Engagement, Participation, and Community Efficacy: Insights Into Social Organization

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Presented at the Hawaii International Conference on the Social Sciences
Honolulu, May 2007
Background and Purpose

Theory development project

- Since 2000 concerned with building capacity of communities to reach desired results
- Initiated with focus on observing military family communities
  - 2000 community capacity model
- More recently expanded to community social organization
  - Community capacity, network structures, and social capital
Background and Purpose

- Hawaii conference presentation
  - Elaboration of social organization theory elements (efficacy, engagement, participation)
    - Particular attention to effects of group membership on how efficacy relates to engagement and participation
    - Research questions:
      - Does engagement and participation contribute to community efficacy? Are there unique contributions?
      - Are these relationships associated with individual and social characteristics?

- Analysis of 2002 survey of 769 Virginians
  - Grounded in Community Connections Index
  - Focus on engagement, participation, and community efficacy
  - Effects of moderators: Gender, age, education, marital status, income, and location of residence
Families and Communities

- 2005 issue (December) of *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*
  - Contextual effects focus
  - Influence of communities on individuals and families
    - Strata, layers, and levels
    - Partial explanation of well-being
  - Community-level processes as independent variables
    - Inform prevention and intervention
- Social organization theory provides insight into leverage points
Social Organization Theory: Definition of Social Organization

- Values, norms, processes, and behavior patterns within a community that organize, facilitate, and constrain interactions among community members
- Process by which communities achieve desired results for individuals and families, including ability to demonstrate resiliency
- Includes networks of people, exchanges and reciprocity in relationships, accepted standards of social support, and social controls that regulate behavior and interaction
Social Organization Theory

- Our previous work (see resource slide): Mancini, Nelson, Bowen, & Martin (2006), Mancini, Bowen, & Martin (2005), Mancini, Martin, & Bowen (2003), Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware, & Nelson (2003), Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson (2000)

- Our work is informed by:
  - Cantillon, Davidson, & Schweitzer (2003)
  - Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal (2001)
  - Furstenberg & Hughes (1997)
  - Janowitz (1991)
  - Kornhauser (1978)
  - Putnam (2000)
  - Sampson (1992)
  - Small (2002)
  - Small & Supple (2001)
Social Organization Theory: The Model

Our approach, however,

- Moves social organization theory from focus on disorganization and delinquency to broader applications
- Moves the theory toward a more layered approach to communities (individual, family, community)
- Presents the theory as having a more fundamental role in explaining broader community system phenomena
Figure 1. Social Organizational Processes, Social Structure, and Individual/Family Results

- Social Structure
- Social Organizational Processes
- Individual/Family Results

**Network Structure**
- Informal networks
- Formal networks
- Network effect levels

**Social Capital**
- Information
- Reciprocity
- Trust

**Community Capacity**
- Shared responsibility
- Collective competence
Social Organization Theory: Structure and Process

- Differentiation of structure from process
  - Former pertains to configuration and composition
  - Latter involves operations, interactions, and transactions
  - Process occurs within structural frameworks
  - Processes provide linkage between social structure and effects on individuals and families
Social Organization Theory: Focus on Processes

- Main focus is on processes
  - Networks
  - Social Capital
  - Community Capacity

- Relationships between them
  - Networks provide context for the development of social capital, and for building community capacity
Social Organization Theory: Networks

- Primary ways through which community life is enacted
- Informal networks comprise web of relationships with friends, neighbors, work associates
- Formal networks associated with agencies and organizations
- Voluntary and obligatory relationships
Social Organization Theory: Networks

- Networks effects levels
  - Action element of our framework
  - Nexus of informal and formal networks
  - First level-within a network
  - Second level-between like networks
  - Third level-between dissimilar networks

- Network configurations provide leverage for achieving results through generation of social capital and production of community capacity
Social Organization Theory: Social Capital

- Information, reciprocity, and trust
  - Aggregate of resources (information, opportunities, and instrumental support)
- Arise from reciprocal social relationships
- Results from participation in formal and informal settings
- Social capital observed in actions of civic groups, faith communities, and any number of community-based groups
- Increases odds of achieving results otherwise not attained
Social Organization Theory: Community Capacity

- **Shared responsibility**
  - For general welfare of the community and its individual members
  - Sentiments

- **Collective competence**
  - Taking collective action, confronting situations

- **Assumptions**
  - Concern directed at community as a whole and at particular elements, action is beyond expression of positive sentiments, action is proactive and reactive, action targeted at threats and at normative situations
Social Organization Theory: Community Results

- Consequences of effective social organization
- Desired results (examples, safety, health and well-being, family resilience)
- Results not owned by any particular group but valued across community
- Identified results assist to determine leverage points for change
- Moves theory from interesting framework to theory of action
Social Organization: Summary

- Need for theorizing that connects families and communities
- Social organization provides linkage framework
- Theory focused on action and community change
- There are leverage points that can be mobilized to support families and communities
- Consequent set of considerations for professionals
  - Program developers
  - Program and community researchers
From Theory to Research

- Current study focuses on slice of social organization
- “Located” in social network and community capacity parts of social organization model
- Effort to explore interplay of related elements of how people are connected to individuals and to collectives in their communities
- Particular focus on how individual and social characteristics moderate how efficacy is related to engagement and participation
  - Who is more “connected”? Role of gender, age, residence, economic resources, education, and marital status.
The Study

- 2002 survey of 769 Virginia residents ages 18 to 99
- Fielded in spring and early summer
- Participants randomly selected and included people who had listed and unlisted telephone numbers
- Response rate of 60%
- Respondents interviewed by telephone
- Margin of error at the 95% confidence level is ± 3.6%
- Research conducted by the Survey Research Center at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Alan Bayer and Susan Willis-Walton, Principal Investigators)
Sample Characteristics

- Sixty-five percent are 40 years of age and older
- Fifty-two percent are women
- Forty-three percent reside outside of Virginia’s heavily populated urban crescent (eastern side of the state spanning from Northern Virginia to Richmond and Hampton Roads)
- Forty percent graduated from college
- Seventy-two percent are white; 28% minorities
- Fifty-eight percent are married
Community Connections Index (CCI)

- Fifteen-item measure grounded in social capital and community capacity theories
- Items originally organized into two dimensions of community connections
  - Community engagement (8 items)
  - Sense of community (7 items)
- For this presentation items organized conceptually into:
  - Efficacy, engagement, and participation
    - Efficacy: shared responsibility and collective competence (community capacity)
    - Engagement: interpersonal closeness
    - Participation: activity in civic affairs
- The interviewer stated: *Now I would like to know about your relationships with people in your community, other than family members. How often in the past year (“often, sometimes, rarely, or never”) have you:*
Efficacy, Engagement, and Participation Items (CCI)

**Efficacy**
- Joined with people in your community to solve community problems
- Felt like you could make a positive difference in your community
- Looked after or showed concern for other people in your community

**Engagement**
- Felt close to other people in your community
- Felt like you belonged in your community
- Spent time with people in your community when you needed a little company
- Made new friends with someone in your community
- Felt like your own circumstances were similar to others in your community
- Talked with people in your community about your problems or difficulties

**Participation**
- Attended informational meeting about an issues affecting your community
- Attended club or organizational meetings in your community
- Attended a local government or political meeting
- Volunteered in your community
- Participated in community events or activities
- Attended religious services
Correlations between Efficacy, Engagement, and Participation

- Efficacy and engagement ($r = 0.592$, $p < 0.001$)
- Efficacy and participation ($r = 0.655$, $p < 0.001$)
- Engagement and participation ($r = 0.522$, $p < 0.001$)
- Engagement and participation explain 51.5% of variance in efficacy ($F(2,756) = 400.89$, $p < 0.001$)
- Unique contributions: Engagement contributes an increase in RSQ of 0.086 beyond Participation; Participation contributes increase in RSQ of 0.165 above and beyond Engagement. Either explains 26.4% of variation in Efficacy (common variance)
Moderation Analysis

- Comparison of levels of individual and social characteristics: Gender (M/F), age (up to 40/40 plus), education (less than college/college graduate plus), marital status (married or living with someone/single), income (less than $60K/$60K or more), and location of residence (urban crescent/all others)

- Six hierarchical multiple regressions, one for each moderator variable
  - Step 1: community efficacy as criterion, with engagement and participation as independent
  - Step 2: moderator variable entered
  - Step 3: interactions (product variables) between moderator and independent variables
  - RSQ change used as decision criterion
With regard to gender (.0025) and income (.0032) was there an increase in RSQ due to the moderator effect, albeit modest.

Overall, moderators make no difference in primary relationships between the three social organization elements (efficacy, engagement, and participation); relationships independent of individual and social condition factors.
Summary of Results

- Substantial intercorrelations between Efficacy, Engagement, and Participation
- Engagement and Participation make independent contribution to Efficacy, particularly Participation
- Relationships between Efficacy, Engagement, and Participation independent of moderators
Conclusions and Next Steps

- Potential for social organization theory to provide bridges between community processes, community programs, and families.
- Theory provides umbrella for program development and for research.
- Analysis suggests that social organization elements cross-cutting and independent of individual and social factors, at least those expressed demographically.
Conclusions and Next Steps

- Provide greater precision to community concepts
- Improve measures of community concepts
- Clarify linkages between concepts
- Move focus to collective, contextual effects level: How do group level phenomena affect individual sentiments and behaviors?

- Develop clearer sense of change leverage points, their importance, and their likelihood of change
- Discern layers and levels in community structure and process
  - Twists and turns
  - To and Fro processes
Resources


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