mainly reflects an oppressive patriarchal code that keeps women in the domestic domain, it also bestows respect and honor on women. Thus, *purdah* simultaneously empowers and oppresses. Young unmarried women in village India do not practice *purdah* in front of adults or other women (Plate 1.3), negotiating an empowered gendered space in the face of overwhelming gender inequality.

■ Dialectic of Dissemination and Dialogue

The dialectic between *dissemination* and *dialogue* is also present in communities struggling with social change. When a group of oppressed people rely on outside, expert-disseminated information to guide their empowerment, it often creates a dependency relationship that might actually limit or derail empowerment. Perhaps the outside source directs, cajoles, or manipulates the poor to behave in certain ways without completely understanding them.

Why shouldn't the poor rely on their own ingenuity to realize empowerment? In the context of organizing for social change, dialogue involves a sharing of information, ideas, stories, and experiences

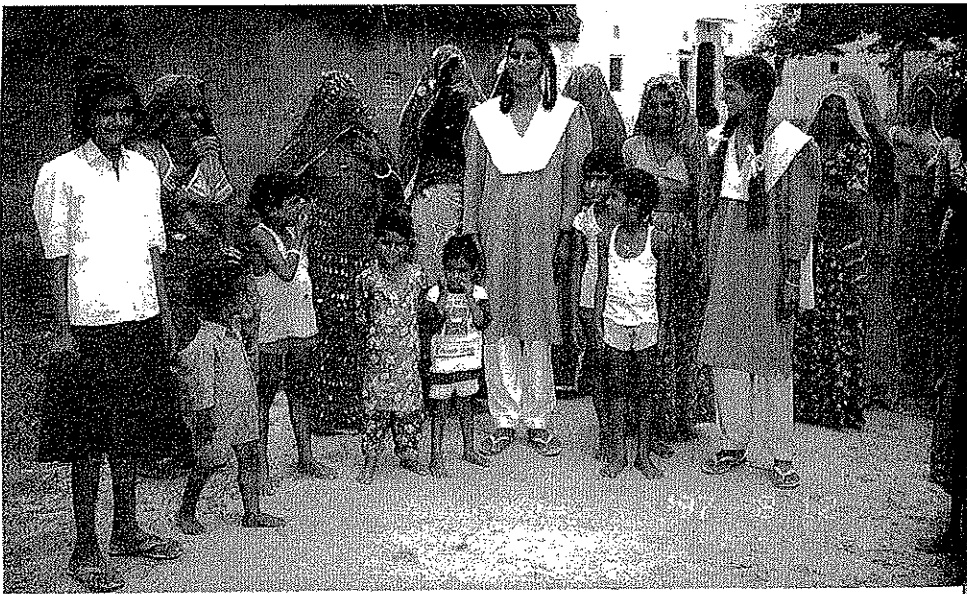


Plate 1.3

The practice of *purdah* is empowering and oppressing for Rajasthani village women in India

Note how young unmarried women do not practice *purdah* [veil], carving out a unique empowered space in the midst of overwhelming gender inequality.

Source: Personal Files of the Authors.

among the poor. Dialogue validates the local knowledge and resources of oppressed groups by facilitating a social learning process that is reflective, critical, and transitive. By developing a consciousness of oppression through dialogue, the oppressed can develop the power to transform reality.

Our stance is that the relationship between dissemination and dialogue is more complicated. There may be instances when information dissemination manipulates the poor or limits their potential. However, what about instances where the poor take the seed of an external idea and then develop that idea into a unique strategy for social change based on internal dialogue and conversations. Further, even when the poor dialogue with one another, isn't there an element of dissemination present? Some members may know more about the topic, and may express it more persuasively. Is such internal dissemination manipulative? The answer is not simple. Sometimes manipulation may be present, other times it may not be present. The answer depends on whose vantage point is being considered and with what understandings of context.

We argue that both dissemination and dialogue exist simultaneously in a dialectic tension with one another. For example, in the Indian radio soap opera *Taru* (described in chapter 4), the character Neha starts a school for *dalit* (low caste) children. Motivated by this story, young men and women in Bihar's Abirpur village established a school for lower caste children, despite initial opposition from some community members. Over the course of multiple conversations, they were able to persuade community members, including their own parents, to change their views toward people of lower castes. Importantly, although this social change was sparked by institutionalized information dissemination in the form of a purposively designed radio soap opera, this change would not have occurred without dialogue between and among listeners of *Taru* and other community members. Clearly, a dialectical tension between information dissemination and dialogue is present in the process of social change.

■ **Dialectic of Fragmentation and Unity**

Finally, we examine the dialectical tension between *fragmentation* and *unity* in organizing for social change efforts. Poverty and homelessness often leads to the separation and isolation of the poor from one another, and from members of other socio-economic groups. As will become apparent through the multiple narratives in this book, one path to building community is to connect the isolated to other people. As connections multiply among the poor and the homeless, and between them and other groups, a diverse community is developed. To survive, this community must locate and secure ties that bind the collective together.

However, differences (in ideas, actions, and socioeconomic status) between people will always be present in any community. Fragmentation occurs when there are multiple voices and interpretations present in a community. Often this multi-vocality separates people from one another, rather than unifies them into a consensus. On one hand, such fragmentation may be necessary to preserve diversity. On the other hand, these differences may create tensions and separate people rather than unify them. Is it possible to sustain forces of fragmentation and unity in a way that preserves the connections between people? In some instances communities may remain intact despite

Box 1.4: An Adhesive that Does not Stick

Dialectical tensions can be viewed as frustrating or unproductive. Or they can be welcomed as opportunities. Identifying and managing dialectics is as important for social change organizations as it is for corporations. Innovative organizations encourage, nurture, and manage dialectical tensions with aplomb (Fletcher & Olwyler, 1997; Johnson, 1996). Consider the case of 3M (Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company), hailed as a champion of innovation and creativity (Peters & Waterman, 1988).

In 1968, Dr. Spencer Silver, a scientist at 3M Company was trying to make an adhesive with high stickiness, and ended up with an adhesive that did not stick well. Rather than shelve his project as a failure, he experimented with the properties of this adhesive. An adhesive that does not stick embodies a dialectical tension, a literal push and pull.

Six years later, in 1974, Silver's friend, Art Fry, also a 3M scientist, was looking for a sticky bookmark. While singing in the Church Choir for different services, the bookmark in Fry's book of hymns kept falling off, leading to an embarrassing scramble during services. Knowing about Silver's "failed" adhesive, Fry made a bookmark that was sticky enough to not fall off from a page, but not tacky enough to rip paper apart. The sticky bookmark was both temporarily-permanent and permanently-temporary. It was unique in that it was a repositionable adhesive. Nobody before had thought that adhesives could be repeatedly repositioned. Spence Silver and Art Fry had invented the sticky yellow Post-it note.

In 2005, 3M markets over 600 Post-it products, including note pads, flip charts, and easel pads. Post-it notes are available in eight standard sizes, 25 shapes, and 62 colors; and sold in over 120 countries. They earn 3M annual revenues of over a billion dollars.

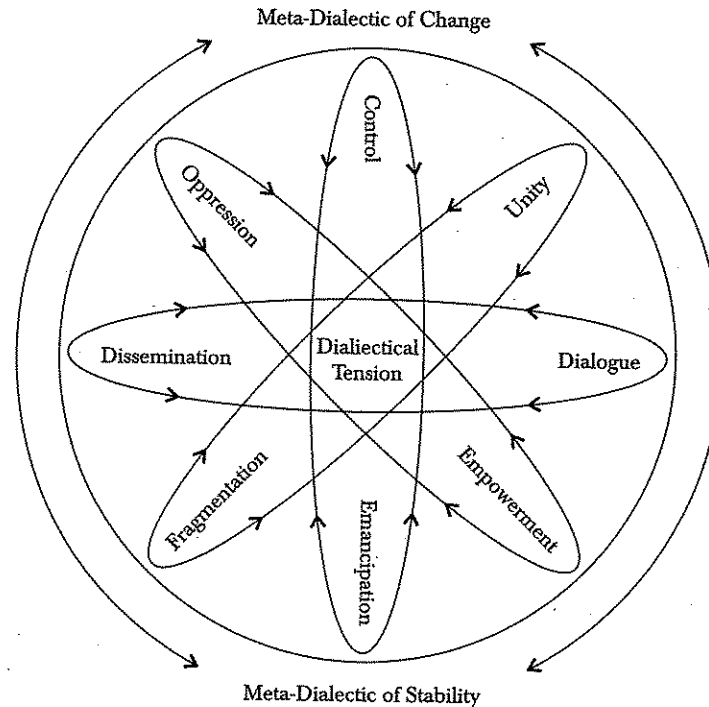
The Post-It note exemplifies that dialectical thinking can pay rich dividends for entrepreneurial corporations. Why not then for social entrepreneurs?

forces that fragment. In other cases the forces of fragmentation may overwhelm the ties that bind people together.

To demonstrate the tension between fragmentation and unity consider the story of Bill, a poor elderly man who frequently attends a community supper in a small college town in the Appalachian region of the U.S. Bill was clearly connected to many people around him at the community suppers. He engaged in animated discussions with

Figure 1.3
Organizing for social change processes embody multiple, co-existing dialectical tensions

The poor, the homeless, and the disempowered experience contradictory tensions that both support and negate attempts to bring change. Our research suggests that the following four dialectics characterize organizing for social change phenomenon: The dialectics of *control* and *emancipation*, *oppression* and *empowerment*, *dissemination* and *dialogue*, and *fragmentation* and *unity*. These dialectics interact and intersect within a meta-dialectic of stability and change.



others, both fellow poor people, and the relatively well-to-do members of the community. However, when he referred to the college students who frequently prepared the community dinners, he demonstrated how he experienced fragmentation. Bill supported his parents financially from the age of nine when he first went to work in the mines of Kentucky. He supported them until they died about a

decade ago. Bill argues that college students of today do not understand him when he talks about financially supporting one's parents. He believes these students are different from him; they take from their parents rather than giving to them. For Bill, the meaning of a harmonious family is everyone chipping in. As Bill engages with the various people who attend the community supper, he simultaneously experiences the forces of fragmentation and unity.

Although we will examine each of the four dialectics heretofore described as reflecting separate tensions, these dialectics may be unified by a meta-dialectic of stability and change (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) or permanence and change (Burke, 1954/1984) (Figure 1.3). Specifically, control, oppression, dissemination, and fragmentation may represent the forces of stability or permanence that dominate the lives of the poor. Oppositional forces of change may then surface when the poor participate in social change programs and encounter the forces of emancipation, empowerment, dialogue, and unity. This meta-dialectic totality clarifies the interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple and competing poles of communicative action.

Conclusions

Organizing for social change is a complex process that requires the coordinated and individual actions of many people—the poor and the privileged, outsiders and insiders, and expertise and local knowledge. The organized activities range from disbursement and utilization of micro-credit to empower the poor, to coordinating the actions of community members to prepare and share food with one another, to coordinating actions to establish a school for lower caste community members. Individual action is also an important part of fostering social change whether through a champion such as Muhammad Yunus of the Grameen Bank, or a local hero such as a poor woman who opposes the actions of an unscrupulous moneylender.

Dialectics are, as well, a central part of the experience of organizing for social change. The poor, the homeless, and the disempowered often experience contradictory tensions as they are pulled between competing poles of communicative action. This occurs because the process of organizing for social change seldom unfolds in a neat and tidy manner. Rather, people are pulled between forces that oppose

one another in a dynamic tension. These forces both support and negate attempts to bring change to a community. The four dialectic tensions that we explore in this book are: *control* and *emancipation*, *oppression* and *empowerment*, *dissemination* and *dialogue*, and *fragmentation* and *unity*.

In the subsequent chapters, these four dialectics are examined in four different social contexts where the poor attempt to organize for change: The Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, the dairy cooperatives of India's NDDB, village-based communities that are exposed to entertainment education radio broadcasts in rural India, and community suppers in the Appalachian region of the United States.

In the concluding chapter, we embark on the journey of theory and praxis, reflecting on the lessons learned about organizing for social change from a dialectic perspective.

Notes

1. This description draws upon Singhal and Rogers (2003) and author Singhal's fieldnotes while visiting the Sonagachi Project in Kolkata in March, 2004.
2. Clearly, not all the fans of the Boston Red Sox share the same feelings of our respondent. However, our respondent reflects the feelings of many Red Sox fans whose affection for a team is based in part on that team's perennial quest to win yet always coming up short.

5 Dialectic of fragmentation and unity in rural Appalachia

Show me a hero, and I will write you a tragedy.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, American novelist and writer
(quoted in http://encyclopedia.lockergnome.com/s/b/F_Scott_Fitzgerald)

A few years ago, we met Hazel, a 57-year-old woman, at a Friday night community supper in Athens, Ohio, located in America's Appalachian region. Hazel suspects her weight, some 300 pounds, is one reason why she is diabetic. The good lord was kind to her, she noted, keeping her alive despite chronic health problems. She poured her heart out to us in ways that lonely people often do. She felt we were willing to listen, not judge. Hazel came to the supper directly from the doctor's office. She coughed and apologized instantly saying that she suffers from a "nervous reflux." The Friday night supper made her both nervous and excited.

Hazel lives five miles from Athens toward New Marshfield. The houses in her neighborhood are not tightly packed together like in Athens, but not so far apart that people can't be friendly to each other. Her neighbors, Hazel noted, rarely talked to her, perhaps because they looked down on her for being poorer than they are. This upset her. She couldn't figure these neighbors out for they are Christian people and should know better. The Friday night supper in Athens is her main opportunity to socialize and she never misses it.

One way of interpreting Hazel's story is to focus on the function of storytelling itself. Stories are intimately illustrative of the levels of belonging that individuals feel toward others in a community. A community is characterized by stories "produced by people talking with one another" (Ball-Rokeach, Gibbs, Gutierrez Hoyt, Jung, Kim,

Matei, Wilson, Yuan, & Zhang, 2000, p. 1). Communities are integrated through structure, ecology, interpersonal networks, civic solidarity, and symbolic communication (Friedland, 2001; Fischer, 1982; Morrison, Howard, Johnson, Navarro, Plachetka, & Bell, 1998; Wellman, Carrington, & Hall, 1988). The connectedness and the sense of community that Hazel feels at the weekly supper is in sharp contrast to the isolation she feels at home. Her participation in the weekly community supper serves as both a reminder of her connection to others and her fragmented existence.

The purpose of the present chapter is to analyze the dialectic of *fragmentation* and *unity* in organizing for social change efforts that address poverty, hunger, and homelessness in the United States. By investigating community suppers that feed the poor, hungry, and homeless in the Appalachian region of the U.S., we analyze how the dialectical tensions between fragmentation and unity undergird social change initiatives.

Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness in America

In the world, every five seconds, someone dies for lack of food; 25,000 will die of hunger today, and 10 million in one year. Half of sub-Saharan Africa is malnourished today, a figure expected to increase by 70 percent in 2010 (Nicholson, 2004).

In 2005, some 40 million Americans live in poverty, up from 25 million in 1980. Of these 13 million are children. Some 31 million Americans are "food insecure," not knowing where their next meal will come from (Borger, 2003). Of these, 10 million Americans experience *real hunger*, defined as the uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food.

■ Hunger in America

Hunger is on the rise in the United States (Clarke & Evans, 1994). In 2003, the need for emergency food rose by 20 percent in 25 major American cities (Borger, 2003). A number of programs exist in the United States to feed the hungry: Community suppers, soup kitchens, food pantries, meals on wheels, and so on (Plate 5.1). Some provide food and groceries once a week or once a month; some others provide

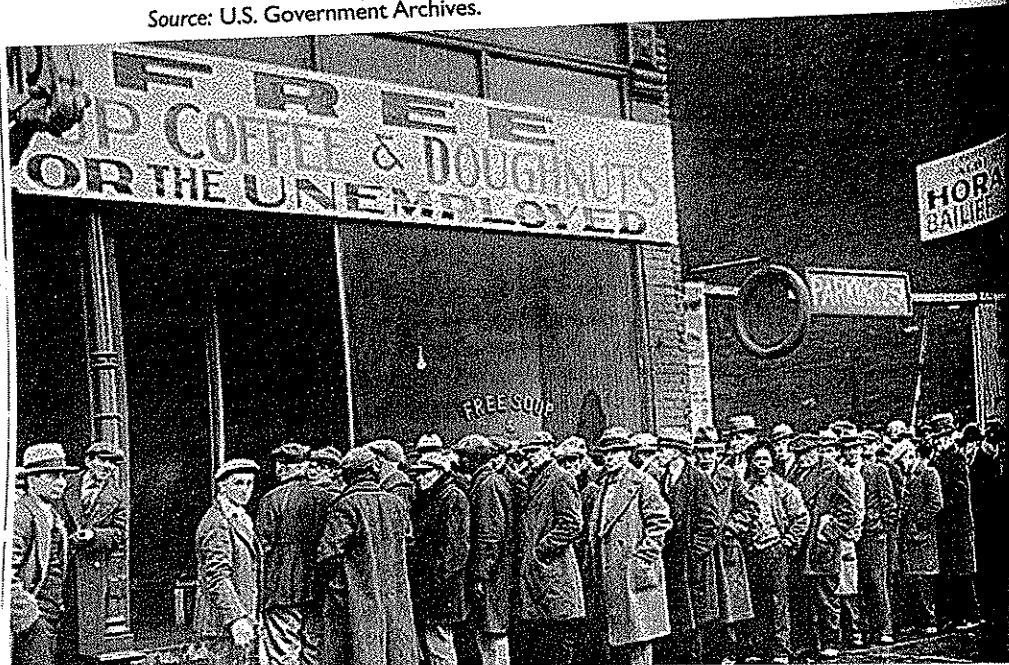
hot meals twice a day. In Logan, Ohio, 25 miles away from where one of the present authors (Singhal) lives, one can see fortnightly traffic jams driven by hunger and poverty. Several hundred cars line up at the drive-through food pantry run by Smith Chapel United Methodist Church to pick up food.

However, what happens in Logan, Ohio or in countless other places in the United States, is fairly invisible to policy-makers in Washington, D.C., the nation's capital. The policy, media, and public discourse on poverty, hunger, and homelessness in the U.S. is apathetically silent (Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, & Broakaw, in press). Few debates occur on these topics under the rotunda of the U.S. Congress, or on the front pages of the *New York Times*. Policy-driven initiatives to end hunger and poverty, such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s (during the height of the Great Depression) and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs of the 1960s, are all but faint echoes from a distant past (Borger, 2003).

Plate 5.1
Men line up outside a soup kitchen in Chicago during the Great Depression of the 1930s

Although the Great Depression ended nearly seven decades ago, some 31 million Americans in 2005 are "food insecure," not knowing where their next meal will come from. Hunger and poverty are on the rise in the United States.

Source: U.S. Government Archives.



Box 5.1: Micky Weiss, Two Academics, and Food Recovery Benefiting Millions¹

In 2005, an estimated 30 million Americans depended on non-profit food distribution charities to supplement their diets, making up for calories they could not afford to buy. A vast network stands at the heart of this charitable effort, starting with approximately 240 food banks (many belonging to a national network, America's Second Harvest) and other food recovery groups in every state. These supply 50,000 community outlets where individuals and families can get food. Most of the food comes from donations by manufacturers, processors, wholesalers, brokers, farmers, and other commercial firms. Government contributions make up a small fraction of the total food surplus, which reached 1.4 billion pounds in 2000 and is closer to 2.0 billion pounds in 2005. Shockingly, more than enough food is discarded in the U.S., between field and table, to feed the hungry.

In 1987, Mickey Weiss, a retired produce wholesaler, was visiting his son's dock at the Los Angeles Wholesale Market. On his way, Weiss' car passed a group of homeless people, who were heating stale bread over an open fire. Minutes later, at the family's vegetable company, Weiss watched a forklift hoist two pallets of raspberries (that had not sold in a timely way) and drop them into a dumpster! Something in Weiss' mind clicked that had remained unappreciated over his decades of business experience. "Why were good fruits and vegetables being thrown away?" he suddenly questioned. "Why could they not be directed to the hungry?" (Sturgulewski, 2001).

Working the phones, Weiss convinced wholesalers to donate produce that was "edible, but not sellable." He rounded up high school students to call church-based pantries, congregate meals programs, missions, battered women's shelters, daycare centers, and other agencies serving the needy throughout Southern California to see which ones could use produce to feed their clients. He worked with agriculture departments and government agencies to cut the red tape that discouraged donations of unsold food. Thanks to Weiss, a novel idea was born.

But Weiss' dream was greater, and for several years it remained stymied. He wanted to see similar programs recovering fresh produce operating in every city in America. But only Houston followed Los Angeles' lead and then not much happened for two years. Food banks had been shunning perishable foods because they are so difficult to handle, or had simply been unaware of the existence or the importance of these surpluses. Then in 1991, Weiss met two academics with a passion for reducing

Box 5.1: Micky Weiss, Two Academics, and Food Recovery Benefiting Millions (continued)

people's risks of chronic illness. Peter Clarke and Susan Evans taught at the University of Southern California's (USC's) Annenberg School for Communication and also conducted research in USC's Department of Preventive Medicine. They understood the importance of nutritious diets for health, realized that fresh produce offered great benefits for primary prevention of many conditions, and grasped that people in poverty cannot afford to eat well. They believed that poor nutrition was an even greater menace than hunger. Evans and Clarke quickly became inspired by Weiss' local achievements and established a project to transplant the essence of produce recovery as widely as possible, calling their undertaking From the Wholesaler to the Hungry. They began visiting as many cities as they could persuade to invite them, talking with food banks, potential sources of donations nearby, recipient agencies, political leaders, and more.

This hands-on experience led Clarke and Evans to develop their own model for disseminating what Weiss had started in Los Angeles (Clarke & Evans, 1994). Slowly, their city-by-city visits began paying off, and Evans and Clarke documented accomplishments and pitfalls so that other places could learn. By 2005, their tireless mentoring had launched nearly 150 fresh produce recovery efforts in 44 states and the District of Columbia. Programs are now offering nearly 300 million pounds of produce to low-income people annually. Along the way, Clarke and Evans began managing a grant making program of Kraft Foods and also forged an agreement with the Soref Foundation. Together, between 1995 and the end of 2005, these sources will have channeled nearly \$25 million into charitable, surplus fresh food distribution.

Clarke and Evans's crusade for healthier eating has recently turned from the supply-side to the demand-side of the equation. With colleagues at USC's Information Sciences Institute they are developing message-tailoring tools whereby community pantries can provide each low-income client with just the recipes and food handling tips that match a household's characteristics and that align with the fresh foods available that day (Hovy, Philpot, Evans, Clarke, & Woolsey, 2005). Each recipient takes away a personalized, illustrated flyer, "Quick! Help for Meals," along with the food. Early field trials show that this boosts the use of fresh produce in meals by 50 percent, compared to handing out standardized recipes and tips.

Clarke and Evans took Weiss' dream, mixed it with their passion, to make possible healthy, nutritious meals for millions of Americans who would otherwise go hungry.

In fact, much of the U.S. welfare system built during the New Deal and the Great Society was dismantled in the mid-1990s during President Clinton's welfare reforms, which set a time line on how long the poor or unemployed could draw social security payments. With these safety nets gone, hunger and poverty in the U.S. have risen. To exacerbate, the minimum wage in the U.S., adjusted for inflation, has gone down 22 percent since 1980.

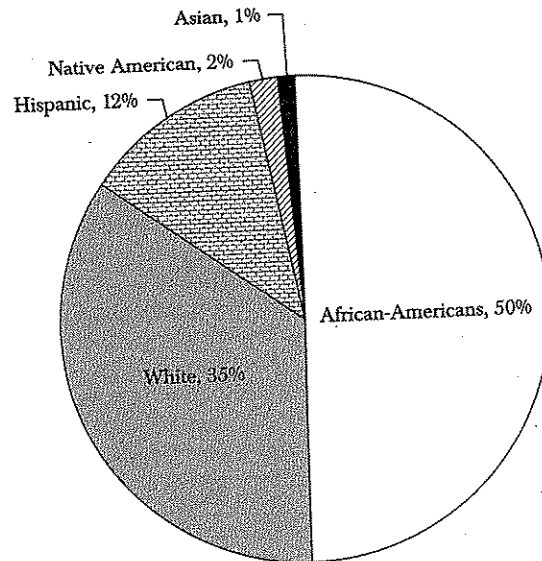
Rising hunger, poverty, and homelessness in the United States has been accompanied by a rise in soup kitchens, food pantries, and homeless shelters. Rural America in particular has been badly hit (Fichten, 1991). The idyllic portraits of rural America in the paintings of Norman Rockwell and Georgia O'Keefe mask a stark reality. Some 20 percent of the American population lives in rural areas, where the population is older, poorer, sicker, and less educated (Duncan, 1999). Compared to urban America, rural poverty rates are double. Further, rural America has fewer hospital beds and physicians per capita, fewer job opportunities, and fewer homeless shelters and soup kitchens.

■ Homelessness in America

A person is *homeless*² if he/she lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence. The homeless live in emergency or transitional shelters, cars, public parks, abandoned buildings, bus and train stations, and the like (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002, Fact Sheet 2). The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (2004) reported that during 2003 over 3 million men, women, and children were homeless in the U.S.³ Half of these are women and children who often experience homelessness to flee domestic violence. Further, half of the homeless are African-Americans, even though they constitute only 12 percent of the U.S. population (Figure 5.1). The number of homeless people in the U.S. greatly exceeds the available shelter space. In rural America, there exist fewer shelters and higher levels of homelessness.

Homelessness is increasing in America because of a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and increasing poverty. Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. Poverty rates have risen because of eroding employment opportunities, lower wages, and declining public assistance programs. A whopping 37 percent

Figure 5.1
The racial profile of homeless people in the United States
 Half of the homeless in the U.S. in 2004 are African-Americans, even though they constitute only 12 percent of the U.S. population. Homelessness is increasing in America because of a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and increasing poverty.



Source: National Coalition for the Homeless.

of the homeless in America had their welfare benefits cut or reduced (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2001). In 2004, people are working more to make the same money. In most U.S. states, a minimum wage worker will have to work 80–90 hours a week to afford a two bedroom apartment at 30 percent of their total income (as per the federal definition of affordable housing [National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002, Fact Sheet 1]). Between 1973 and 1993, some 2.2 million low-rental housing units disappeared from the market in America, abandoned on account of increasing rents. The benefits of economic growth in the U.S. are unequally distributed. The rising tide did not lift all boats; in fact, the most vulnerable boats have either sunk or are barely staying afloat.⁴

Box 5.2: Barbara Ehrenreich On Not Getting by in America

In 1998, Barbara Ehrenreich, a well-to-do freelance writer, decided to experience the indignities of earning poverty-level wages. Engaging in old-fashioned "immersion journalism," Ehrenreich moved from Florida to Maine to Minnesota living in cheap motels, and taking such jobs as a waitress, a hotel maid, a house cleaner, and a Wal-Mart salesperson (Ehrenreich, 2001). These jobs employ millions of Americans and they typically pay six or seven dollars an hour. Ehrenreich discovered that not only are these jobs physically and mentally exhausting, a person must often work at least two jobs to afford decent housing. Further, when a person works long hours, they are more susceptible to falling sick; yet, few of these back-breaking, low-paying jobs provide health insurance.

Not having health insurance creates significant problems for low wage earners. While working as a waitress in Florida, Ehrenreich befriended Gail, a low wage earner who was supposed to be on her company's health plan. The company claimed, however, that they lost Gail's application and had to start the paperwork all over again. Without the health plan, and without the estrogen supplements that her health plan covered, Gail suffered debilitating migraine headaches. Each visit to the doctor and pharmacy cost her hard-earned dollars. Ehrenreich also discussed the case of a roofer who lost his job because he missed work after he cut his foot. The problem was exacerbated by an infection, but he was unable to pay for the prescribed antibiotic. So, the indignity of poverty goes hand-in-hand with poor health.

Under Clinton's welfare reforms, people in the U.S. who received monetary assistance from government programs, now must work multiple jobs to support themselves. Sadly, many of these workers, who have internalized highly disciplined mechanisms of control to work multiple jobs, cannot afford the security deposits (typically the first and last month's rent "up front") to sign a rental lease. They have little choice but to live in hotel rooms, leased on a weekly or monthly basis. The meager wages they earn rarely allows them to save enough to sign a standard rental lease (Ehrenreich, 2001).

Unlike the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the control systems internalized by the working poor in the United States, provide no reasonable opportunities for emancipation from oppression. Ehrenreich (2001) argues that small businesses that earn hundreds of thousands of dollars per year and large corporations such as Wal-Mart that earn billions of dollars each year make their profits on the backs of the working poor. One

Box 5.2: Barbara Ehrenreich
(Continued)

would think that full-time employment in the U.S., one of the wealthiest countries in the world, should allow a person to have a decent standard of living. Not so. Yet, corporations believe they will not be able to survive in the global economy if they pay workers more money.

In a recent lecture at Ohio University, where author Singhal was in the audience, Ehrenreich posed the following question to the audience: "Aren't you ashamed to live in a country where the largest public housing system is the Federal penitentiary system?"

Fragmentation and Unity in Organizing the Poor

Dialectic theory provided us with a framework to explain the process of organizing for social change within community suppers that feed the poor, hungry, and the homeless. In each of the community suppers we observed, multiple organizing activities took place including setting up the facility where the meal is served, coordinating meal preparation, distribution, and clean up. Participants may also plan for future activities together such as looking for work, sharing an apartment, or seeking medical attention. The organizing activities that are the focus of this chapter are consistent with Mumby's (2001) description of organizing through communicating as "the process of creating collective, coordinated structures of meaning through symbolic practices oriented toward the achievement of organizational goals" (p. 587).

Dialectically-speaking, people who are homeless are often isolated from mainstream society in ways that lead to a *fragmented* existence (Wright, 2005). Rather than feeling connected to others, they see themselves as lonely and separate. In the struggle for survival, they even see other homeless people as competitors rather than allies, further contributing to feelings of fragmentation. Simultaneously, there may be attempts by relatively well-to-do community members to reach out to the homeless in ways that build *unity* in a community setting. The homeless may also band together in ways that connect and temporarily reduce the pain of loneliness.

■ Community

A *community* is characterized by one or more of the following features: defined boundary, close affinity, common interest, and social control (Moemka, 1998). Hillery (1968) defined community as "that unit of social organization or structure which comes into being when interactional activities become sufficiently regularized or patterned for us to say that the total complex of them comprise an identifiable entity" (p. 198). This definition of community emphasizes communication, group formation, and formal structure (Berkowitz & Wolff, 2000; Bloom, 2000; Caswell, 2001; Cohen & Phillips, 1998; Constantino-David, 1982; Friedland, 2001; Maclver, 1928). When most people think of community they think of a place in which people connect and interact as they carry on daily activities. These interactions can focus on playful activities or on solving common problems. When people feel a sense of community there are common identifications that unify the group. Members are motivated to continue their association with one another, and thrive on it. Also important to note, however, is that people create community life and weave networks of social capital based on competing desires and experiences of both *fragmentation* and *unity*. In order to clarify the dimensions of the fragmentation and unity dialectic that is present in community, consider the descriptions presented next.

■ Fragmentation

Fragmentation is likely to occur when there exist multiple, competing voices and interpretations in a discursive social setting. This multivocality often separates people from one another rather than unifying them (Martin, 1992; Meyerson, 1991; Miller & O'Leary, 1987; Ruud, 1995). Multiple discourses may contribute to fragmentation as different dynamics surface in the process of organizing (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). For instance, in organizations where there exists a great deal of ambiguity regarding rules and norms, people may find it difficult to interact with others. The result of such fragmentation is that people are disconnected from one another even when they share a common physical space. In essence, fragmentation occurs when there is no form of identification that unifies people to communicate, work, or play with one another in ways that are personally or socially

rewarding. People who are fragmented often feel a deep sense of isolation from others. Depression and anger are also common among people who experience fragmentation. If fragmentation continues, a person may lose the ability to connect with others even when others show compassion.

■ Unity

Although a community may be comprised of diverse people, unity within a group implies oneness in spirit, sentiment, aims, purpose, interests and feelings. Even complex groups comprised of many related parts may display unity if the members act as a totality or a whole. Unity holds communities together even when internal and external forces attempt to loosen the ties that bind the collective together. Displays of unity occur when people in a community act together to accomplish a goal that requires the energy and collective effort of all members. Unity may also be exhibited when group members communicate social support for one another. This social support could take the form of emotional support, informational support, and instrumental support (House, 1981; Miller, 2003). Emotional support is exhibited when one person lets another person know they are cared for. Informational support involves providing facts or advice that may help a person solve a problem. Finally, instrumental support offers an individual physical or material assistance in completing a task (e.g., helping someone cook dinner).

Our Research Site and Data

We participated in a total of 30 community suppers sponsored by seven different churches, community groups, and non-profit organizations in the states of Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and West Virginia. The total number of hours in participant observation was approximately 450 hours (3 people \times 30 suppers \times 5 hours per supper). Our involvement in these community suppers ranged from helping to set up tables, chairs, and place settings; cooking the meals to be served; serving the meals; participating in the dinners by sitting among the attendees and engaging in conversation; and cleaning up afterwards.

We would usually arrive at 4:00 in the afternoon and leave at about 9:00 in the evening. Reflective field notes were written immediately following each supper. Importantly, because we were so actively involved in all aspects of the community suppers, our field notes represent the perspective of co-participants.

■ Interviews and Informal Conversations

Both formal interviews and informal conversations were part of the data collected for this project. Formal in-depth interviews were conducted with 33 different workers and volunteers who worked at the community suppers. These interviews (ranging from 30 to 90 minutes) were tape-recorded and transcribed. Questions centered on the experiences of interviewees during the community suppers including types of participation, memorable events, and the meanings the event held for them.

Informal conversations were held with 142 different people who attended the community suppers. With some respondents, three or four separate conversations were conducted across different suppers. All these conversations were with the poor; some were also homeless. Fearing that tape recording equipment would limit participation, we did not record any of these conversations. We concentrated carefully on what was said during these conversations and recreated the text as faithfully as possible in field notes written immediately after the conclusion of the meals. These conversations focused on the meaning that the community suppers held for the attendees and memorable events that had transpired during their attendance.

■ Good Works' Community Suppers

There were many similarities among the different groups sponsoring community suppers. The most participative and complex was the Friday Night Community Supper orchestrated by Good Works, a non-profit organization located in Athens, Ohio, that provides shelter to the poor and homeless in Appalachia along with a variety of other social services (Santee, 2001).

Appalachia is one of the poorest regions in the United States and is the label for a 200,000-square-mile area running along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Among these, Appalachian Ohio, where Good Works is based, has a population of 1.4 million and is one of the poorest regions in the United States. In 2005, nearly one-fifth of the families in Appalachian Ohio lived in poverty, earning \$15,000 or less per year for a family of three. Despite the local presence of Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, the college-going rate for Appalachian Ohio is 30 percent, compared to 62 percent for the U.S.

The Friday Night Supper at Good Works has been ongoing since 1992. The idea for this weekly event emerged when Keith Wasserman, the founding director of Good Works (Plate 5.2), realized that they could not always tell what happened to the people who had participated in the organization's programs (as workers, volunteers, and clients). The Friday supper would be a reunion of sorts to allow people to reconnect, and also provide a place for others to meet for the first time. This would be an opportunity to rekindle and sustain friendships and to share in one another's lives. The Friday Night Supper, which attracts from 125 to 140 people, is now an integral part of the Good Works organization (Plate 5.3).

A sponsoring organization shoulders the responsibility of procuring the food and coordinating the cooking, serving, and cleaning. Many of the poor who attend the dinner also help out with cooking, setting up, serving, and cleaning up afterwards. To use Keith's words, "this is a soup kitchen in reverse." The Friday Night Supper does not set up a structure where those with financial means provide handouts to poor people who wait in line to receive food. Keith believes that such structures may work in emergency situations but they make the poor feel worthless, devoid of dignity. By organizing an ongoing event and creating a structure where the poor work alongside their more well-to-do community counterparts, a sense of dignity is fostered. The poor can say with pride, "I worked at the Friday Night Supper and we all had a great time together."

At the Good Works Friday night community supper, the food is served "family style." Each table seats eight people and includes a

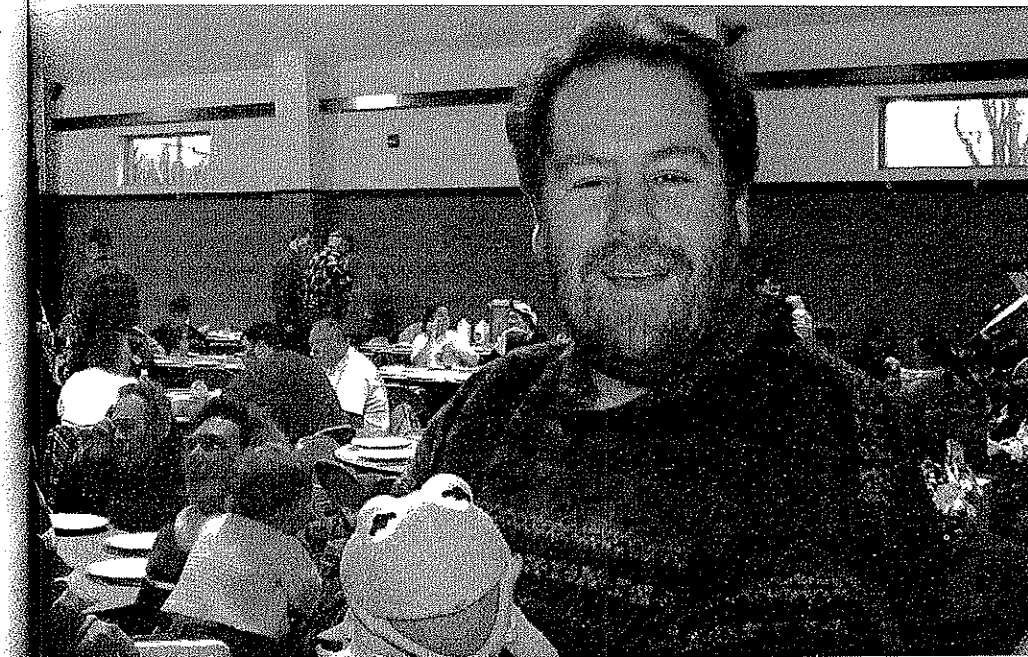
big salad bowl, along with large dish for the main entree, the vegetables, and the bread. Good Works could more easily serve the food in the style of a soup kitchen by having several big pots and trays of food in a line where people can approach the servers with plates in hand. Such a structure, however, sets up an "us" versus "them" environment with the poor cast as the marginalized other. By serving family style, more work is created for the cooks, the servers, and the cleaners. There are many more serving bowls, pans, and dishes to fill, serve, and clean. The food distribution process is also more complicated. But Good Works believes the additional work is worth it. By sitting at common tables, the well-to-do and the poor share and pass food to each other, signifying a contact between equals.

Community suppers help to spark social change by connecting the disconnected. So many homeless people are disconnected from people around them, particularly from the wealthier people who live in comfortable homes while they live on nearby street corners.

Plate 5.2

Keith Wasserman, founder of Good Works with "Kermit the Frog" during a 2005 Friday Night Community Supper in Appalachian Ohio

Wasserman voluntarily lived as a homeless person in various American cities to first-hand understand poverty, hunger, and homelessness. These street-based experiences shaped the design of Good Works' Friday Night Community Suppers. Source: Keith Wasserman.



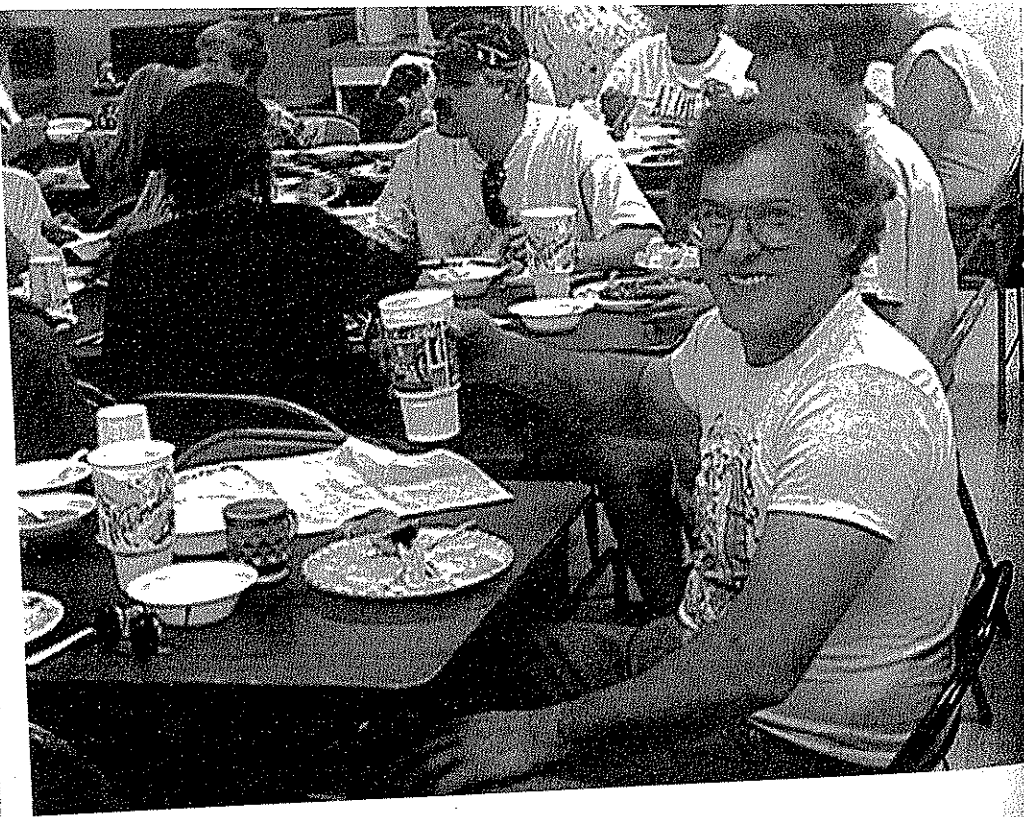


Plate 5.3
The Good Works Friday Night Community Supper creates a comfortable space for the poor and the homeless to connect with other community members

The Friday Night Supper, which attracts 125–140 people, serves as a weekly reunion for the homeless, and also a place for the homeless and well-to-do community members to connect on an ongoing basis. Unlike in soup kitchens where people line up for food, the meal in Good Works community suppers is served “family style” with each table seating eight people. By sitting at common tables, the well-to-do and the poor pass food to each other, signifying a contact between equals.

Source: Personal Files of the Authors.

Through these connections, the homeless develop the support networks which may help some of them to move from helplessness to self-sufficiency. Importantly, these connections are with other homeless people as well as well-to-do community members. This inspires social change by building community across different socio-demographic groups who otherwise may never come in contact with one another.

Box 5.3: Keith Wasserman and Good Works

After experiencing a tumultuous youth in the city of Cleveland, which included both drug addiction and drug peddling, Keith Wasserman arrived in Athens, Ohio in 1976 to begin his freshman year at Ohio University. Little did he know that Athens, Ohio would become the place of his calling, including his place of service to the poor and the homeless.

Keith founded Good Works, Inc., a Christian non-profit ministry in the early 1980s, building on a senior year internship project at Ohio University. Good Works began with Keith remodeling the basement of his Athens home to open an emergency shelter for homeless people. In 1985, the Good Works shelter moved out of Keith and Darlene’s (his wife) basement into its present facility—The Timothy House (named after after Keith and Darlene’s son). Timothy House includes four bedrooms with 15 beds, a living room, a kitchen, two bathrooms, two offices, and a large eating/meeting room. In 1994, Good Works purchased another property, The Hannah House. This facility, unlike an emergency shelter, provides a long-term transitional housing opportunity to homeless single men and women, enabling them to move toward independence.

Good Works is more than a homeless shelter. Residents of Timothy House represent a community. Good Works builds trust, teaches responsibility, and strengthens people’s faith in themselves and God. Good Works’ staff members help the homeless to identify the underlying factors that led to their current situation, moving them from dependence to self-sufficiency.

Good Works’ activities were shaped, in part, by Keith’s personal and voluntary forays in living as a homeless person. To design a need-based and compassionate program for the poor and the homeless, Keith lived as a homeless person in various American cities, accepting meals at soup kitchens and attending community suppers. Immersed in a voluntary culture of homelessness and poverty, Keith reflected on his experiences, writing extensive field notes and rich diaries (some of these are available on the Good Works website: www.good-works.net/). These experiences informed Good Works’ community-building activities among the poor and homeless in rural Appalachia.

Each year, Good Works provides some 200 homeless people a safe, clean, and secure environment to stay. In addition, Good Works provides an estimated 16,000 meals to the poor and homeless each year, including the Friday Night community supper held at The Plains United Methodist Church during winter months and on the Good Works Luhrig Road property (picnic style) the remainder of the year.

Box 5.3: Keith Wasserman and Good Works
(Continued)

Good Works has initiated several other projects to promote employment opportunities for the poor and homeless in Appalachia. One such project is "Good Gifts," a small business venture to help the poor both locally and globally. Working with two international organizations—Ten Thousand Villages and Servv International—Good Works purchases hand-crafted items made by poor people in developing countries and sells them locally (<http://www.good-works.net/>).

Over lunch in May, 2005, when author Singhal asked Keith Wasserman to reflect on his past three decades of work with the homeless in Appalachia, he noted: "The homeless have a need to connect ... both among themselves and with others in the community. Good Works makes these connections possible."

The Dialectic of Fragmentation and Unity in Community Suppers

The dialectic of fragmentation and unity emerged in the narratives of the organizers, workers, and volunteers, as well as the stories of the poor and the homeless in the community suppers we visited.

■ Communication and Unity

The community suppers that we observed view social change as a process of building unity within community. This unity building process includes re-connecting the poor and homeless to other people. Some of these connections are with other oppressed people. Other connections are with wealthier members of the community who desire to work alongside the poor.

Community suppers have certain structures in place that foster connections and mutual learning. Participating in meal preparation, serving, and clean-up operations integrates the poor into a setting of organized task completion. Their presence is dignified. They are not being given charity. Rather, they are working with people who all

participate in making the meal a success. Their role in the organizing of the community supper is important, no matter how small.

In the community suppers, the poor form connections with others who experience similar problems. Collaborative solutions may then be discovered. For example, two homeless people may pool resources to afford an apartment. Also, connections are made between the poor and the relatively well-to-do community members. When people from different socio-economic groups connect, the poor can access ideas, resources, and possibilities for action that they may have never considered previously. The poor further realize that the poor and the middle class have a common platform of engagement. When more affluent community members work alongside their poor neighbors, hope is restored among the poor. Social change becomes possible when the poor recognize they have a support network.

The integration of the poor and the well-to-do community members prompts social change in other ways too. Help may be given to the homeless in finding shelter. Guidance may be given on job training and employment possibilities. Available medical care services may be identified. Through such assistance, the homeless are able to concentrate less on surviving on a day-to-day basis, and may plan for the future.

At Good Works (GW) a starting point for the process of building unity begins when volunteers who will be cooking the Friday dinner listen to a GW employee describe the history of the meal. This contextualization is both inspiring and motivational. The compassion that motivates GW staff and the volunteers who work at the Friday Night Suppers is kindled. Some first time volunteers might worry about the daunting task of meal preparation for 125–140 people, but experienced GW volunteers reassure them by saying, "we can do this because we won't be allowed to fail. Our safety net is woven with the threads of our poor neighbors who appreciate all that we do" (field notes, 1999).

When authors Michael and Wendy Papa participated in their first Friday Night Supper, they were part of a group of eight volunteers. While their group prepared the meal, GW staff and community members (including local poor and homeless people) filtered in and out of the kitchen and dining area. Some came in to just smile and say hello. Others helped bring food out to the tables. Some set up the tables; others distributed the place settings. These activities occurred with few words being spoken. As Michael observed in his

field notes, "We are involved together in making this dinner happen both because it is the task at hand and because we care about one another" (field notes, 1999).

The Friday Night Supper sponsored by GW reveals some interesting dimensions of building unity within community (Eisenberg, 1998; Jason, 1997; Mandell, 2001; Nalbandian & Oliver, 1999; Naparstek & Dooley, 1998; Warburton, 1998; Warren, 1998). One way to build unity among people is to establish clear boundaries so participants know what to expect in a situation. When boundaries are established, common norms and rules begin to develop making it easy for people to coordinate actions. The boundary of the community suppers is defined by meal preparation and serving, dinner-time conversations, and cleaning up afterwards. Unity is created as people develop close ties with one another through conversations about common interests. Finally, unity is displayed through the establishment of connections, fellowship, and solidarity between and among people (Christenson, Fendley, & Robinson, 1989)

GW's Friday Night Suppers also draw attention to how unity may be created by communication, group formation, and formal structure. In order to orchestrate the suppers for 125-140 people, regular patterned interaction among participants is required, including a formal structure of interlocking activities (McLeod, Daily, Guo, Eveland, Bayer, Yan, & Wang, 1996; Warren, 1978). The relationship among participants, while voluntary and optional, is collectivistic in terms of the interlocking actions that are performed to prepare the dinner, serve it, and clean up afterwards. In the weekly suppers, community members—through informal conversations—form intimate and enduring relationships.

Selfless Service and Unity Moemeka (1996) explains that there can be no unity within community without individual members who serve selflessly. The sustenance of the community spirit demands that the hungry be fed, that the sick be looked after, and that the community takes care of what the individual does for a living during periods of illness (Ewalt, 1998; Flora, 1992; Moemeka, 1989, 1998; William & Windebank, 2000).

The centrality of selfless service is shown in author Michael Papa's field summary of a community supper sponsored by a Methodist Church in the Appalachian region of Ohio: "After attending this

supper, I developed a deeper understanding of the process of building unity within communities. Building unity is a process of doing things together, working toward a common goal, sharing thoughts, disclosing personal information, and giving from the heart." Further, author Papa noted: "As volunteers, we worked collaboratively in a small circle. We were also embedded in a larger circle that contained the members of the church staff, and the community people who attended and worked at the supper. We prepared and cooked together. We served and ate together. We cleaned up together. We shared our thoughts and our histories and we gave of ourselves." Author Wendy Papa noted: "We were embedded in a support structure that would not allow failure. This supper was about people connecting with one another.... When people connect with one another, we end the fragmentation experienced in isolation. Through sharing and listening and doing together we build unity" (field notes, 2000).

The preceding observation clarifies clearly what is possible when people connect with one another and commit to accomplishing something of value together. When the poor and homeless work alongside wealthier members of the community, the differences between them cease to be of importance. Deep identification exists between and among community supper participants. Despite differences in socioeconomic status, participants must recognize that they comprise one community. The task of preparing the dinner and cleaning up requires task identification. People must be willing to share a part of themselves with others. When a strong community is built, structures are put in place that people not only identify with; they work to protect those structures.

The most important dimension of identification that emerged in community suppers was interpersonal identification. Feelings of isolation and humiliation dominate the lives of the homeless. Being able to talk to other human beings lifts some of this isolation. They are accepted by those around them, not judged. While connection and acceptance does not solve all their problems, they derive agency from a safety net of supportive connections.

Spirituality and Unity Spirituality is often embodied among many of the poor and those who serve the poor. Religious spirituality is often used as a tool for keeping the social order and protecting social norms and communication rules (Mbiti, 1969; Moemeka, 1994). This

may not mean forcing religion upon people but rather helping people to recognize the spirituality that is within them.

One person who exemplifies this trait is Keith Wasserman, the founding director of GW. Keith believes that spirituality must emerge from within. When Keith walks through the door to participate in the Friday Night Supper in the basement of Central Avenue United Methodist Church in Athens, Ohio, he brings along his favorite puppet, Kermit the Frog. He does a great imitation and children look up at him with wide eyes and smiles. At the community suppers, Keith jokes with the crowd, getting audience participation, and asking people what they are thankful for. On one occasion, a young girl of about six suddenly spoke up and said that she would like to thank God since he made us all. That comment drew warm laughter from the crowd and a few said "Amen." On that note, food was passed around and the meal started (field notes, 2001).

Keith's facilitation of audience participation helps to build unity among Friday Night Supper participants. He does not preach to those assembled for the supper, rather he asks them to share their thoughts and experiences. Through this approach, he helps community members to both connect and identify with one another through shared experiences of joy and suffering. Importantly, as Chaskin and Abunimah (1999) explain, when individuals in a community feel a sense of connection with one another they feel prepared to participate in the community building process. This sense of connection may not have been realized if Keith presented a more structured religious service. By facilitating an audience-centered approach to spirituality, Keith allows the group to define its own spiritual culture rather than imposing one upon them.

Reconnecting the Isolated One part of building unity is to reconnect people who have faced separation. Too many of the homeless have been discarded by family, friends, and neighbors. These contacts are usually not renewed when a person is homeless. Eventually, the homeless internalize the belief that they are worthless, not deserving of human contact. If this feeling builds up over a number of years it becomes difficult to reconnect the isolated person with others. This is why so many homeless people shun others and frequently lash out in anger when a person attempts to connect with them. Consider Terry's story.

Terry, a woman in her late 40s and mother of four children, presented one of the most poignant examples of this process to us. Terry first came to a community supper at a Methodist Church in Detroit, Michigan a month after her husband beat her severely, breaking her jaw and slashing her face with a knife. While he was chasing her, he banged his head on a kitchen countertop and passed out. She rushed her children out of the house and never returned. Without the money or insurance to pay for plastic surgery, her face bears the scars she will carry for the rest of her life.

Once released from the hospital's emergency room, Terry and her children had no place to go. When they showed up at the apartment of two of her closest friends, they turned them away saying they had no room. Fortunately, one of her friends agreed to let her (and her children) stay. After a couple of weeks, however, she realized that her family was causing tension in the house. They needed to find another housing option.

When Terry heard about a community supper in the local neighborhood, she decided to attend. It was the first time she had left her house since her face was slashed. She was very self-conscious; she didn't want people to stare. When Terry walked in the door, the man who ran the community supper asked her to sit next to him. He talked to her normally, not staring at her scars. He introduced Terry to several other people. During her second visit, Terry learned that the man directing the community supper program ran a life-in-transition center for people who wished to get back on their feet. Terry stayed at this center for two months until she found a job that paid her enough to rent an apartment. Before coming to the community supper, Terry didn't think there was much hope for the homeless. Now she thinks differently. Even though she has her own apartment, Terry regularly attends the community suppers. As Terry explains, "These people are family to me. Unlike the people who I thought were my friends, the people who go to the supper care about each other" (personal interview, 1999).

Terry came to her first community supper disconnected and lonely. By connecting with the program director and other community members, she rediscovered hope. The path from hopelessness to hope was paved by the social capital embedded in the relationships she developed at the supper. *Social capital* is defined as the building of

interpersonal networks between people so as to enhance social trust, foster reciprocity, and facilitate coordination in order to benefit the collective (Preece, 2002; Putnam, 1995, 2000; Wallis, 1998a, 1998b; Woolcock, 1998). Social capital is enacted through patterns of civic engagement, trust, and mutual obligation among persons (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Kawachi, Kennedy, Bruce, & Lochner, 1997; Kawachi, Kennedy, & Lochner, 1997; Portes, 1998; Taylor, 1989; Weitzman & Kawachi, 2000). In terms of the impact of social capital on a community, when people connect with one another; trust grows, improving their lot both as individuals and as a collective.

Building Networks of Support among the Homeless In the community suppers we attended, well-to-do community members often helped the poor to find affordable housing, pursue possible job opportunities, or locate supportive community organizations. Community suppers also served the purpose of connecting the homeless to one another. A homeless person needn't be helpless. When people connect with one another, synergistic possibilities arise.

Consider the experiences of Sally, a homeless woman from Toledo. When Sally first went to a community supper, she didn't know anyone. She was afraid and embarrassed of what people would think of her. After people started conversations with her, she felt at ease. During her third community supper, Sally befriended Janice. They realized they had much in common, including daughters who were the same age. Janice helped Sally get a job at a local store. Some weeks later, Sally and Janice started talking about moving out of their respective shelters and sharing an apartment. Without each other's support, Sally and Janice were unlikely to afford an apartment on their own. Now they live in a respectable place with dignity. As Sally explained, "It feels like home and we can help each other out by watching the other's child" (personal interview, 2002).

Sally's story highlights the power of building unity, even if it means a connection between two people. Community suppers play an important role in helping people connect with others who experiences common problems. When people connect and identify with others, possibilities for collaborative action arise. Sally's connection with Janice ended homelessness for both of them.

Box 5.4: StreetWise Empowering the Homeless in Chicago⁵

StreetWise organizes and empowers the homeless of Chicago, providing them an alternative to begging or panhandling. By publishing and distributing the *StreetWise* newspaper, the organization (with the same name) provides employment to men and women in Chicago who are either homeless or at risk of becoming so. The newspaper serves as a vehicle to expand public awareness of the homeless among the homed, and to influence the media, policy, and public discourse on homelessness and poverty (Harter, Edwards, McClanahan, Hopson, & Carson-Stern, 2004).

Begun as a monthly newspaper in 1992, of and by the homeless, *StreetWise* became a bi-monthly publication in 1996, and then a weekly publication a few years later. In 1998, *StreetWise* launched its Work Empowerment Center (WEC) to assist homeless vendors with job skills, computer access, and a library. WEC provides a safe environment in which homeless people can form networks of cooperative action, a place where they are not judged or stigmatized (Harter et al., 2004).

Since 1992, *StreetWise* has provided 7,000 homeless men and women in Chicago an opportunity to earn a livelihood, enabling them to secure housing and buy food, clothing and personal necessities (<http://www.streetwise.org/>). More importantly, *StreetWise* has provided an opportunity for the homeless to begin their journey to self-sufficiency.

StreetWise vendors, who represent independent entrepreneurs, sell newspapers for one dollar, and keep 65 cents (Plate 5.4). Vendors are encouraged to follow *StreetWise's* code of conduct which includes respecting the "rules of the street," including using professional language, modeling courteous behavior, and refraining from asking for donations (Harter et al., 2004). By 2004, some 20,000 copies of *StreetWise* were selling every week, totaling a distribution of over a million annual copies.

StreetWise represents an alternative discourse community, privileging voices that are often marginalized, silenced, or rejected by the mainstream media. In its earlier years, it included regular columns titled *Labor Beat*, *Media Watch*, and *Vendor's Voices*. A *Labor Beat* column, for instance, covered issues of unfair labor practices, rising unemployment, echoing the concerns of immigrant workers, janitorial workers, and the racially underprivileged (Harter et al., 2004). In 2005, it provides space for carefully-selected non-profit organizations to promote their causes and political agendas.

StreetWise relies on the support of Chicago's community businesses, philanthropic organizations, and volunteers to organize the homeless.

Box 5.4: StreetWise
(Continued)

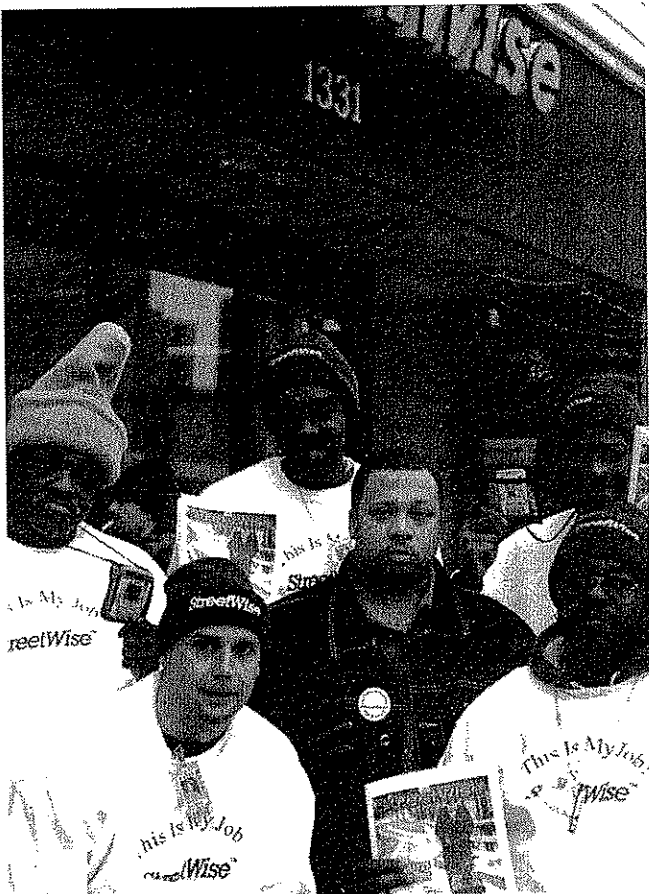


Plate 5.4
StreetWise vendors in Chicago proudly holding their newspaper while donning their organization's sweatshirts and hats
By publishing and distributing the StreetWise newspaper, StreetWise empowers the homeless of Chicago, providing them an alternative to begging or panhandling. The newspaper expands public awareness of the homeless among the homed.
Source: Suzanne Hanney.

Box 5.4: StreetWise
(Continued)

StreetWise has received numerous recognitions, including awards from the North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA).

In 2000, StreetWise began offering "Not Your Mama's Bus Tour," an interactive, theatrical and non-traditional bus tour hosted by StreetWise vendors that took tourists through downtown Chicago, showing sites and scenes depicting homeless life (<http://www.streetwise.org/current%20events/bustour.htm>). The tour featured five downtown stops in Chicago. At each stop, vendors narrated their personal stories of homelessness, including their path to self-sufficiency. This unconventional tour afforded the vendors a means to earn additional income outside their selling the StreetWise newspaper. Vendors earned money for their show performances on the tour bus and additionally pocket \$1 for each tour ticket they sold. More importantly, the bus tour raised public awareness on homelessness and poverty.

The bus tour was discontinued⁶ in 2003 when StreetWise management took a decision to focus on its core competency, the StreetWise newspaper.

■ **Communication and Fragmentation**

Despite the unity building aspects of community suppers, there is also evidence of fragmentation. Interestingly, these opposing dialectic tensions can be present in a single person's experience. Surrounded by caring people, a homeless person may nonetheless feel alone. Such lonesome feelings can be driven by insecurities or embarrassment. If well-to-do community members are present, a homeless person may feel resentment, jealousy, or disassociation. Consider Bill's story.

Bill, 65 years old when we met him, worked as a miner in his youth. When he was in third-grade, his father said, "You got to come work with me in the mines." With his schooling abruptly over, Bill worked six days a week in the Kentucky mines for the next 10 years. When Bill shares his story with young college student volunteers at community suppers, they often ask him why he did not say *no* to his father. Bill responds: "It's for my parents. They took care of me and fed me. They needed me to help out.... How could I tell them no? Why can't these kids I talk to understand? They come here and cook

the dinners but they just don't understand. They're different. They take from their folks. Why don't they want to help their folks? (personal conversation, 2000).

Bill's story exhibits fragmentation. He feels disconnected from the local college students who often volunteer at the community suppers held in a church basement in Athens, Ohio. Bill realizes how different his value system is from theirs. While Bill talks to the students, the talk accentuates these differences further. Rather than making connections, the separation is reinforced (Martin, 1992; Meyerson, 1991; Miller & O'Leary, 1987; Ruud, 1995).

Communication and Disconnection In all the community suppers we attended, there was evidence of meaningful community building. People laughed and offered support to one another. Sometimes people would burst into tears in recounting a particularly painful experience. Others would then immediately offer consolation. There was not a single community supper where the poor and the homeless did not have an opportunity to forge a connection. There were, however, clear examples of disconnection as well. Often, this disconnection was palpable between groups of people belonging to different socio-economic statuses. At most community suppers, some of the well-to-do people separated themselves from the homeless who were present in the same room. Perhaps being in the same room was being close enough. There was no need to sit with or talk with the poor. Many of the homeless appreciated the work of the well-to-do in preparing and serving meals, but felt slighted by the palpable lack of contact. Carl, a homeless man from Toledo, noted: "Why don't they talk to me? I have things to say. I'm not dumb. I have feelings. If they just sit by themselves, I don't want to talk to them either."

Disconnection and separation was also noticeable within groups. Remember our opening story about Hazel. She was shunned by her poor neighbors because they perceived Hazel as being even poorer. We also saw evidence of disconnection among the poor in community suppers. The homeless often sat in separate areas from the working poor. Those who were unemployed sat separately from those whose jobs barely allowed them to survive. Spatial hierarchy was evident among the poor. This hierarchy is so rigid that one dare not cross over to connect with someone of a higher or lower status.

Disconnection was also experienced by some homeless people during the informal prayers, or the saying of grace, during the community suppers. Sometimes this disconnection was displayed with subtlety. On a number of occasions we observed some of the homeless roll their eyes or shake their heads when others would pray. Other times the disconnection would be verbalized. Tim, a homeless man we spoke to at a community dinner in Detroit told us that he was tired of all the praying: "Why do we have to pray? What's God done for us? It makes me want to yell at these people. Just shut up and eat." Although prayer may connect some people to one another, for Tim it separated him further from others.

Communication and Disconsolation Although the preceding stories highlighted dimensions of fragmentation, the community supper participants were still connected to others, at least in a physical space.

In Charleston, West Virginia we came across a community supper organized by a neighborhood association in which everyone was seated at tables of 8-10 people except for one man who sat alone, hunkering over his plate. He looked like he had slept in his clothes; they were wrinkled and stained. When he glanced upward, he displayed a tense, angry expression. One of the volunteers went across the room to say hello to him. As the volunteer approached, the man moved his face closer to his plate. When the volunteer sat down next to him, the man exploded: "Get the fuck away from me." After a few minutes, he finished his food, stood up, and wiped his hands on his pants. Without making any eye contact with others, he walked to the exit, slamming the door shut as he left (field notes, 2000).

The preceding example highlights some of the intractable problems associated with homelessness and poverty. Despite being surrounded by supportive people, this man felt alone and disconsolate. Although we can only guess, the man probably experienced great pain and abuse in his life. In such cases, defensiveness serves as a protective shell that is difficult to penetrate. As Keith Wasserman of GW explained: "Many of the homeless are like abused puppies who will bite you as you offer human kindness. Are they biting you because they are hurting... or because they have learned to bite in order to survive? The answer is complex. People who are hurting spill their pain onto us when they bump into us. When they walk

Box 5.5: Fragmentation and Unity in Soup Kitchens

Although our investigation focused on community suppers, a more common setting to feed the homeless is through soup kitchens. Keith Wasserman of Good Works and authors Michael and Wendy Papa have visited dozens of soup kitchens throughout the U.S. The dialectic of fragmentation and unity was palpable in soup kitchens as well. Interestingly, the most powerful illustration of the dialectic surfaced when some form of violence was enacted.

Physical violence surfaced in several of the soup kitchens we visited. Consider the following excerpt from author Michael Papa's field notes from a soup kitchen in Charleston, West Virginia: "About an hour after dinner, two men started arguing. One said the other owed him some money. As each became angrier it became clear that the two were going to fight and a crowd started to surround the two men." Author Papa was surprised that the onlookers did nothing to alleviate the tensions: "People were yelling, 'C'mon hit him.' This was obviously considered entertainment for the night. The two men traded blows until one punch snapped back the head of the smaller man and his head hit a light pole. He collapsed to the ground and his attacker just walked away. When a soup kitchen volunteer tried to help the injured man, he yelled, 'Leave me alone.' After ten minutes, he got up and staggered away, alone" (field notes, 2002).

One of the most disturbing acts of violence and intimidation observed by Keith Wasserman was directed at a mentally disabled young man outside of a soup kitchen in Pittsburgh. As Keith documented in his field notes: "The first person I noticed was Martin, a severely mentally disabled young man with a loud voice. He reminded me of the many other 'Martins' who had come to Good Works over the years. It was apparent to me that Martin could not control his speech. Like a two-year-old child, he simply spoke whatever he was thinking at the time." Wasserman noted that Martin's behavior both irritated and amused the other men: "Martin became the center of their attention and he took the brunt of their anger and frustrations. Some of the men clearly enjoyed picking on Martin.... Then, the next day Martin started irritating the same group of men.... Willie, another homeless man, picked up a garbage can and started to chase Martin into the street. Martin ran and was almost hit by a car. This happened two or three times. The other men applauded Willie for his actions. I got the impression that no one liked Martin and that he had absolutely no friends in the world" (Wasserman, 1999, <http://www.good-works.net/>).

Box 5.5: Fragmentation and Unity in Soup Kitchens (Continued)

In Martin's example we see how unity existed alongside fragmentation. Martin's tormentors established a spirit of unity among themselves in their coordinated actions of degradation and violence. Simultaneously, their actions served to further fragment Martin's existence. Undoubtedly, Martin felt more alone and isolated after these sad series of events.

Author Michael Papa noted a similar example in a soup kitchen in downtown Atlanta: "A wild-eyed man in his early thirties entered this soup kitchen. His hair was long and matted. He wore a torn shirt without buttons and his pants hung low around his waist. Although everyone else came here for food, he came in clutching a crumpled and stained pizza box. Three or four slices of pizza were on top. When I came within a few feet of him, he grabbed the box more tightly and turned away. He then sat at a corner table." Author Papa further noted: "A group of young men in their twenties began to laugh and then one shouted. 'Hey, it's the pizza man.' 'No it's not,' said another, 'It's pizza man Dan.' After a couple of minutes of huddling together and laughing, the biggest man in the group started singing a rhyming rap song. 'It's Pizza Man Dan from the 404.' Got dinner from the trash, he must be poor.' This produced great laughter causing Dan to hunker down more as he ate his pizza." Author Papa realized that the situation was getting tense: "Each time the rapper repeated the lyrics, more laughter occurred. The rapper got closer and closer to Dan. Finally, when he yelled in Dan's ear, Dan jumped up and ran toward the door, clutching his pizza box. He tripped as he exited the door and fell down the steps. The pizza box flew from his arms and he yelped in fear. He got up, grabbed his pizza box, and limped away running. His tormentors rolled around on the floor choking with laughter" (field notes, 2002).

Insidiously, a group of poor men created community by uniting in their torture of another poor man. They enjoyed themselves at the expense of Dan, whose life became more fragmented by this torturous experience. But there is more to this story. At some level, Dan came to this soup kitchen because he wanted to be with other people. Paradoxically, he brought food with him that he wished to devour, and he was fearful of anyone getting close to him. So, he tried to isolate himself. To understand Dan's behavior we must recognize that he was torn between two desires—a desire to be connected and a desire to be separated from others. These opposing forces created great internal turmoil accounting for the panicked look on Dan's face when he entered the soup kitchen.⁸

Box 5.5: Fragmentation and Unity in Soup Kitchens (Continued)

One way to understand the violence and degradation observed by Papa and Wasserman is to consider the organizational culture in which the homeless are embedded at a soup kitchen. From the perspective of organizational culture, fragmentation refers to ambiguous cultures where individuals and organizations have fluctuating boundaries and identities (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). In many organizational cultures consensus is short-lived and issue specific (Kreiner & Schultz, 1993). In such fragmented cultures, members struggle to cope with wide-scale confusion and ambiguity (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). This fragmentation produces "de-centered" people who constantly restructure their identities (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). The identities of the poor are constantly fluctuating in a soup kitchen environment: Being a person in need, to a person undeserving of assistance; being a victim, to a perpetrator of violence. Different identities rise to the fore as different situations emerge. The act of survival requires a de-centered person who can constantly restructure his or her identity to meet impending exigencies.

A second way to interpret the violence and degradation is to consider the different forces of identification that operate in soup kitchens. Fragmentation can characterize the interplay between acceptance and rejection of organizational identities, providing space for organizational members to shift among identification, counter-identification, and dis-identification (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Phillips & Hardy, 1997; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). At one level, the poor and homeless identify with others who have similar experiences. However, so much of the feedback they receive from others (the poor and the wealthy alike) makes them feel worthless. As a result, the homeless both counter-identify and dis-identify with other poor and homeless people. They may reject those who are similar to them by lashing out at them with words, fists, and sometimes weapons. In doing so, they may feel momentary satisfaction, but they also further fragment their own personal identities.

away we are often left bruised and stained" (personal conversation, 2001).

The experiences of separation and fragmentation that we observed in the community suppers can be interpreted in numerous ways. Taylor and Trujillo (2001) provide us with a perspective on the fragmentation of the self when they observe that within every person

exists "multiple, de-centered, linguistically constituted and often competing forms of consciousness" (p. 174). In each of our descriptions of fragmentation, the focal individual is clearly de-centered from other individuals. Providing another perspective on fragmentation, Deetz (2001) rejects "the notion of the autonomous, self-determining individual" and in its place suggests a complex, conflictual subject with an emphasis on fundamental dissensus" (p. 32) (see also Garsten & Grey, 1997; Henriques, Holloway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Nukala, 1996). In each of our examples of fragmentation, the poor behave like conflictual subjects fearful or skeptical of connecting with others. Part of this fear or skepticism could be the perception of a fundamental dissension between middle-class attendees and the poor. Finally, as Deetz (2001) observes, identity is a discursive production. This means that individuals acquire so many simultaneous identities through competing discourses that fragmentation is virtually inevitable (see also Deetz, 1995; Gergen, 1991).

In summary, the dialectic of fragmentation and unity was palpable in our experiences with community suppers. While certain aspects of building unity were apparent in community suppers, so were aspects of fragmentation. In overall terms, however, the unity building aspects of community suppers were more noticeable than fragmentation.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we examined the dialectic tension between *fragmentation* and *unity* in community suppers. The micro-organizing techniques we observed included preparation and distribution of food, orchestration of some sort of religious ritual or ceremony, and fostering of fellowship and solidarity with the poor to offer direction for possible employment, job training, and housing opportunities.

In the organizing approach underlying community suppers, there were clear and powerful instances of building unity within communities. People who participate in these events tend to care deeply about one another. Participants offer a helping hand—whether it be a kind word or help in finding shelter and employment. There are also instances of fragmentation, however. In some instances, people experience dialectic tensions by feeling connected at the supper but simultaneously feeling disconnected upon returning home.

In other instances, people at the supper have been so shaped (even damaged) by their life experiences that they remain fragmented from others despite the community around them.

As we reflect on our experiences at community suppers, the dynamic tension between fragmentation and unity becomes clear (Table 5.1). Our opening example of Hazel at the beginning of the chapter noted her excitement in talking to people and being part of the Friday Night Community Supper. At the same time, however, Hazel reflected on the isolation she feels when she returns to her home where her neighbors ignore her. For Hazel fragmentation and unity are experienced at the same moment. The experience of unity at the community supper is contrasted simultaneously with her reflections of fragmentation at home.

Table 5.1
Dimensions of fragmentation and unity

<i>Dimensions of Fragmentation</i>	<i>Dimensions of Unity</i>
Isolation from Others	Affinity with Others
Focus on Difference from Others	Expression of Common Interests
Anger and Violence toward Others	Love and Concern for Others
Dissension with Others	Consensus with Others
Rejection	Acceptance
Disidentification	Group Identification
Made to Feel Worthless	Made to Feel Worthy
Forced Participation in Activities	Invited Participation in Activities

Transcending the dialectic of fragmentation and unity is a great challenge and not always possible. However, through the continued building of fellowship and community the poor and the homeless can gain in hope. There will always be some people who are so distraught and angry that no help is likely to be accepted, but this does not mean that social change organizers should turn their backs. Lives torn apart can be mended, isolated people can reconnect, hope can be kindled in darkness, and the deepest wounds healed by compassion. As seen through the examples described in this chapter, people can be uplifted despite tragic life experiences. In closing, consider the words of Keith Wasserman, Managing Director of Good Works. His commentary provides some insights about transcending the fragmentation-unity dialectic.

Helping homeless people who have been hurt and abused is impossible outside the context of community. It is in the formation of community that we can bear one another's burdens, share vital information, and hand off to one another the most difficult people who need our assistance and love.... It is in community that we help one another to heal the emotional pain experienced by our homeless neighbors. It is in community that we can do the most loving things toward those who need the most help. It is in community that we can model dignity and responsibility. It is in the context of community that we learn to prevent burn out. What we are suggesting ultimately is that we must intentionally join hands and deliberately attach ourselves to others and organize in a way to maximize our energy so we can all move forward together. (personal interview, 2001)

Keith Wasserman's insights are invaluable, but only if we describe community as a product of forces that both unify and fragment. When we promote only unity among the poor, or between the poor and other social classes, we risk perpetuating the status quo rather than interrogating it. Status quo attitudes have created the problem of homelessness and changes are needed in how we form communities so voices of dissent are not suppressed. Ultimately, we need to transform our cultural conversation about the problem of homelessness through dialogue. Importantly, this dialogue must manage carefully the tension between unity and fragmentation. On the one hand, dialogue helps us to discover the bonds that unify us. Just as important, however, dialogue can fragment us in ways that highlight differences that may be impossible to overcome. These tensions do not deny the existence of community. Rather, the dialectical tensions make for a vibrant community.

Notes

1. We thank Drs. Peter Clarke and Susan Evans for their inputs and insights in finalizing this case.
2. We use the term "homeless" instead of "people without homes." The latter phrase is more accurate as it recognizes that being without a home is only one part of a person's identity. However, it is quite cumbersome to use and we side with simplicity and clarity.
3. Homelessness is a temporary circumstance, not a permanent one. So the "number of homeless" people is not as robust a measure of

- homelessness as compared to the "number of homeless people over time" (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002, Fact Sheet 2).
4. Ironically, the largest federal housing assistance program in the U.S. is the entitlement to deduct mortgage interest from one's income tax. For every dollar that the U.S. government spends on low-income housing programs, the Federal treasury loses \$4 to lost revenues from tax breaks. Over 75 percent of this tax benefit is reaped by the top 20 percent of wealthy American in the U.S. In essence, Federal housing policy disproportionately benefits wealthy Americans.
 5. We thank Suzanne Hanney, acting editor of *StreetWise*, for providing inputs to this case through a conversation with author Singhal on May 11, 2005.
 6. The bus tour was also highly labor intensive, dependent on the vagaries of Chicago weather (including its long winter season), and logistically complicated to implement.
 7. 404 is the area code for Atlanta.
 8. Although our field notes reflect our subjective experiences, these experiences do guide what we see. Furthermore, given the vast amounts of time that authors Michael and Wendy Papa have spent with the homeless, we believe our interpretations accurately describe the lived experiences and perceptions of those we observed. Of course, we do not wish to generalize our observations to all homeless people in the U.S.

6 A dialectic journey of theory and praxis

Whatever goes around, comes around.

—Anonymous

In the present book, we focused on *four* dialectic tensions that are central to the process of organizing for social change.

First, we examined the dialectic of *control* and *emancipation*. This dialectic speaks to how disempowered people must embed themselves in control systems to emancipate themselves from oppression. Without some sort of control system it is difficult for the poor to organize themselves for emancipation. These control systems, however, require constant scrutiny, given they may offer emancipation while simultaneously restricting opportunities in other arenas of one's life.

Second, we explored the dialectic of *oppression* and *empowerment*. This dialectic emphasizes that oppression and empowerment are linked together in a dynamic tension. An act that empowers at one point in time may be oppressive at a later time. Alternatively, an action that appears to be empowering on the surface may actually lead to oppression at a deeper level.

Third, we focused on the dialectic of *dissemination* and *dialogue*. To passively accept information from an expert source is to accept control from another rather than to act independently of one's own free will. However, the path from oppression to self-sufficiency cannot be traversed in a vacuum. The oppressed are often so disconnected from sources of power that outside, expert information may be essential to their well-being. Dialogue among oppressed people is important as well because it provides an opportunity for people to reflect on their present conditions, and take collective decisions and actions.

Finally, we described the dialectic of *fragmentation* and *unity*. The poor and the homeless usually desire unity with others in a community setting that provides a semblance of security. In this community, people view one another as allies in their struggles to become self-sufficient. However, the forces that connect people in community compete with forces that fragment. Diversity in a community often separates people from one another, leading to isolation for some. The organizing struggle then is about sustaining unity despite forces that fragment.

In the present book we concentrated our analysis on four different organizational contexts to examine the process of organizing for social change. In each organizational context, we explored a single dialectic. Because the process of organizing for social change activates each of the four dialectics, an alternative approach might have been to focus on all four dialectics in each of the four organizational environments. To illustrate, let's consider how these four dialectics play out in one of our organizational settings—the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh.

Co-Existing Dialectics in the Grameen Bank

In the Grameen Bank, we focused on the dialectic of *control* and *emancipation*. This dialectic became clear when we recognized that emancipation is possible when one embeds oneself in control mechanisms that allow one to fight forces of oppression. The very control mechanisms that free one from a given type of oppression (money-lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates), however, trap one inside another control framework (working 12–14 hours per day, seven days a week) in order to provide for one's family.

Grameen Bank members also experience the dialectic of *oppression* and *empowerment*. Similar to the experiences of Indian women who are dairy farmers, Grameen Bank women are empowered through the economic activities that bring income to their families. At the same time, however, dominant husbands and in-laws restrict their mobility thereby oppressing many of them. Grameen Bank women are also more likely to seek assistance in performing their work from other women rather than enlist the assistance of men. Asking for assistance from another woman is an empowering action. When men cannot be asked for assistance, women are simultaneously oppressed by gender roles that separate them from men in the economic sphere.

Grameen Bank members also experience the dialectic tension of *dissemination* and *dialogue*. There is a compelling need for information dissemination. Women receive training and instructions from Grameen fieldworkers so they may understand the dynamics of the Grameen loan system. There are also times when a woman accepts information from another woman who has more expertise on a given topic and/or can offer assistance in solving a problem. Dialogue is also central to the empowerment of Grameen women, however. They share personal stories and experiences of building small businesses. Dialogue also builds trust, camaraderie, and cohesiveness among women members.

Finally, Grameen members experience *fragmentation* and *unity*. Remember the story of Tasmiah. When her husband took her loan money she received no support from her close friend and fellow group members. She was isolated when she needed assistance. After being re-introduced into the group by the Grameen fieldworker, she again enjoyed the benefits of unity with others. The pulls of fragmentation and unity are not isolated, however. In every group there are tensions that pull people apart from one another as well as tensions that link them together.

In essence, we argue that the process of organizing for social change is a dynamic and complex process that produces multiple and simultaneous dialectic tensions that pull people between competing poles of communicative action. The more we understand the dynamics of these multiple forces, the more we will understand how social change processes unfold in complex communities.

Organizing in Complex Social Systems

Our investigation of the four dialectic tensions in four organizational contexts strongly suggests that social change processes are highly complex and non-linear. Mutual causalities and outcomes exist that are often uncertain, emergent, and non-predictable. As we reflect on what we have learned about social changes processes, complexity science emerges as a potentially valuable framework to gain insight into issues of praxis for practitioners of social change initiatives.¹

What exactly is the value in applying principles of complexity science to understanding complex social change phenomenon? Complexity science is a discipline that is providing new insights into

how complex social systems self-organize, evolve, and adapt as a result of emergent and non-linear interactive processes (Glouberman & Zimmerman, 2002). Complexity science is not a single theory; rather it is the study of complex adaptive social systems, including the patterns of relationships within them, how they are sustained, and how outcomes emerge (Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek, 1998). In this sense, complexity science debunks highly-planned blue-print approaches to social change, privileging self-evolving, and adaptive learning approaches (Morgan, 1993, 1997).

Here, using illustrations, we explicate four principles valued by complexity science that hold important implications for scholars and practitioners interested in organizing complex social systems: (1) mutual causality, (2) the butterfly effect, (3) valuing outliers, and (4) celebrating paradoxes. Why the focus on these four principles? We focus on *mutual causality* because in complex social systems outcomes are interdependent, emergent, uncertain, and non-predictable. We focus on *the butterfly effect* because in complex social systems big changes can occur from small interventions. We focus on *valuing outliers* because in complex adaptive systems deviance and anomalies are treated as real phenomenon that provide valuable insight (as opposed to being perceived as useless or undesirable). Finally, we focus on *celebrating paradoxes* because complex adaptive systems are non-linear and embody noise, tension, and fluctuation.

■ Mutual Causality: Negotiating Peace or Eradicating Guinea Worm Disease

In 2004, author Michael Papa started his association with The Carter Center (TCC) in Atlanta, Georgia, serving as a technical advisor to an evaluation plan to document the approaches taken by President Carter in conflict resolution. Papa's efforts centered on the peace negotiations that took place between Uganda and Sudan culminating in the signing of the Nairobi Agreement in Nairobi, Kenya in 1999.

To many outsiders familiar with the Camp David Accords of the late 1970s (in which Carter brokered peace between Egypt and Israel), the Nairobi agreement appears to be a function of President Carter's mediation artistry in negotiating peace between President Al-Bashir of Sudan and President Museveni of Uganda. Although Carter's role

was clearly crucial, the peace negotiation process was much more circuitous and complex.

Lasting peace is built from the ground-up as well as from the top-down and middle-outwards. So, President Carter's mediation strategies involved much more than facilitating and mediating negotiation between national leaders. TCC administrators worked simultaneously with state department officials and other key government personnel of Sudan and Uganda "building the ground for peace." They identified all points of agreement between Sudan and Uganda, so Presidents Carter, Al-Bashir and Museveni could focus on only the most divisive issues.

Further, a conflict management training program was implemented for various civil society groups in Sudan and Uganda. Jeffrey Mapendere, Senior Program Officer of TCC, met regularly with different rebel and community groups in both countries to reduce the existing distrust and violence. The goal of these training efforts was to build trust and replace violence with peaceful conflict management strategies.

However, President Carter's views on peace are even broader than negotiating agreements that halt hostilities between adversaries. Carter, for instance, believes there cannot be a lasting peace when people are destitute and suffering from disease. Nor can there be peace when people cannot freely elect their leaders. Not surprisingly, President Carter routinely offers his services to monitor the process of holding free and fair elections in several countries.

So, in the Sudan-Uganda project President Carter and the TCC were closely involved in the eradication of guinea worm disease, common in East Africa. When a person drinks water which has guinea worm eggs, the eggs enter the person's digestive tract, hatch and grow, and then exit the body causing bloody sores and extreme pain. Instances of paralysis and death are common. Thanks to TCC efforts over several years in Sudan and Uganda, guinea worm disease declined from 3.5 million cases to a paltry 33,000—a miraculous feat. Many attribute this progress to TCC's Guinea Worm Eradication Program. Results have been so promising that the World Health Organization has targeted Guinea Worm Disease as only the second disease after small pox to be completely eradicated.

Some interesting observations may be made concerning the inter-relationship between TCC's health and peace initiatives. Although some may say that peace between Sudan and Uganda allowed the

guinea worm eradication program to reach its goals, others may argue that the guinea worm eradication program was essential to help promote peace. Because of the ongoing program of eradicating guinea worm disease, TCC and President Carter had sustained relationships with government leaders and key members of civil society in both Sudan and Uganda for over a decade. This long-term building of trust made President Carter and TCC the clear choice in mediating peace between the two countries. Recognizing this reality, President Carter called for a guinea worm cease-fire to end hostilities in Sudan so the health initiative could operate without fear of violence. The cease fire not only helped the health program accomplish its goals, the temporary cessation of hostilities paved the road to peace.

Did the guinea worm eradication program play a role in initiating peace or did the peace agreement play a role in allowing the health program to continue? The answer to this question is not simple. What this example does show is that the path to social change, whether it is the cessation of hostilities, or the adoption of filtration devices to provide potable water, is not clear-cut. There exist competing mutual conditions, complexities, and causalities.

What do you think?

■ The Butterfly Effect: Hunterdon Medical Center

Complexity theorists value the wisdom embodied in what is known as the butterfly effect. That is, a butterfly may flap its wings in Lima, Peru eventually leading to thunderstorms over the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. The principle here is that small changes in input conditions, when sustained over time, can often cause cascading huge effects. Also, as we have implied previously, in complex, adaptive, non-linear social systems, there are usually no independent or dependent variables. All variables are independent and dependent. So, how might one find the few small changes that might have large effects?

Let's consider the case of The Hunterdon Medical Center in Flemington, New Jersey.² Hunterdon, a not-for-profit 176 bed health care facility, is a model for patient and community-centered care, and has consistently topped charts for patient satisfaction with nursing care. At Hunterdon, you are not a patient in Room 23, but Mrs. Bloom, who manages the corner deli on Main Street.

How has Hunterdon achieved its well-deserved reputation? Linda Rusch, Hunterdon's Vice President for Patient Care, encourages her staff to make small positive changes in whatever they do (Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek, 1998). To Rusch, small changes act like drops falling on a still pond, creating a ripple effect; or, they can act as a grain of sand that falls on a sandpile, causing large avalanches of sand. An "insignificant" thing can build over time leading to big results (akin to a variety of bamboo that does not sprout for five years, but in the sixth year grows 80 feet).

Akin to most complex adaptive systems, Hunterdon is a site of rich interactions among its agents, fostering connections and cultivating relationships, exemplifying the "feminine" side in health care. Dubunking the aggressive, competitive, male testosterone model of care, Hunterdon instead emphasizes sensitivity, compassion, and expression. The primary energy of the system is channeled into cultivating positive interactions. Rusch labels her style of leadership as a relationship "cultivator"—one who cultivates an environment where people want to come and work. She also sees herself as a "weaver"—who can work like a spider—ceaselessly spinning new tendrils of connection, while continually strengthening ones that exist (Helgeson, 1995).

At Hunterdon, nurses experience what it is like to be a patient. To build empathy, they are put on wheel chairs, rolling beds, and in restraining harnesses. Hunterdon's culture encourages nurses to work outside the hospital. Nurses hold community blood pressure screenings, cholesterol checks, and health fairs. They work with police and car dealerships to teach young parents how to buckle children in car seats.

These small initiatives cascade through the Hunterdon system, replicating themselves and leading to big changes. What implications does the cascading butterfly effect have for scholars and practitioners of organizing for social change?

■ Valuing Outliers: Positive Deviance in Vietnam³

Can a community find solutions to its problems without requiring a lot of outside resources? Positive deviance (PD) is an approach to social change that enables communities to discover the wisdom they

already have, and then to act on it (Buscell, 2004; Sternin & Choo, 2000; Pascale & Sternin, 2005).

PD initially gained recognition in the work of Tufts University nutrition professor Marian Zeitlin in the 1980s, when she began focusing on why some children in poor communities were better nourished than others (Zeitlin, Ghassemi, & Mansour, 1990). Zeitlin's work privileged an assets-based approach, identifying what's going right in a community in order to amplify it, as opposed to focusing on what's going wrong in a community and fixing it.

Jerry Sternin, a visiting scholar at Tufts University, and his wife, Monique built on Zeitlin's ideas to organize various PD-centered social change interventions around the world (Plate 6.1). They institutionalized PD as an organizing for social change approach by showing how it could be operationalized in a community-setting (Buscell, 2004).

In 1991, the Sternins faced what seemed like an insurmountable challenge in Vietnam. As director of Save the Children in Vietnam, Jerry was asked by government officials to create an effective, large-scale program to combat child malnutrition and to show results within six months. More than 65 percent of all children living in Vietnamese villages were malnourished at the time. The Vietnamese government realized that the results achieved by traditional supplemental feeding programs were rarely maintained after the programs ended. The Sternins had to come up with an approach that enabled the community to take control of their nutritional status. And quickly!

Building on Zeitlin's ideas of PD, the Sternins sought out poor families that had managed to avoid malnutrition without access to any special resources. These families were the positive deviants. They were "positive" because they were doing things right, and "deviants" because they engaged in behaviors that most others did not. The Sternins helped the community to discover that mothers in the PD families collected tiny shrimps and crabs from paddy fields, and added those with sweet potato greens to their children's meals. These foods were accessible to everyone, but most community members believed they were inappropriate for young children (Sternin & Choo, 2000). Also, these PD mothers were feeding their children three to four times a day, rather than the customary twice a day.

The Sternins created a program whereby community members could emulate the positive deviants in their midst. Mothers, whose children were malnourished, were asked to forage for shrimps, crabs,

and sweet potato greens, and in the company of other mothers were taught to cook new recipes that their children ate right there. Within weeks, mothers could see their children becoming healthier (Plate 6.2). After the pilot project, which lasted two years, malnutrition had decreased by an amazing 85 percent in the communities where the PD approach was implemented. Over the next several years, the PD intervention became a nationwide program in Vietnam, helping over 2.2 million people, including over 500,000 children improve their nutritional status (Sternin & Choo, 2000; Sternin, Sternin, & Marsh, 1999).

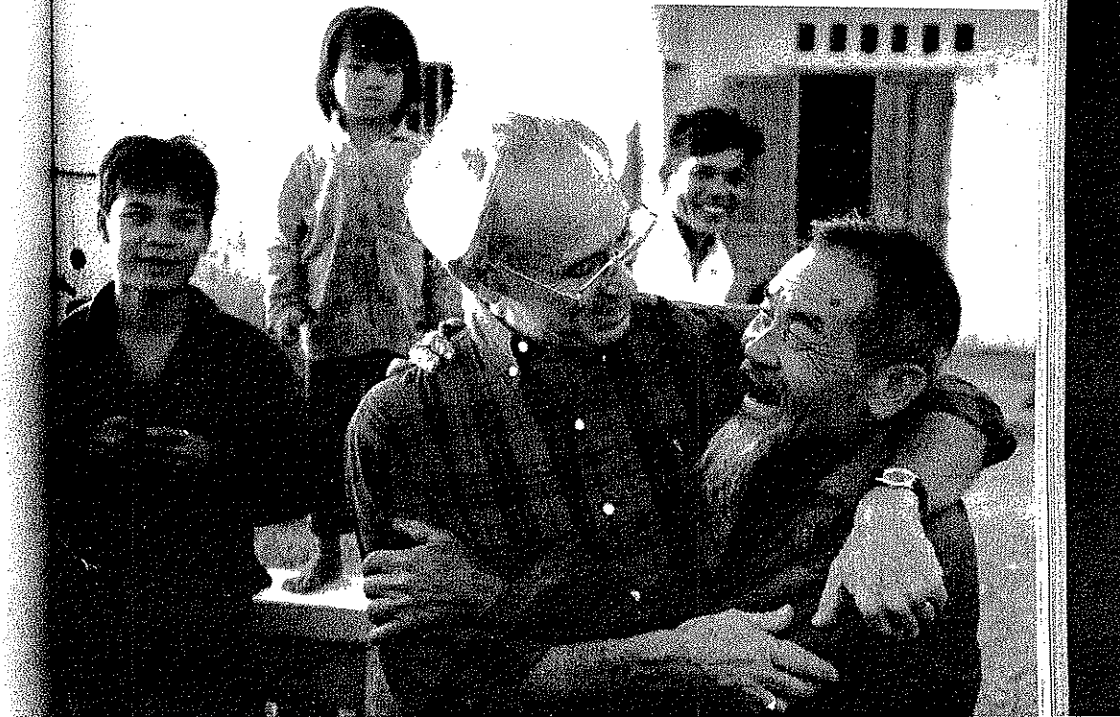
Positive deviance questions the role of outside expertise, believing that the wisdom to solve the problem lies inside. Social change experts, usually, make a living discerning the deficits in a community,

Plate 6.1

Jerry Sternin with a Vietnamese community elder who strongly supported the Positive Deviance nutrition program in his village

Jerry Sternin and his wife, Monique, have led the implementation of various positive deviance (PD)-centered social change interventions around the world. PD privileges an assets-based approach, identifying what's going right in a community in order to amplify it.

Source: Jerry Sternin.



prioritizing the problems, and then trying to implement outside solutions to change them. In the PD approach, the role of experts is to find positive deviants, identify the uncommon but effective things that positive deviants do, and then to make them visible and actionable (Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2000). PD is led by internal change agents who present the social proof to their peers (Macklis, 2001). In PD, the role of the expert is mainly to facilitate a process that can help amplify this wisdom locally. In so doing, solutions and benefits can be sustained, since the solution resides locally.

The PD approach emphasizes hands-on learning and actionable behaviors.⁴ As Jerry Sternin notes: "It is easier to act your way into a new way of thinking than to think your way into a new way of acting"

Plate 6.2

Monique Sternin (center) and health volunteers create a nutritious meal based on foods used by Positive Deviants in Quang Vong, Vietnam, 1995

After identifying the nutritional strategies followed by the positive deviants in the community, the Sternins asked mothers, whose children were malnourished, to forage for shrimps, crabs, and sweet potato greens. These mothers then learned how to cook new tasty recipes with these ingredients which they fed to their children. Within weeks, mothers could see their children becoming healthier. The PD intervention in Vietnam helped over 2.2 million people improve their nutritional status.

Source: Jerry Sternin.



(Sternin quoted in Sparks, 2004). So, the PD approach turns the well-known KAP (knowledge, attitude, practice) framework on its head. As opposed to subscribing to a framework that says increased knowledge changes attitudes, and attitudinal changes change practice; PD believes in changing practice. PD believes that people change when that change is distilled from concrete action steps.

Evaluations of PD initiatives show that PD works because the community owns the problem, as well as its solutions (Buscell, 2004; Dorsey, 2000; Sternin, 2003). Positive deviance is now being used to address such diverse issues as childhood anemia, the eradication of female genital mutilation, curbing the trafficking of girls, increasing school retention rates, and promoting higher levels of condom use among commercial sex workers (Sternin, 2003).

The positive deviance approach to organizing for social change is located at the intersection of theory, method, and praxis. Theoretically, it privileges local knowledge. Methodologically, PD does not treat deviance as an anomaly. In contrast to approaches that favor "regression to the mean," PD valorizes outliers. PD's praxis is humane. It believes in inside-out social change with the help of outside expertise and facilitation.

When author Singhal visited Jerry and Monique Sternin in their Cambridge home in January, 2005, they were making preparations to travel to Davos, Switzerland to conduct a Positive Deviance workshop at the World Economic Forum. When Singhal noted that PD was "going places," Jerry winked and responded: "Yes, the world could do better with more deviance."

What do you think?

■ Celebrating Paradox: Posing Wicked Questions, Managing Polarity

Consistent with dialectic approaches, complexity science believes that contradictions, paradoxes, and tensions are inherently unavoidable in complex adaptive social systems. For instance, organizations inevitably are characterized by the following tensions: The need for leadership to be conservative to maintain stability *and* be revolutionary to spur change; the need for centralized coordination *and* decentralized initiatives; the need to foster team building *and* reward individual achievement, and so on (Johnson, 1996).

Complexity science holds that these tensions cannot be solved by choosing one polarity, and neglecting the other. The on-going, natural tension represented in the polarity, dilemma, or paradox can either be paralyzing, destructive, or debilitating for an organization or can represent entry points for organizational creativity, innovation, and opportunity (Johnson, 1996; Pascale, 1990; Fletcher & Olwyler, 1997). An organization in which tension is smoothed over and differences are glossed over is neither learning nor adapting efficiently (Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek, 1998). On the other hand, a learning and adaptive organization manages polarities by tapping the power of opposing ideas.

Polarity managers can uncover the power of opposing ideas by posing *wicked questions*, questions that have an embedded paradox or tension in the question (Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek, 1998). Wicked questions have no obvious answers, but help expose people's strait-jacketed assumptions about an issue, context, or situation. For example, how can we set direction when we do not know the future? How can we be both a system and many independent parts? A wicked question is not a trick question. With a trick question, someone knows the answer. The value of wicked questions lies in their capacity to expose our assumptions, and open up new options not considered before. Exposing these assumptions in a question is both uncomfortable and a relief.

Wicked questions are especially useful to pose (a) when there are polarized positions in a group and there seem to be only either-or answers, (b) to open up possibilities which are not intuitively obvious, and (c) to make the "undiscussable" discussable, that is, to articulate the assumptions held by members in a group (Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek, 1998).

Wicked questions invite participation in both forming the questions and searching for solutions to address them. The embedded tension or paradox, uncovered through a wicked question, provides an opportunity for an organization to pursue creativity and innovation.

In sum, scholars and practitioners of social change should consider the implications that complexity science principles—mutual causality, the butterfly effect, valuing outliers, and celebrating paradoxes—have for their work.

What other implications does our book have for praxis on organizing for social change?

Implications for Praxis

We suggest the following:

■ Re-framing Freire: Viewing Deposits as Investments

When Freire (1970) referred to the banking model of education (discussed in chapter 4) he described how traditional educational practices turn students into "receptacles" to be "filled" by teachers, like making deposits at a bank. The teacher deposits and students are the depositories. The role of the student is to receive, memorize, and repeat. Freire argues that the banking model tries to control thinking and action and inhibits our creative powers.

We argue that Freire's metaphor of "making deposits" minimizes the value of expert information that can genuinely empower the oppressed. We believe organizing for social change programs will be better served if Freire's metaphor of "making deposits" (which has taken on a negative connotation) is reframed as the metaphor of "making investments."

An expert in the specific problem confronting an oppressed group may have access to information that may be beneficial. This expert need not view the oppressed as passive entities but as active receivers of information. The expert offers the information because he or she believes in the human potential of the oppressed group. This belief justifies the investment the expert makes in the hope of sparking meaningful social change. Like all investments it is up to the person receiving the information to "work the capital." In this process the oppressed mold, reform or otherwise make the information theirs.

Although the information that sparks the social change may not emerge through dialogue between the external expert and the oppressed group, dialogue may occur among the oppressed. Through this dialogue they produce social change that they own because it is driven by their conversations and actions. The investment therefore produces a return that exceeds the initial principal. The excess capital (e.g., social capital) that is created could not occur without the efforts of the oppressed working with each other.

If we apply this idea to the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, we may view the banking model to which women members are introduced as being the investment made by the organization. This model

is quite specific in terms of loan disbursement and recovery procedures to be followed. However, the loan recipients produce their own ideas for small businesses. They also devise their own ways of helping each other and moving their communities forward. They are not passive receivers of information rather they are active agents in producing meaningful social change.

In the cooperative societies of the National Dairy Development Board in India, women dairy farmers are presented with very specific information about producing milk under hygienic conditions, caring for their cows, and providing them with balanced cattle-feed and animal vaccinations. They are introduced to systems of cooperative decision-making and governance. Like the Grameen borrowers, they too take this organizational investment and make it their own. They figure out ways to help one another deal with issues of both animal and child care. They collaboratively identify new business opportunities made possible by the profits earned from dairying. In short, their ingenuity and hard work allows the investment to grow over time.

When audience members listen to an entertainment-education radio serial, they are exposed to messages crafted by scriptwriters and subject-matter specialists, often based on formative research. These message designers rarely come in direct contact with the people who receive the investment. However, as we observed in several villages of Bihar, listeners took this investment and sparked social change through their actions. The fire that burns within the Singh family in Kamtaul (discussed in chapter 4) cannot be explained by viewing them as passive receptacles of a deposit. The Singh family, like so many other listeners, put the investment to work to create something of societal value.

Finally, the poor and homeless who attended the Good Works' community suppers in Appalachia (discussed in chapter 5) were also exposed to certain models of building community. They were not manipulated into accepting these models blindly. The poor decide for themselves what alternatives there are to living on the street. They decided that being connected to others is preferable to isolation. And they decided how to seek help to become self-sufficient.

Our metaphorical reframing is not inconsistent with Freire (1970) who acknowledges that no one is liberated entirely through his or her own efforts. This opens the door for people to serve as investors in the oppressed. The goal is not manipulation or re-creation of the

status quo. The outside investment represents the spark; the social change that emerges is owned by the people who "work the capital."

■ Amplifying Discourses of Dignity

One of the key lessons that we glean about organizing for social change is to create, sustain, and amplify a discourse of dignity. The poor, for instance, are treated with dignity when they are given loans to start their own businesses rather than handouts that sustain relationships of dependency. The poor are treated with dignity at community suppers when people sit around a table for a family-style meal and share personal stories, rather than serving them in silence as too often happens in soup kitchens.

Creating a discourse of dignity also means opposing public discourses that deny dignity to oppressed groups. Unfortunately, the overwhelming public discourse views the poor as societal sponges, drug addicts, thieves, and prostitutes (a discourse that newspapers like *StreetWise*, discussed in chapter 5, are trying to change). Equally disturbing is the elitist proclivity to push the disempowered out of the common range of vision; so they literally cannot be seen (Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak & Browkaw, in press; Joniak, 2005; Von Mahs, 2005). When you cannot see a population of people it is easy to forget them. For example, the *dalits* in rural India live at the periphery of most villages—almost invisible from the common gaze.

Furthermore, there rages a discourse of hypocrisy that further denies dignity to the poor. For example, the rich executive snorts powder cocaine framing it as "reward" for a hard day's work. Yet, that same executive vilifies the poor man smoking crack cocaine to escape a reality that seems hopeless.

Discourses of dignity must end the separation of viewing us versus them. When we see separation, we extend a helping hand to someone who is different and in some way lesser than we are. Restoring the dignity of the poor also means making the invisible more visible. Wealthier and poorer members of society need to come into more frequent contact with one another. Policy-makers in Washington, D.C. or New Delhi need to attend community suppers in Appalachia to understand the dignity and resilience of the poor and the homeless. The mass media also has an important role to play in amplifying a discourse of dignity. Too many news stories stigmatize the actions of

Box 6.1: Rush Limbaugh
Promoting Hypocrisy and Denying Dignity

For several years, Rush Limbaugh has made a lucrative career as a conservative radio talk show host in the United States. A darling of many right-wing republicans, and living the consummate good life in a posh, tree-lined mansion in Palm Beach, Florida, Limbaugh derided gender activists as "feminazis," conservationists as "environmental wackos," and the homeless as "scum bags." All too often, in his radio programs, Limbaugh lambasted the poor who use drugs, arguing that drug use destroys families and societies. He advocated strong prison penalties for convicted drug users (Tucker, 2003).

Now Limbaugh faces charges of illegally obtaining hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of prescription painkillers. Because his wealth allows him to hire Roy Black, one of the best criminal defense attorneys in the U.S., it is unlikely that Limbaugh will spend time behind bars or suffer the indignities of random drug tests or routinely reporting to a probation officer.

When will rich, influential people like Rush Limbaugh—who exercise such strong influence on mass media and public discourses—end the hypocrisy of vilifying the poor for the same choices they make themselves?

the poor. This provides justification for viewers to look down on the person who begs or steals in order to fill a hungry stomach, or who sells their body to survive. Indignity anywhere, threatens dignity everywhere. So, we need more alternative discourses such as *StreetWise* newspaper, and more city tours like "Not Your Mama's Tour of Chicago."

■ **Centering Struggle as Necessary to Social Change**

Practitioners dedicated to promoting social change need to recognize that struggle and dialectic tensions will always be present when working with the poor. Instead of becoming frustrated by these struggles, they should view them as essential and productive.

Why is struggle an ongoing and necessary condition of social change? First, social change overturns established habits of individuals. When people have grown accustomed to long-standing ways

of thinking and acting it is very difficult to internalize and sustain change. So, at a very basic level, people must struggle against the very natural tendency to revert back to the familiar. Take for example the decision to use condoms as a way to prevent STDs and/or as a method of birth control. An individual may commit to this decision; however, when opportunities for sexual relations surface will the commitment remain if a person does not have access to a condom? For some people, the commitment may remain strong. For most, a personal struggle will surface as different options are considered, including "let's take a chance."

Struggle also exists at the community level. Power brokers and elites (such as money lenders), who are threatened by the change, may actively resist it. Peers may not see eye-to-eye on certain issues. Such struggles enact themselves in conversations, arguments, social ridicule, or even violence. When social change efforts require problem solving at the community level, other struggles may surface. There may be a struggle over solution development, selection, and enactment. Furthermore, just because a solution is thoughtfully designed does not mean that it will work. Solving complex social problems often involves trial and error. Participants in the process must be willing to work through the struggles of group problem solving, devising creative solutions, and repeatedly producing possible solutions until one or more seem to work.

Even when support for social change exists in a community, a critical mass of followers must surface. Developing this critical mass can be a very slow process where advocates will have to struggle with uncertainties, hesitations, and resistances from community members. Before a critical mass develops, resources in support of social change may be lacking. The struggle involved here includes the willingness among advocates to sustain the efforts necessary to persuade people, even if that support is developed gradually one person at a time.

The dialectical perspective advanced in this book exposes perhaps the most difficult struggle. Initiating and sustaining support for social change produces unanticipated dialectics that surface only when people attempt to enact change at the community level. So empowerment can be oppressive, building unity may cause fragmentation, and so on. These dialectics may be a product of unanticipated community resistance. Importantly, community members rarely notice these dialectic tensions until that struggle reaches a crisis point.

By studying the programs of the Grameen Bank we learned that control systems provide structures that make emancipation possible. There will always be struggles and tensions, however. Grameen members are so interconnected with fellow members that breaches in discipline or loan defaults have potentially frightening consequences. This does not mean that control systems should not be part of social change programs. Rather, control systems should be constantly scrutinized to ensure that the emancipatory benefits of membership override the restrictions of control systems. The call for constant scrutiny is not simple. There will be struggles between program advocates and program members. These struggles are necessary because they eventually help strengthen the programs benefiting the poor.

When we talked with women dairy farmers in India we learned that the path from oppression to empowerment contains many struggles. When a person has experienced oppression for years there will be both internal and external impediments to empowerment. Internally, a person may doubt their ability to accomplish what they have long been told is impossible. There may also be powerful pulls toward old habits that are difficult to change. Externally, a poor person struggling to change may face barriers from other vested interests that try to derail their empowerment. In some cases, the oppressed person may be able to fight these impediments; in other instances, they may have no choice but to give up.

Our conversations with listeners of radio soap operas who enacted changes in their communities drew attention to the dialectic between dissemination and dialogue. Here we learned that the struggle is often over whose voice should be considered when social change options are discussed. There will be times when an outside expert may have a broader field of vision about what may be effective. Although dialogue among the poor who will be affected by social change is vital, that dialogue may yield options that are potentially damaging. But even this observation deserves scrutiny because one may argue that learning from one's mistakes may provide deeper lessons than listening passively to an expert.

The lesson for practitioners concerning dissemination and dialogue is the need to be open about how communication occurs between outsiders and community members and how dialogue is sparked and sustained within communities. There is no one best way to disseminate information or to create dialogue. Many possibilities exist

concerning a combination of dissemination and dialogic strategies. What works in one community, may not work in another.

The final struggle we considered is the one between fragmentation and unity. Social change requires communication and cooperative action among people who perceive themselves to be connected in some way. The connections a group of people perceives having with one another may create community. However, communities are not defined only by unity. Fragmentation is not only a reality in every community; it also is an important part of diversity. Too much of an emphasis on unity may suppress fragmentation and silence diverse voices. Too much fragmentation may dissolve the ties that connect people, derailing trust and cohesiveness.

There is no precise formula to determine how much unity or fragmentation is necessary to sustain social change initiatives. What is vitally important for practitioners is to discuss the struggles that will inevitably surface within communities concerning unity and fragmentation. This struggle is not one to be resolved. Rather, the struggle will always be present. Managing the struggle with great care may have the outcome of building stronger community or tearing a community apart.

These observations do not negate the possibility of social change. Rather, we offer these observations to prepare social change practitioners and community activists for the struggles they will inevitably face. There are many social change initiatives that have the potential to empower and emancipate the oppressed. Supporters of change must recognize that struggle is at the very center of social change. There is no emancipation, empowerment, dialogue, or unity without struggle. Remaining resolute in the face of obstacles is what is necessary.

These ongoing struggles for social change also point to the length of time required before substantive social changes are fully internalized within a community. The programs of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) in India took decades before they reached maturity. Further, these organizations continually respond to changing needs and opportunities (as evidenced by the expanding nature of the Grameen social change conglomerate). Likewise, community suppers designed to re-connect the poor and social changes prompted by entertainment-education programs may take years before desired outcomes are

produced. Simply stated, social change is slow, requiring continual experimentation, and group involvement over long periods of time.

The message for practitioners is the importance of being humble and modest about what can happen in the short term. There will always be setbacks. When people have been oppressed all their lives, when suffering is such a dominant part of one's experience, moving forward is not a quick, linear march toward self-sufficiency.

■ Creating Spaces and Opportunities for Dialogue

Although there will always be struggles between dissemination and dialogue, there are important lessons for practitioners to learn about the vitality of dialogue in promoting social change. In the Grameen Bank, dialogue within groups sparks new ideas about creating or running small businesses. Women in dairy cooperatives engage in dialogue to solve community problems. After being exposed to the characters and storylines of radio soap operas, listening club members promoted dialogue concerning issues such as gender equality, dowry eradication, and forming schools for *dalit* children. Finally, dialogue in community suppers provides connections for people who are often isolated. Problems such as finding available housing and employment opportunities were also addressed through dialogue between and among the homeless and their wealthier neighbors.

Dialogue does not emerge spontaneously, however. People who are poor, disempowered, and often isolated may be hesitant to voice their opinions. They may be muted. Practitioners hoping to facilitate dialogue must be prepared to encounter hesitations and resistances to engage in dialogue. One possible recommendation may be to network carefully in a community in order to determine if there are certain people more likely to talk in a group about personal or social problems. By "priming the pump" with more active participants, dialogue may emerge and a group may initiate ideas suggestive of social change.

Creating safe and comfortable spaces for dialogue is critical. In Bangladesh and India, for instance, women would attempt to set aside space for dialogue (such as in a *mahila mandal* or women's club) and often men would attempt to invade that space. A strategic consideration then is to help the disempowered find space that is protected so they may openly discuss issues that are not for the ears of

Box 6.2: Safe Comfortable Spaces to Reduce AIDS Stigma⁵

Pink Triangle Malaysia (PTM), a non-governmental organization, operates an innovative outreach program targeted at intravenous drug users (IDUs) in Chow Kit, a poor red-light community in Kuala Lumpur, the nation's capital city (Singhal & Rogers, 2003). PTM creatively uses space to reduce stigma and prejudice (UNAIDS, 1999). A culturally-sensitive research protocol to assess the clients' needs, prior to launching the PTM Program, pointed to the importance of creating an *Ikhlās* [sincere] Community Center (ICC), a "safe space" where the IDUs would feel comfortable about dropping in. The ICC provides meals to IDUs, medical care and treatment, referrals to hospitals and drug treatment centers, counseling and psychological support, access to condoms and other risk-reduction services, and referrals to job placements. Clean bathroom and toilet facilities are also provided so that drug users can bathe, wash their clothes, and maintain their hygiene.

The IDUs participate in running these ICC activities: They cook and clean, serve as outreach workers and volunteer counselors, and carry out administrative work. This involvement helps them take ownership of the *Ikhlās* project, and builds their self-esteem. The IDUs of the ICC now routinely liaise with volunteer groups from hospitals, nursing schools, the corporate sector, and colleges, and thus feel more accepted by the general community. Their active involvement also makes the Pink Triangle Malaysia's *Ikhlās* program highly cost-efficient and effective.

The *Ikhlās* program represents a non-stigmatized, non-judgmental space for IDUs in Malaysia, a country where drug use, according to the local law, is punishable by death. However, the humane environment created by ICC is palpable enough that law enforcement authorities look the other way. As such, the ICC achieves harm reduction, rather than seeking to eliminate intravenous drug use.

The principle of harm reduction is also the basis of several Dutch initiatives that create comfortable spaces for commercial sex work, legalized in the Netherlands in 2000 (Kapila & Pye, 1992). Many local municipalities have established *gedoogzones*, streets where soliciting is allowed during predetermined hours. The city of Utrecht has an *afwerplek*, a special car park with parking bays divided by high-fences, where commercial sex work is transacted. Many Dutch towns established *huiskamers* ("living rooms"), where counseling, care, and assistance are available to CSWs. Utrecht's *Huiskamer Aanloop Prostitutes Foundation* established a mobile caravan-style *huiskamer*, which is parked in local *gedoogzones*

Box 6.2: Safe Comfortable Spaces to Reduce AIDS Stigma (Continued)

during permitted hours. CSWs stop by to rest, take a shower, to buy condoms, receive counseling, and for medical care (Kapila & Pye, 1992). This mobile *huiskamer* is an example of creating a mobile "comfortable space" for those at risk for HIV. The Dutch projects, much like the *Ikhlis* in Malaysia, are respectful of people's lifestyles, non-judgmental, and create comfortable spaces where people can take responsibility (and refuge) for their personal decisions.

PATH (Program for Alternative Technology in Health) created youth-friendly drugstores in Thailand and Cambodia. Studies indicated that 40 percent of young men seeking health products view pharmacies as the access point for buying condoms and STD treatment. Pharmacies in Thailand averaged as many as 50 youthful clients at a drugstore per day (Singhal & Rogers, 2003). PATH's strategy in creating "friendly drugstores" involves training Thai pharmacists to interact with young people in a compassionate, non-judgmental manner, and to refer them, if needed, to appropriate clinical services.

their oppressors. This will not always be easy because creating space for the powerless to dialogue with one another may be perceived as threatening to those who have power in the community. Careful networking is necessary in this situation as well to find a supportive person in the community who has sufficient power to reserve a space for private discussion. The disempowered need such a space so they may share their experiences and discuss possibilities for the future.

■ **Introducing Counter Narratives**

The oppressed are often so overwhelmed with their lives that they focus almost exclusively on the negative. They are often trapped by their experiences and by the stories they tell about these experiences. We saw this play out in particular in the community suppers. Even when a person would experience a small gain in their life such as through a day's employment, the conversation would turn to the likelihood that no work would be available for another day. Part of the reason for this negativity is that the poorest of the poor live

day-to-day. Survival means a focus on the here and now. A future of self-determination seems to be a delusional dream.

We came into contact with workers and volunteers in Appalachia who talk with the poor on a daily basis. They spoke about feeling overwhelmed by all the negative stories and experiences. Practitioners can help re-center the focus of the oppressed by drawing attention to the small wins, the positives, and their hopes and dreams. Even being able to talk to another person about one's troubles represents a positive in comparison to being lonely in sorrow.

We argue that counter-narratives are essential to re-center the focus of the oppressed. Exactly how many counter-narratives be developed? In order to develop counter-narratives we need to investigate the conditions described by the oppressed in their true complexity. The knowledge offered by the original narratives may be wrong, oversimplified, or based on missing information. Needed is the co-construction of counter-narratives that present new emancipatory knowledge; that is, narratives that hold the potential to reverse old patterns of thinking and acting (Roe, 1999). For example, a group of oppressed people may develop a counter narrative that reconfigures the disempowering elements of their present social environment. Participants may experience new stories in which the social practice of dowry is opposed, a child marriage is stopped, or a poor woman receives an education.

Scholars and practitioners increasingly realize the emancipatory potential of narratives (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001; Burke, 1945/1969). More than simple vehicles for disseminating information, narratives bring together storytellers and audiences, building bridges that allow alternative ideological meaning formations to be created, maintained, and articulated. The power of counter-narratives is based on the viewpoint that individual and collective identities are narratively constructed and damaged (see Carbaugh, 2001) and as such can be narratively repaired (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001; White & Epston, 1990). So, the voicing of personal and collective counter-narratives can liberate and heal in the same way that dominant stories oppress and marginalize. Counter-narratives can re-construct individual and communal identities, and render credible previously muted voices. Thus, counter-narratives become a way for people to heal their personal and collective past, creating possibilities for new beginnings.⁶

One lesson on counter-narratives that practitioners may draw upon is a practice that occurs in some Christian Churches. Some ministers

have found that when prayers are solicited from the congregation, the prayers are dominated by requests for help. In many congregations ministers have countered this focus by encouraging prayers to celebrate joys and triumphs, even if small. Practitioners need to encourage narratives that run counter to stories that dominate the lives of the poor and oppressed.

Entertainment-education programs are also uniquely positioned to bring in new stories, new models of behavior, and new ways of thinking, acting, and being. As discussed in chapter 5, E-E programs can present counter narratives that celebrate a young girl's birthday in Indian villages, encourage a high-caste daughter-in-law to open a school for *dalit* women, and empower neighbors to collectively bang pots and pans to break the cycle of domestic violence.

■ Putting the Last First

Mahatma Gandhi's litmus test for undertaking any social action was predicated on asking and answering the following question: Will my actions help alleviate in any way the suffering of the poorest-of-the-poor, the downtrodden, the most vulnerable, and the most marginalized? If the answer was affirmative, he moved forward. If it was negative, he shelved the idea. Not surprisingly, his life's work centered on fighting colonialism, and caste, gender, and socio-economic inequalities.

Gandhi, for instance, knew that clothing production had once been the premier industry in India, until the British colonists had systematically destroyed the spinning and dying of cotton cloth by Indian businessmen, moving cloth manufacturing to their Manchester mills. The result was massive unemployment and poverty in India, and a ruralization of India as former clothing workers were forced to move back to villages (Singhal & Rogers, 2001).

In response to British interference in the clothing industry, Gandhi made hand-spun, hand-woven cloth (*khadi*) the centerpiece of his program for Indian independence (Bean, 1989, p. 335). He spun his own yarn on a spinning wheel each day (Plate 6.3), and urged his followers to do the same (Shridharani, 1946; Mehta, 1977). Furthermore, he dressed only in *khadi*, including his signature loin cloth. This costume was a communication message, distinctively all-Indian

(cutting across caste, religious, region, and social class differences) and strongly anti-British. Gandhi's clothes were a statement of *swadeshi*, the promotion of indigenous products. The Indian National Congress in 1921, at Gandhi's urging, voted to require its officers and workers to spin and wear *khadi* and to boycott foreign cloth. The spinning wheel was adopted as the symbol of the National Congress, and placed in the center of the party's flag. *Khadi* cloth emporia (stores) are still found today throughout India, a lasting symbol of India's Gandhian heritage.

Gandhi's focus on *khadi* signifies his belief in putting the last first. Gandhi's famous Salt March to protest British taxation on salt was also couched as a protest of 350 million poor Indians. Salt is perhaps the only item that poor people—who toil in the fields under the hot sun—needed more than the rich. It was an appropriate symbol for organizing the masses against oppressive British colonial policies.

Plate 6.3

Mahatma Gandhi, wearing his hand-spun *khadi* loin cloth, and sitting behind his spinning wheel

Gandhi made hand-spun cloth, *khadi*, the centerpiece of his program for Indian independence from the British. *Khadi* symbolized *swadeshi* [the promotion of indigenous products] and represented a distinctively all-Indian anti-British message, cutting across caste, religious, and socioeconomic lines.

Source: Government of India Archives.



Box 6.3: Whose Reality Counts in the Mayan Highlands of Guatemala?

In the Mayan Highlands of Guatemala, Dr. Carroll Behrhorst put his heart and soul into alleviating the suffering of the poorest of the poor.

The town of Chimaltenango, located 50 kilometers from the capital Guatemala City in the Mayan Highlands of Guatemala, is home to the Behrhorst Clinic, established in the early 1960s by a U.S.-trained medical doctor, Dr. Carroll Behrhorst (Plate 6.4). Although Dr. Behrhorst

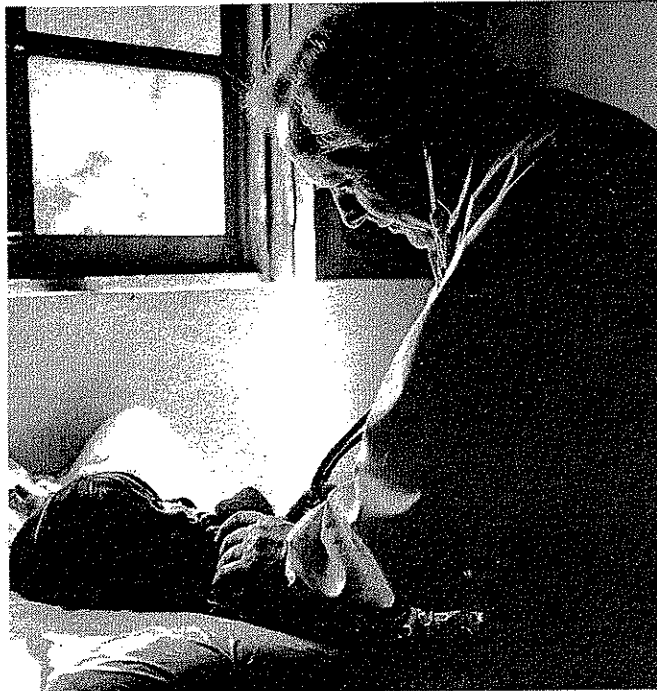


Plate 6.4
Dr. Carroll Behrhorst treating a Mayan Indian child in Chimaltenango, Guatemala

Behrhorst, known as the Albert Schweitzer of Guatemala, realized that good health to the Mayans was not just the absence of disease, but the performance of positive physical and social functions, including a restoration of a person's dignity, self-respect, and pride.

Source: Behrhorst Partners for Development.

Box 6.3: Whose Reality Counts in the Mayan Highlands of Guatemala? (Continued)

(commonly called the "good Doc") passed away in 1990, the clinic in Chimaltenango (that bears his name) symbolizes a model of a people-centered approach to social change worthy of emulation (Luecke, 1993). To Behrhorst, social change could not happen piecemeal; it required holistic, evolving, and multi-pronged approaches, consistent and culturally resonant with people's lived realities (Singhal & Chitnis, 2004).

Known as the Albert Schweitzer of Guatemala, Behrhorst realized within a year or two of practicing medicine among the Cakchikel Mayan Indians that his bio-medical training in the United States, which viewed "body as disease" (in need for a physical cure), was unsuitable for serving local residents (Barton, 1970). The Mayan conception of health was not just the absence of disease, but rather the performance of several positive functions: good appetite, hard work, enjoyment of nature, and participation in social activities (Luecke, 1993). Good health meant a restoration of the patient's dignity, self-respect, and pride (Crawshaw, 1993). Healing was not purely physical (a point of view that his medical training privileged), but also social, spiritual, and psychological.

Behrhorst was disillusioned by his initial focus on just curing patients. Curing the sick in clinics and hospitals was "like trying to empty the Atlantic Ocean with a teaspoon," he noted (cited in Ajquejay, 1993, p. 32). The root cause of illness in Chimaltenango was poverty which resulted in poor sanitation, contaminated water supply, and chronic malnutrition. Having treated over 25,000 patients in his first year alone, Behrhorst's initial work was akin to running an ambulance service at the bottom of a hill where automobiles regularly fell-off. Proper care, Behrhorst realized, involved treatment of causes, not the amelioration of pain. The Clinic's community outreach activities included the training of several hundred village-based health promoters in the Mayan Highlands, who through their presence in the communities where they lived, established home gardens and poultry farms, gravity-based water wells that provided clean potable water, as well as animal husbandry, agro-forestry, literacy, and income-generating projects (Behrhorst, 1993). Community members played an instrumental role in planning and conducting these social development initiatives, mindful of practicality, relevance, and usefulness to local contexts.

The design of the health clinic in Chimaltenango, the centerpiece of the people-centered approach to health care, exemplified a holistic approach to healing (Luecke, 1993). The clinic, constructed by the donated labor of the local residents, had airy rooms and open corridors which opened into a courtyard, much like Mayan dwellings. The rooms were

Box 6.3: Whose Reality Counts in the Mayan Highlands of Guatemala? (Continued)

designed so that families, who often traveled long distances to be in Chimaltenango, could stay with the patients, take care of them, and learn first-hand the basics of health, hygiene, sanitation, first aid, and home-based care. A roomy kitchen, located at the end of the corridor, allowed family members to cook corn tortillas, a local staple food nutritious in carbohydrates, protein, and essential vitamins and minerals. Family members were encouraged to bring their handlooms to the clinics where they could weave cloth while the patients rested. Cooking for loved ones and cloth weaving for income-generation bestowed on patients and their families a sense of home, comfort, self-respect, and dignity. A chicken coop in the clinic provided eggs for consumption, and gravity-based water wells in the courtyard (constructed through the voluntary labor of local residents and patients' family members) brought clean potable water for drinking, washing, and bathing (Behrhorst, 1993).

The nursing staff at the Behrhorst Clinic, consisting of local Mayan women, were chosen for their bi-lingual skills in Spanish and Cakchikel and trained in primary health care (Barton, 1970). These friendly nurses could look at the embroidered fabrics of their patients or their gait, and tell what part of the highlands the patients hailed from. Furthermore, Behrhorst's "healing house" in Chimaltenango never used white sheets as were used in the "white man's hospital" in the capital Guatemala City, 50 kilometers away, where few Mayan Indians would go. Instead, a transparent plastic was used over mattress pads which gave the beds the appearance of the sleeping platforms that the Mayan Indians used in their huts (Barton, 1970). For the "good Doc," attending to such details conveyed respect for his patients (Logan, 1993). To be disrespectful to the cultural traditions of the Mayan Indians, constituted "sin" in Behrhorst's book (Ajquejay, 1993, p. 38).

In sum, the conception of good health in Behrhorst's primary health care project in Chimaltenango was not just based on a physical absence of disease but included a holistic approach to physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. The role of the doctor was reframed from a "curer" to "healer." Behrhorst emphasized that the doctor's main responsibility was to leave a bit of his heart with the patient: "First humanity, then technicality," he said (cited in Crawshaw, 1993, p. 10).

For the social change practitioner, Behrhorst had the following advice: "If you wish to serve, go to the people. Live with the people. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build on what they have. When the task is finished, the people will say, 'we did it ourselves'" (cited in Luecke, 1993, pp. 183-184).

Further, Gandhi labeled the poor as *daridranarayan* (poor but godly) and the untouchables as *harijans* (children of god). He attributed his effectiveness to a single-minded devotion to work for, and with, the poorest and the most oppressed.

We have mentioned repeatedly that the lives and stories of the poor and oppressed can be overwhelming for even the most dedicated practitioner. Despite this reality, practitioners must focus on the poorest of the poor and the most oppressed community members (Chambers, 1983, 1997). There may be a temptation to look at certain groups of people as beyond help, but those are the people we need to help most.

Muhammad Yunus started the Grameen Bank with the intention of helping the poorest of the poor. In fact, the Grameen Bank has developed a poverty index to make sure that its programs benefit only the neediest. NDDB's dairy cooperatives focus their attention on the marginalized and subsistence farmers who average 1.5 milch animals. Listener's clubs in rural India reached out to create open air schools for the most disadvantaged villagers, and the volunteers and workers at the Friday Night Suppers sponsored by Good Works focus on feeding the poor and the homeless.

The four contexts selected as cases for the present book were selected purposefully because of their focus on the poorest of the poor, the most vulnerable, and the most marginalized. With this group, practitioners will face the greatest challenges in organizing for social change. Because they are relegated to the margins of society, the poorest of the poor are difficult to find. Once they are found, they are likely to be silent and skeptical of any attempt by an outsider to help them. On the path from hopelessness to hope this group will face the greatest setbacks. For these reasons, *practitioners must put the last first.*

Conclusions

Past scholarship and praxis on organizing for social change has privileged binary, either/or, dualistic perspectives. That is, one is empowered or powerless, developed or underdeveloped, educated or illiterate, knowledgeable or ignorant, modern or traditional, and so on. Mainstream approaches to organizing for social change have also embodied such binary distinctions: Top down or bottom-up,

centralized or decentralized, expert-centered or people-centered, and so on. The methods employed to understand organizing for social change phenomenon have also been dichotomized into binaries: quantitative versus qualitative, deductive versus inductive, structured versus unstructured, and so on.

We question this dualistic, dichotomized, and binary conception of scholarship and praxis in organizing for social change. We argue instead for a dialectic approach to organizing, acknowledging that contradictory tensions are inevitable and co-present in social change. In fact, contradictions represent the basic drivers of social change. Our analysis shows that control makes emancipation possible. Within the experience of oppression the seeds of empowerment lie. Dissemination may promote dialogue and within fragmentation lies unity.

As our book draws to a close, let's return to a question we posed in the first chapter: Is there a "meta-dialectic" that unifies the struggles we highlight in this book? Clues to this meta-dialectic are found in Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) assertion that the dialectic of *stability* and *change* is ever present in our personal and public lives. A similar dialectic was discussed by Burke (1954/1984) when he described humans' desires for both *permanence* and *change*. Applying this meta-dialectic framework to our four cases it seems possible to argue that control, oppression, dissemination, and fragmentation dominate the lives of the poor. When the poor participate in social change programs, oppositional forces may surface, pulling them toward emancipation, empowerment, dialogue, and unity. This struggle between opposing forces will likely be an ongoing one, even though a person, at any given time, may anchor their lives in forces dominated by *stability or change*.

At a theoretical level, our book suggests that there is tremendous value in examining the lives of people who embody the struggles of change. The poor will always encounter dominant external forces that resist such change and seek to preserve the status quo. Future theorizing in the area of organizing for social change must be mindful of these struggles as they focus on fostering emancipation, empowerment, dialogue, and unity.

Notes

1. Author Singhal thanks Curt Lindberg and Henri Lipmanowicz of the Plexus Institute in New Jersey for introducing him to complexity science principles and insights, and also for the ongoing conversations on the role of complexity science in understanding social phenomenon. Plexus Institute's mission is to foster the health of individuals, families, communities, organizations, and our natural environment by helping people use concepts emerging from the new science of complexity.
2. A story from Linda Rusch, written by Birute Regine, and available from <http://www.plexusinstitute.com/services/stories/show.cfm?id=14>. Also see Zimmerman, Lindberg, and Plsek (1998).
3. Author Singhal thanks Jerry and Monique Sternin for sharing their PD experiences from all over the world, and for digging up of photos from their PD intervention in Vietnam for use in this section.
4. A positive deviance inquiry focuses on eliminating those client behaviors from the strategy mix that are true but useless (TBU). TBU is a sieve through which a facilitator passes the uncommon qualities of positive deviants to ensure that the identified practices can be practiced by everyone.
5. This case draws upon Singhal and Rogers (2003).
6. We thank Dr. Lynn Harter for her helpful comments in constructing these arguments.
7. This case draws upon Singhal and Chitnis (2004).