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Who Participates and Why: Building a Process Model of Citizen Participation

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Initiating and sustaining sufficient levels of participation among residents in low-income and urban neighborhoods have become significant focuses of many initiatives that strive to develop healthy communities. This study examines the factors associated with citizen participation levels in resident leaders and followers in seven low-income neighborhoods in one community. Overall, the findings suggest that different factors facilitate participation in leaders and followers. Leaders are more likely to actively participate in neighborhood and community affairs if they perceive themselves as having the skills needed to organize others and make change happen. Whereas perceived skill levels also matter for followers, these residents are strongly influenced by the norms for activism within their neighborhood. These norms mediate the impact of neighborhood readiness and capacity for change on citizen participation levels. Implications for funders and practitioners interested in promoting healthy communities are discussed.

Keywords: *citizen participation; organizing skills; neighborhood leaders; readiness for change; capacity for change; healthy communities; comprehensive community changes*

Citizen participation plays a critical role in building healthy communities by creating more empowered constituencies who can leverage greater and more equal access to available resources. In fact, an active citizenry has been linked to a variety of positive health outcomes for neighborhood residents (e.g., Caughy, O'Campo, & Brodsky, 1999). Healthy communities also emerge when citizens play an active role in shaping the programs available and formulating policies to better serve their needs (e.g., Arcury, Austin, Quandt, & Saavedra, 1999). Thus, many initiatives designed to create healthy communities—such as community health promotion initiatives and comprehensive community change efforts—often seek to create contexts that nurture citizen participation in

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at least one of two domains: (1) program design and decision-making bodies (e.g., coalitions, advisory boards, planning groups) and (2) other forms of civic life (e.g., neighborhood associations, citizen organizing efforts; cf. Chaskin & Peters, 2000).

Despite efforts taken to promote broad-scale resident participation in community-based efforts, some initiatives have difficulty eliciting the desired level of resident involvement (e.g., Chaskin & Peters, 2000), and this lack of resident participation has threatened the potential success and sustainability of these efforts (Foster-Fishman et al., 2006). Given the increased emphasis on strengthening communities via citizen participation—and the struggles some initiatives have faced in doing so—it seems important to better understand how to nurture levels of citizen participation, particularly in neighborhoods that are entrenched in poverty and other social issues. We submit that despite decades of research focused on understanding citizen participation behavior, we still do not fully understand the processes through which residents become engaged or how to best strategically leverage increased levels of participation (Brisson & Usher, 2005). The primary purpose of this study was to expand our understanding of the factors associated with citizen participation by exploring who gets involved and under what circumstances. Developing more explicit process models will help health practitioners and funders design interventions capable of leveraging the levels of participation desired.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED PROCESS MODEL

Ecological theory posits that when individual characteristics fit with situational circumstances, residents are more likely to be active participants in their neighborhood and broader community (Wandersman & Giamartino, 1980). This suggests that attention to individual and environmental characteristics—and their interplay—is an important consideration in citizen participation research. Following this approach, we identified key environmental and individual characteristics critical for our targeted community and study. Because neighborhoods are critical contexts for promoting citizen participation (Traynor, 2002), and our study is embedded within an effort designed to promote healthier neighborhoods, we focus our environmental level of inquiry on residents' perceptions of the social environments in their neighborhoods. We were particularly interested in understanding how residents' perceptions of neighborhood characteristics influence their civic behavior and examined one possible mediator—neighborhood norms for activism—as the link between two neighborhood conditions (readiness and capacity for change) and citizen participation.

In regard to individual characteristics, we were interested in targeting individual attributes that were more easily developed through intervention, as opposed to the demographic characteristics more frequently targeted by citizen participation researchers. In this study, we examined two individual characteristics relevant to citizen participation behavior that can be modified through capacity-building efforts but have received little attention in the literature to date: perceived organizing skills and resident leadership status. Then, to fully understand who participates and under what circumstances, we examined the dynamic interplay between individual and neighborhood characteristics by exploring the extent to which residents' perceptions of neighborhood characteristics differentially influence the participation levels of different types of residents—specifically, resident leaders and resident followers. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model for the study.

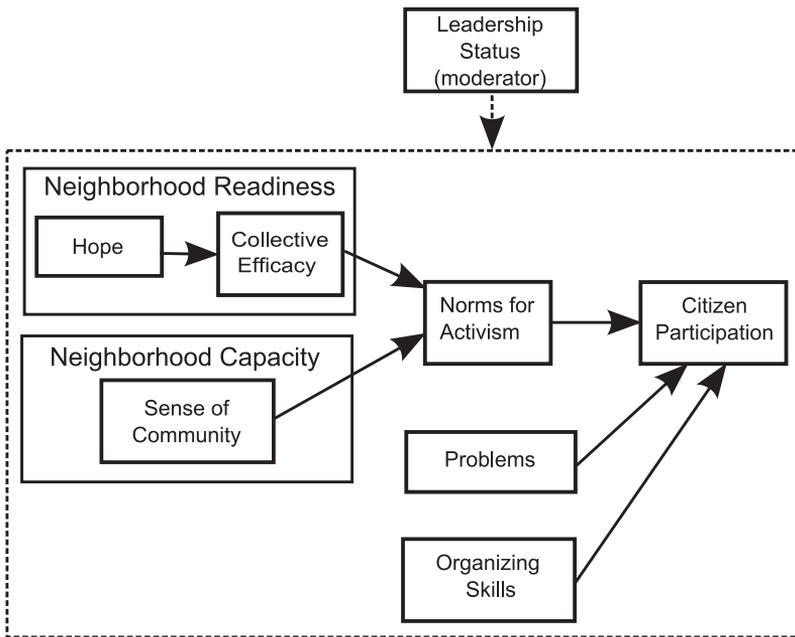


Figure 1. Conceptual model for the study depicting the structural relationships between the constructs.

Neighborhood Capacity and Readiness for Change

Our previous work has highlighted the importance of neighborhood conditions for developing greater citizen participation. In particular, when neighborhoods have the infrastructure to support and mobilize residents for action—neighborhood capacity—and residents believe that change is feasible—neighborhood readiness—residents of low-income neighborhoods in one small city were far more likely to report both individual and collective action behaviors (Foster-Fishman et al., 2006; Foster-Fishman, Cantillon, Pierce, & Van Egeren, 2007). In this study, we build on those findings by targeting one element of neighborhood capacity (sense of community) and two elements of neighborhood readiness (collective efficacy and hope) to examine whether and to what extent neighborhood norms for activism mediate the relationships between these conditions and citizen participation.

Sense of Community. Sense of community refers to the extent to which residents have a sense of mutual commitment, belongingness, and interdependence with their neighbors (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Sense of community fosters shared norms among neighbors and helps to connect neighbors together so they can collectively work together for change (e.g., Cantillon, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2003). Overall, individuals and neighborhoods high in sense of community are more likely to pursue resident action, including developing and participating in neighborhood associations (Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, & Chavis, 1990).

Hope for Change. Hope for positive change motivates individuals to take action to improve their lives (e.g., Hanna, 2002) or their communities (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). Many urban renewal efforts prioritize “rebuilding hope” (Kingsley, McNeely, & Gibson, 1997, p. 13) because of the belief that hope for a better future provides the foundation through which individuals find it worthwhile to become involved in change efforts. In this study, hope for change focused on neighborhood residents’ perceptions that change is possible for themselves and their children.

Because rebuilding hope often serves as the foundation that sparks action, we hypothesized that its role in building neighborhood norms for activism would be mediated through collective efficacy. By building hope and thus the belief in the possibility of a better future, individuals are more likely to believe that collective action efforts can make a difference. This increase in collective efficacy, in turn, would build stronger neighborhood norms for action. Evidence from previous research supports this pathway: Perkins and Long (2002) found that the degree to which residents were hopeful that conditions on their block would improve was positively related to perceptions of collective efficacy.

Collective Efficacy. Based on Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory, collective efficacy refers to the “exercise of collective agency” (p. 7)—the belief that a group of individuals has the capacity to take action and achieve desired results. Several recent research projects have demonstrated the critical role that collective efficacy plays in nurturing a healthy community. Sampson and colleagues demonstrated that even after controlling for neighborhood structural characteristics, communities with higher levels of collective efficacy experienced lower violence rates. Foster-Fishman and colleagues (2007) also found that collective efficacy was predictive of levels of citizen participation behavior in low-income neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Norms for Activism: A Possible Mediator

Although it is widely recognized that neighborhood conditions such as readiness and capacity for change influence citizen participation behaviors, it is less clear *how* these conditions foster an active citizenry. We hypothesized that neighborhood conditions matter because they create a shared system of meaning within the neighborhood that then creates expectations for and guides resident behavior (Smircich, 1983). When individuals have strong social ties with each other and believe that working together can make a difference, a general expectation within the community to pursue efforts to improve local conditions can emerge. For example, when African American churches cultivate the expectation that activist behaviors are acceptable and necessary to eliminate racism or unfair treatment, church members are more likely to engage in political activism (Brown & Brown, 2003). Thus, attitudes and perceptions such as sense of community and perceived collective efficacy can, when they are aligned and supportive of each other, create strong expectations for behavior that provide guidelines for how individuals should act.

We refer to these expectations for action as “neighborhood norms for activism” and define this as the extent to which individuals perceive that others in the neighborhood will take action—for example, by voting, attending a neighborhood association meeting, or filing a complaint with the city. As a descriptive norm (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990), neighborhood norms for activism represent beliefs about the prevalence or likelihood of particular kinds of behavior. Descriptive norms play an important role in social environments because they help people to identify effective and sanctioned behaviors, thereby motivating them to behave similarly. As social learning/

cognitive theory suggests (Bandura, 1986), when individuals are surrounded by neighbors who are active citizens, they learn the value of these behaviors and develop the normative expectation that these behaviors will be enacted by their neighbors again in the future. This, in turn, motivates them to become engaged themselves. In this study, we hypothesized that neighborhood norms for activism would mediate the relationship between neighborhood readiness and capacity for change and citizen participation behaviors.

Neighborhood Problems

Neighborhood problems, such as crime, drugs, and prostitution, can also provide residents with an impetus to act (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). When residents perceive that a problem exists, they have a reason to become involved and are thus more likely to become active citizens. In fact, several researchers have found that when residents perceive more neighborhood problems, they are more likely to become engaged in neighborhood- and community-level activities (e.g., Peterson & Reid, 2003). Of course, high levels of social disorder can also immobilize a neighborhood. When crime is very high, many residents do not become involved because they are afraid of retaliation (Korbin & Coulton, 1997), and if physical and social disorder is too high, residents may withdraw from community life. Given that previous research within the community targeted for this study found that neighborhood problems served to motivate individual activism and collective action (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007), we hypothesized that neighborhood problems positively and directly predict resident participation.

Individual-Level Characteristics: The Importance of Organizing Skills

Previous research has demonstrated that residents will be more active participants when their individual characteristics fit with situational demands (Wandersman & Giamartino, 1980). This suggests that we should consider what participation opportunities within a community require of engaged individuals. The initiative in this study was striving to mobilize residents to become active participants in their neighborhood and broader community through collective action strategies. Such strategies require residents to have general organizing capacities, including the ability to create plans of action and organize their neighbors for action. Because self-assessments of individual efficacy can determine whether someone becomes engaged in a new task (Bandura, 1986), we hypothesized that individuals with high perceived levels of organizing skills would be the most active citizens. Previous research provides support for this hypothesis. For example, Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) found that those who participate most tend to have the highest levels of skills and the greatest access to resources.

Exploring Differences Between Resident Leaders and Resident Followers

Healthy neighborhoods have both active resident leaders and followers, and most initiatives designed to build an active citizenry target both groups. Resident leaders are needed because they play a critical role in helping neighborhoods mobilize for change by initiating action and organizing residents in the collective effort (Chaskin & Peters, 2000). In fact, when neighborhood leadership is strong, residents are often more active

citizens (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007). However, leadership is not enough; effective community building efforts also require followers—residents who do not identify themselves as leaders but who are engaged in the effort. Resident followers are critical because change is more likely to occur when broad and diverse constituencies organize for change and participate in civic life (Rubin & Rubin, 2001).

Despite the need to develop both resident leaders and followers, and the struggle commonly experienced among mobilization efforts to identify sufficient numbers of both (Traynor, 2002), no researchers to date have examined whether different conditions facilitate the participation of these two groups. A better understanding of the unique factors that influence each group's participation could inform the design of more ecologically valid interventions intended to foster both leaders' and followers' participation.

Existing literatures shed little light on the above question. Most citizen participation studies to date collected their data from a general resident population (e.g., Hwang, Grabb, & Curtis, 2005) or from members and nonmembers of neighborhood associations (e.g., Wandersman, Florin, Friedmann, & Meier, 1987) with little exploration of the disparate subgroups (i.e., leaders and followers) that may be present within the data. Nonetheless, some evidence suggests that leaders and followers are different in important ways, and these differences may affect what leverages change in participation levels for each group. For example, Unger and Wandersman (1983) found that resident leaders engage in fewer neighboring behaviors (i.e., talking to neighbors about problems) than nonleaders but are often more active in community-wide organizations. These results suggest that resident leaders and followers may place differential value on connections to neighbors versus the broader community. We took this examination one step further and investigated whether the processes in our model of citizen participation differed as a function of resident leadership status. This allowed us to examine if situational and individual characteristics influence citizen participation levels for leaders and followers in similar or in different ways.

Overview of the Current Study

This study was designed to expand our understanding of how residents in poor neighborhoods become engaged as active citizens by participating in neighborhood and community activities. It explores five hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Neighborhood norms for action will mediate the relationship between neighborhood capacity and readiness and citizen participation.

Hypothesis 2: Collective efficacy will mediate the relationship between hope and neighborhood norms.

Hypothesis 3: Neighborhood problems will have a positive effect on citizen participation.

Hypothesis 4: Residents' perceptions of their level of organizing skills will be positively related to their levels of citizen participation.

Hypothesis 5: Leadership status will moderate the above relationships; however, the ways in which leadership status will affect the model are not specifically hypothesized.

METHOD

Study Context

This study is part of an evaluation of a community-building initiative called *Yes we can!* (YWC!), funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. YWC! was initiated in the small city of Battle Creek, Michigan, to bring about a more just and sustainable community by reducing the gaps in economic and educational outcomes. The central assumption of YWC! is that residents and neighborhood leaders can be effective agents for change through their informed and full participation in public life. The data presented here were collected in 2003, 1 year after the initiative was launched.

A collaborative approach to inquiry was used, with significant input from Foundation and YWC! staff and a group of resident leaders on all research phases. The researchers participated in monthly YWC! team meetings, where representatives from key stakeholder groups provided feedback on the survey and data collection processes including identifying locally relevant operationalizations of targeted constructs (e.g., identifying local forms of citizen participation), prioritizing constructs to target, and brainstorming effective strategies for sampling and data collection. The Evaluation Task Force of 12 resident leaders and followers met four times to provide additional advice on survey construction, data collection, and interpretation of findings.

Participants

The funder and project staff were interested in understanding how to bolster the participation levels of resident leaders and followers targeted for involvement in YWC! activities. For this reason, we used a purposive sampling frame, targeting 333 residents living in the seven poor neighborhoods involved in YWC! These individuals represented both resident leaders and followers who either had been or were expected to be engaged in YWC! community-building efforts. They were identified using lists provided by YWC! staff and published lists of neighborhood association and planning council leaders. The sample included (1) all residents who had demonstrated some commitment to the initiative's goals (applied to the initiative's minigrant program or served on YWC!'s steering committee) and (2) all known residents who held formal and informal leadership positions in neighborhood-based groups, including the PTA, neighborhood associations, and neighborhood planning councils. Because individuals who are active as citizens are different from those who are inactive in important ways (Foster-Fishman et al., 2007), we believed that a focus on *active* followers and leaders allowed us to better understand the unique factors associated with participation levels in this subpopulation.

Sample. These residents were sent a mail survey, and 205 surveys were returned (62% response rate). Four surveys were excluded due to missing leadership status data, resulting in a final sample of 201 participants. Table 1 summarizes the demographics for the sample overall and separately for leaders and followers. The majority of participants were female (77%) with a mean age of 48.9 years ($SD = 14.6$ years). The sample was racially/ethnically diverse and generally representative of the composition of the targeted neighborhoods; 56% were White, 35% were African American, and 4.5% were Hispanic. Consistent with the fact that we sampled from low-income neighborhoods, three quarters of participants reported annual household incomes of less than \$45,000 per year, with almost a quarter reporting incomes under \$15,000 per year.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics for Followers ($n = 110$) and Leaders ($n = 91$)

Variable	Followers		Leaders		Full Sample	
	<i>n</i>	% ^a	<i>n</i>	% ^a	<i>N</i>	% ^a
Sex						
Female	88	80.0	66	74.2	154	77.4
Male	22	20.0	23	25.8	45	22.6
Missing data	0				2	
Age category						
18-35	24	23.1	12	14.0	36	18.9
36-55	44	42.3	51	59.3	95	50.0
56 and older	36	34.6	23	26.7	59	31.1
Missing data	6		5		11	
Race/ethnicity						
White	65	60.2	46	50.5	111	55.8
Black or African American	31	28.7	39	42.9	70	35.2
Hispanic or Latino	7	6.5	2	2.2	9	4.5
American Indian	2	1.9	0	0.0	2	1.0
Mixed race	3	2.8	4	4.4	7	3.5
Missing data	2		0		2	
Marital status						
Single	18	16.5	15	16.9	33	16.7
Married or cohabitating	58	53.2	53	59.6	111	56.1
Divorced or separated	18	16.5	18	20.2	36	18.2
Widowed	15	13.8	3	3.4	18	9.1
Missing data	1		2		3	
Highest degree obtained						
Did not graduate from high school	11	10.9	5	5.8	16	8.6
High school diploma, GED, trade or training certificate	60	59.4	45	52.3	105	56.1
Associate's or bachelor's degree	20	19.8	27	31.4	47	25.1
Graduate degree (MA, MS, PhD, MD, or JD)	10	9.9	9	10.5	19	10.2
Missing data	9		5		14	
Are you currently employed?						
Yes	60	55.6	51	58.6	111	56.9
No	48	44.4	36	41.4	84	43.1
Missing data	2		4		6	
Do you own or rent this address?						
Rent	27	25.0	16	18.2	43	21.9
Own	81	75.0	72	81.8	153	78.1
Missing data	2		3		5	
Annual income						
Less than \$15,000	26	25.5	18	20.5	44	23.2
\$15,000 to \$25,000	25	24.5	17	19.3	42	22.1
\$25,000 to \$45,000	33	32.4	24	27.3	57	30.0
\$45,000 and above	18	17.6	29	33.0	47	24.7
Missing data	8		3		11	

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Followers		Leaders		Full Sample	
	<i>n</i>	% ^a	<i>n</i>	% ^a	<i>N</i>	% ^a
How long resident has been a leader in the neighborhood ^b						
Less than 1 year			11	12.8	11	12.8
1-5 years			48	55.8	48	55.8
6-10 years			11	12.8	11	12.8
More than 10 years			16	18.6	16	18.6
Missing data			5		5	
At least one organizational leadership affiliation reported ^b						
Yes			85	93.4	85	93.4
No			6	6.6	6	6.6
Which organization(s) leaders have positions in ^c						
Neighborhood association/block group			41	48.2	41	48.2
Community house			12	14.1	12	14.1
Neighborhood planning council			21	24.7	21	24.7
Weed and Seed			11	12.9	11	12.9
Parent-Teacher Organization			15	17.6	15	17.6
Church			29	34.1	29	34.1
Urban league or National Association for the Advancement of Colored People			6	7.1	6	7.1
City government			7	8.2	7	8.2
Other			25	29.8	25	29.8

a. Except where otherwise noted, percentages were calculated after excluding cases with missing data from the denominator.

b. Data were tabulated only for leaders ($n = 94$).

c. Data were tabulated only for leaders ($n = 94$). Answer options are not mutually exclusive because leaders selected all options that applied to themselves, so the denominator for these percentages is the number of leaders.

Leadership Status. When this study was conducted, the staff involved in the initiative had not yet become familiar enough with the neighborhoods to accurately identify all resident leaders. In addition, although formal neighborhood leaders (e.g., presidents of neighborhood associations) were known, there was little awareness of the informal leadership in the neighborhoods. For this reason, we decided to use self-nominations to determine who was and was not a leader in our sample. One item on the survey asked whether the respondent considered himself or herself to be a neighborhood leader. Using this variable, we categorized participants into self-identified leaders ($n = 91$; 45%) or followers ($n = 110$; 55%). To check the validity of this assignment, we collected additional data (e.g., lists of residents in elected positions in neighborhood associations and groups) to identify recognized formal neighborhood leaders. Self-identified leadership was then cross-tabulated with recognized leadership status.

Whereas only 6% of the followers were recognized leaders, 34%¹ of the self-identified leaders were recognized leaders, $\chi^2(1) = 27.14, p < .001$. Thus, self-identified leaders were 8.96 times more likely to be recognized by others as being leaders than were residents who did not see themselves as leaders.

Experience in neighborhood leadership varied among self-nominated leaders, with 13% reporting less than a year of experience and most (56%) reporting 1 to 5 years of experience. They also reported having leadership roles in a variety of organizations including neighborhood associations or block clubs (48%), churches (34%), parent-teacher associations (18%), Weed and Seed (13%), and city government (8%).

Procedures

Surveys were distributed and returned by mail between July and December of 2003. Nonresponders were sent up to three additional mailings at intervals of approximately 1 month. Respondents received a \$25 gift card to a local store as a token of appreciation for participation.

Measures

The measurement development for this study was informed by existing measures and key informants' suggestions. As a first step, we worked with our Evaluation Task Force and funder to create operational definitions for each construct that met YWC! goals and the needs of the local context. We then identified existing scales (when available) that best fit these local definitions and presented them to our task force and funder. Based on their feedback, we revised existing scales, creating indicators that were more relevant to this context. When existing measures were not available, we worked with our task force to generate relevant items. Measures of community conditions included one dimension of community capacity (sense of community), two dimensions of community readiness (hope and collective efficacy), neighborhood problems, and neighborhood norms for activism. Measures of individual characteristics included organizing skills and self-identified leadership status. Citizen participation was the outcome variable. Each measure is described below. More details about the survey may be obtained from the first author.

Sense of Community. The Sense of Community scale (10 items, $\alpha = .90$) measured the degree of social bonding that residents perceived in their neighborhood using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Example items included "In my neighborhood, people socialize with each other" and "In my neighborhood, most people agree about what is best for the neighborhood." This scale was adapted from the sense of community/neighborhood interaction measures developed by Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, and Wandersman (1986) and Coultlen, Korbin, and Su (1996).

Collective Efficacy. The Collective Efficacy scale (six items, $\alpha = .91$) assessed the degree to which residents believe that they can make change happen by working together. Respondents were asked to rate from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*completely*) the extent to which, working together with their neighbors, they could achieve neighborhood change such as improving "neighborhood physical conditions" and "the schools." The format of this scale was based on the Collective Efficacy scale developed by Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997).

Hope. The Hope scale was developed specifically for this study (three items, $\alpha = .84$). It assessed residents' belief that in their neighborhood, residents see the possibility of positive change and a better future for themselves and their children. Items were rated using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*) and included "Residents believe that change is possible in this neighborhood" and "Parents in this neighborhood are hopeful about their child's future."

Neighborhood Norms for Activism. The Neighborhood Norms scale, which was developed specifically for this study (eight items, $\alpha = .91$), measured residents' perception that people in the neighborhood could be counted on to engage in social change activities. Residents were asked to respond to a series of questions (e.g., the stem was "How much are residents in your neighborhood likely to . . ." followed by items such as "work with other residents on projects to improve the neighborhood" and "participate in a letter writing campaign") using a 6-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *always*). All items asked residents about behaviors they might have either seen their neighbors engage in or that neighbors might have mentioned in a conversation.

Neighborhood Problems. Residents' perceptions of problems in their neighborhood were measured with three items ($\alpha = .86$) adapted from Coulton and colleagues' (1996) Social Disorder scale. Residents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with a set of statements about physical and social disorder (e.g., "Crime is a problem" and "Abandoned, vacant, or neglected buildings are a problem") using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*).

Organizing Skills. The Organizing Skills scale (10 items, $\alpha = .95$) was developed specifically for this study. It measured residents' self-reported abilities on skills needed to be effective at promoting neighborhood change. Residents were asked to rate their skills on a set of items (e.g., the stem was "How good are you at . . ." followed by items such as "running effective meetings," "organizing a neighborhood group," and "getting city leaders to listen to you") using a 6-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *excellent*).

Citizen Participation. The Citizen Participation scale (11 items, $\alpha = .80$) measured the extent to which the respondent had been involved in neighborhood and community-level organizations and change activities. Responses to all items ranged from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*more than 7 times*). The first 6 questions measured organizational participation and used the stem "How many times in the past 12 months have you attended a meeting of any of the following associations or organizations?" followed by items such as "your local Neighborhood Planning Council," "P.T.A.," and "City Commission." The remaining 5 questions measured level of change activities and used the stem "How many times in the last 12 months have you . . ." followed by items such as "organized your neighbors to take action on some issue" and "worked on a neighborhood improvement project." Items for this scale were adapted from Speer and Peterson's (2000) Behavioral Empowerment scale and Chavis and colleagues' (1986) Interaction scale.

Imputation. SYSTAT 11 (Systat Software, Inc., 2004) was used to impute missing values (Schafer & Graham, 2002) at the scale level by applying the expectation-maximization algorithm to a covariance matrix containing the variables in the model plus several additional variables. This replaced missing values with maximum likelihood (ML) estimates based on the relationships between variables.

Structural Equation Modeling. Structural equation models with observed variables were used to examine both mediation and moderation hypotheses. Although using latent variables is generally preferable to working only with observed variables, constructing multiple indicators for each construct would have dramatically changed the ratio of parameters to be estimated to sample size, leading to potentially unstable results (Tanaka, 1987). Given the size of our sample, we chose to work with the simpler model.

All models were tested with LISREL 8.72 software (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2005) using ML estimation and covariance matrices (Kline, 2005). All scale scores were centered prior to analysis because the main area of interest was in modeling the structural relationships between constructs rather than modeling the means (Kline, 2005). In the multigroup models, group means rather than the grand mean were used for centering. In all models we report unstandardized parameter estimates. We used several criteria for assessing model fit (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998; Kline, 2005), including the likelihood ratio chi-square statistic (preferring models where it was small and not significant), standardized root mean square residual (seeking SRMR < .10), and root mean square error of approximation (seeking RMSEA ≤ .08). We also looked at the expected cross-validation index (ECVI), which measures absolute fit (models with lower values are preferred).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities for each variable are presented in Table 2. Citizen participation scores varied more among leaders ($SD = 0.90$) than among followers ($SD = 0.67$), $F(199) = 5.08$, $p = .03$, but there were no significant differences in the variances between these groups on any of the other scales, all $F_s(199) \leq 2.76$, *ns*. Followers had lower means than leaders on almost all the scales, all $t_s(199) \leq -2.20$, $p_s < .05$, except for perceived problems, on which the means were not significantly different, $t(199) = 1.18$, *ns*.

Examining Neighborhood Influences

To examine Hypotheses 1 through 3, we first developed a model that included only the impacts of neighborhood conditions (hope, collective efficacy, sense of community, neighborhood problems, and norms for activism) on citizen participation. This provided a reference model for us to then compare against future models that included individual characteristics (organizing skills and leadership status). The initial results from this model indicated that adding a path from sense of community to collective efficacy would improve the fit of the model. We added the path after considering the possibility that sense of community may contribute to collective efficacy because social ties among neighbors may increase the likelihood that a resident feels working together will be an effective means to bring about social change. Research conducted by Perkins and Long (2002) supports this link as well. The initial results also indicated that adding a direct path from hope to norms for activism would improve the fit; we added this path to represent the fact that collective efficacy may only partially mediate the effect of hope on norms.

The final form of Model 1 fit the data quite well, $\chi^2(6) = 5.22$, *ns*; had reasonable values for RMSEA (.015) and SRMR (.028); and had a low value for the ECVI (.25). Model 1 explained 11% of the variance in citizen participation, 15% of the variance in collective efficacy, and 43% of the variance in norms for activism.

Table 2. Correlations, Reliabilities, and Descriptive Statistics for Followers ($n = 110$) and Leaders ($n = 91$)

	HOPE	CE	SOC	NA	OS	PP	CP
HOPE	(.840)	.336**	.463**	.448**	.305**	-.224*	-.041
CE	.306**	(.910)	.262*	.456**	.294**	-.015	-.052
SOC	.356**	.303**	(.900)	.651**	.361**	-.308**	.087
NA	.331**	.307**	.540**	(.910)	.534**	-.113	.152
OS	.156	.023	.207*	.504**	(.950)	-.073	.427**
PP	-.444**	-.052	-.152	-.264**	-.249**	(.860)	.063
CP	.053	.272**	.203*	.412**	.434**	.033	(.800)
Full sample							
<i>M</i>	4.09	3.47	3.71	2.86	2.91	4.21	2.32
(<i>SD</i>)	(0.98)	(1.14)	(0.91)	(1.02)	(1.22)	(1.42)	(0.89)
Followers							
<i>M</i>	3.95	3.26	3.50	2.68	2.32	4.32	1.93
(<i>SD</i>)	(0.94)	(1.17)	(0.83)	(0.98)	(1.01)	(1.36)	(0.67)
Leaders							
<i>M</i>	4.25	3.71	3.97	3.06	3.61	4.08	2.80
(<i>SD</i>)	(0.99)	(1.05)	(0.93)	(1.04)	(1.07)	(1.49)	(0.90)
Levene's test	0.27	1.73	0.79	0.48	0.74	2.77	5.08*
Two-sample <i>t</i> test	-2.20*	-2.88**	-3.76**	-2.64**	-8.76**	1.18	-7.80**

NOTE: The lower triangle of the correlation matrix contains the correlations for the followers ($n = 110$); the upper triangle contains the correlations for the leaders ($n = 91$) in the sample. The entries in parentheses along the diagonal are the reliabilities for the scale scores (based on the full sample, $N = 201$). Both Levene's test for equality of variances and the two-sample *t* test for equality of groups means have $df = 199$. HOPE = hope for change; CE = collective efficacy; SOC = sense of community; NA = norms for activism; OS = organizing skills; PP = perceived neighborhood problems; CP = citizen participation.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

In regard to our hypotheses, we found strong support for Hypothesis 1 that norms for activism would mediate the relationship between neighborhood readiness and capacity and citizen participation. Norms for activism were significant direct predictors of citizen participation ($\beta = .29, p < .05$) and were themselves predicted by both collective efficacy ($\beta = .17, p < .05$) and sense of community ($\gamma = .56, p < .05$). Furthermore, neither collective efficacy, $\chi^2(1) = 0.98, ns$, nor sense of community, $\chi^2(1) = 1.05, ns$, had significant modification indices, suggesting that inserting direct paths from either of them to citizen participation would not improve model fit.

The results partially supported Hypothesis 2, which predicted that collective efficacy mediates the effect of hope. Whereas hope was a significant predictor of collective efficacy ($\gamma = .29, p < .05$), which in turn had a significant direct effect on norms as noted above, the direct path from hope to norms was also significant ($\gamma = .13, p < .05$). Overall, the indirect effect of hope on norms for activism was small ($\gamma = .05, p < .05$) compared to its total effect ($\gamma = .18, p < .05$). The direct effect of sense of community on collective efficacy was significant ($\gamma = .27, p < .05$) and was included in our final model. Neighborhood problems, which was expected to have a direct effect on citizen participation, was nonsignificant ($\gamma = .04, ns$).

Assessing Individual Differences

To examine the impact of individual characteristics on citizen participation (Hypothesis 4), we developed Model 2 by adding organizing skills as another direct predictor of citizen participation. In the initial version of the model, a large positive modification index suggested that adding a link from skills to norms for activism would improve the model fit. After considering the possible meaning of such a link, we added it, reasoning that residents with greater organizing skills may have confidence that they can successfully elicit participation from their neighbors.

Model 2 fit the data quite well, $\chi^2(7) = 7.63$, *ns*, and had small values for RMSEA (.037) and SRMR (.033), but it had a slightly higher value for the ECVI (.33) than Model 1. While a chi-square difference test did not detect a significant change in overall fit between Models 1 and 2, $\chi^2(1) = 2.41$, *ns*, Model 2 accounted for 34% of the variance in citizen participation, which is a substantial improvement over Model 1. The change in predictive ability was less dramatic for the other variables: Model 2 explained 15% of the variance in collective efficacy and 51% of the variance in norms for activism. Both values are similar to values from Model 1.

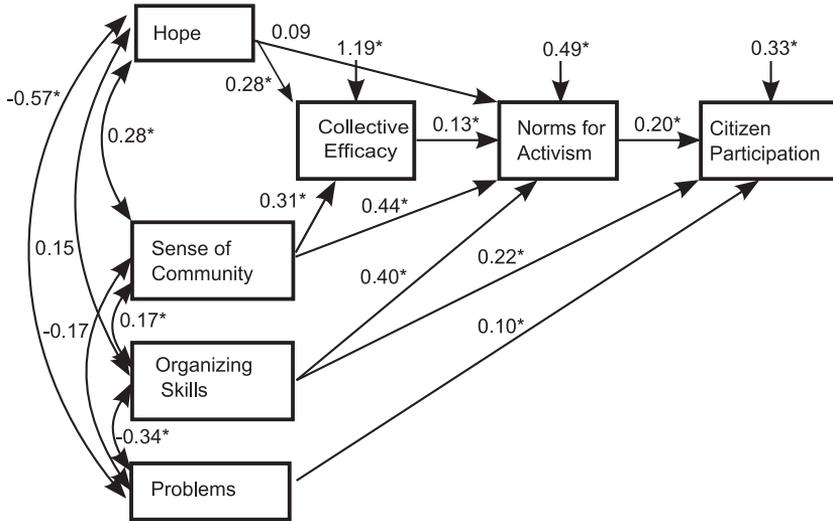
As hypothesized, organizing skills was a strong direct predictor of citizen participation ($\gamma = .42$, $p < .05$). Organizing skills was also a significant direct predictor of norms for activism ($\gamma = .27$, $p < .05$). Adding organizing skills eliminated the effect of norms for activism ($\beta = .04$, *ns*) on citizen participation and also reduced the size of the coefficient for the path from sense of community to norms for activism ($\gamma = .45$, $p < .05$), although the latter remained quite strong.

Meanwhile, most other coefficients in the model were similar to those observed in Model 1. Hope ($\gamma = .29$, $p < .05$) and sense of community ($\gamma = .27$, $p < .05$) both remained significant predictors of collective efficacy; collective efficacy remained a significant predictor of norms for activism ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$); and neighborhood problems remained nonsignificant as a predictor of citizen participation ($\gamma = .07$, *ns*). Unlike in Model 1, hope was not a direct predictor of norms ($\gamma = .09$, *ns*), so collective efficacy fully mediated hope's effect on norms in Model 2.

Do Leaders and Followers Experience Different Processes?

To test whether leadership status moderated the relationships in our model (Hypothesis 5), we compared a multigroup model (Model 3) where all parameters were constrained to have equal values for both followers and leaders to an unconstrained multigroup model (Model 4) where all parameters were free to vary between groups. The chi-square difference test between Models 3 and 4 served as a simultaneous multivariate test for whether leadership moderates any relationships or other parameters in the model (Singh, 1995; see Figure 2). Model 3 provided a marginally acceptable fit to the data according to most fit indices. For example, the SRMRs of .090 for followers and .110 for leaders are on the borderline for acceptability, as is the RMSEA of .080 (90% confidence interval [CI] = .037 to .120). The ECVI is .65 (90% CI = .50 to .71). However, there was still room for improvement, as indicated by the significant goodness-of-fit test result, $\chi^2(34) = 54.95$, $p = .013$. Meanwhile, Model 4 provided an excellent fit to the data, $\chi^2(12) = 18.15$, *ns*, and was in fact a substantial improvement over Model 3 according to a chi-square difference test, $\chi^2(22) = 36.80$, $p = .025$. The Model 4 SRMR values of .039 for followers and .049 for leaders were substantial improvements over those from Model 3, as was the RMSEA of .073. The ECVI for Model 4

A) Followers



B) Leaders

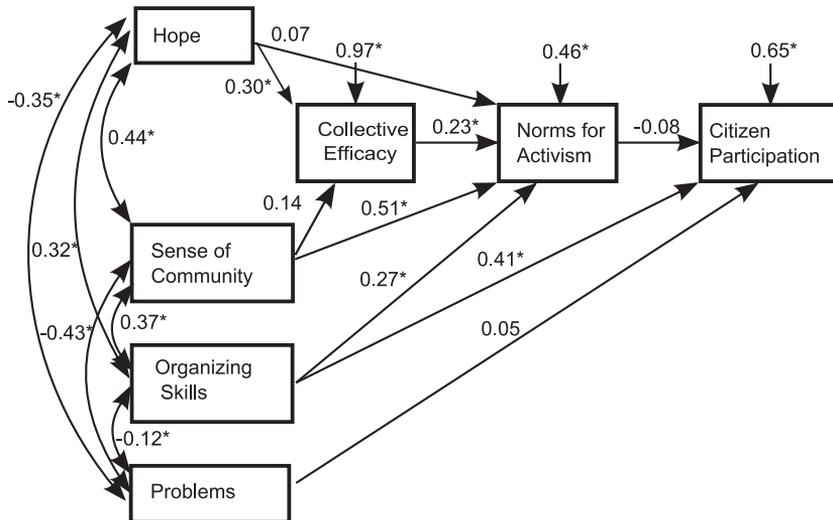


Figure 2. Path diagram for a multigroup structural equation model for followers (A) and leaders (B).

NOTE: Because the comparison of interest is across groups, unstandardized parameter estimates are shown (Kline, 2005). These estimates are from Model 4 because it provided superior fit compared to Model 3, $\chi^2(22) = 36.80, p = .025$. Model 4 fit the data well: $\chi^2(12) = 18.15, ns$; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .039 for followers and SRMR = .049 for leaders; root mean square error of approximation = .073; and expected cross-validation index = .69 (90% confidence interval = .59 to .70).

* $p < .05$.

was .69 (90% CI = .59 to .70). Thus, removing the cross-group equality constraints revealed evidence that leadership status moderates at least one parameter in the model. For brevity, we omit parameter estimates for Model 3 and present only those for Model 4 (see Figure 2) because the latter provided a better fit to the data.

To identify exactly which parameters are moderated by leadership status, we checked whether unstandardized estimates (Kline, 2005) from Model 4 for leaders fell within the 95% CI for the corresponding estimates for followers. When the estimate for leaders fell outside the CI for followers, we concluded that leadership status moderates that parameter. We also concluded that there was support for moderation when a path coefficient was significant for one group but not the other. Figure 2 shows the parameter estimates and corresponding CIs for both followers and leaders.

Overall, we found strong support for our hypothesis that leadership status moderates the relationships between neighborhood conditions, skills, and citizen participation. Neighborhood norms for activism plays a strong mediational role for followers ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = .06 to .34) but not for leaders ($\beta = -.08$, *ns*) with respect to predicting citizen participation. Although organizing skills was a positive predictor of citizen participation for both groups, it was stronger for leaders ($\gamma = .41$, $p < .05$) than for followers ($\gamma = .22$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = .10 to .34). Other process differences are also evident in Model 4. For example, whereas sense of community was a positive predictor of collective efficacy among followers ($\gamma = .31$, $p < .05$), it was not among leaders ($\gamma = .14$, *ns*). Similarly, neighborhood problems was a direct predictor of citizen participation among followers ($\gamma = .10$, $p < .05$), but not among leaders ($\gamma = .05$, *ns*).

It is important to note, however, that not all processes were moderated by leadership status. For example, sense of community has a strong positive relationship to neighborhood norms for both followers ($\gamma = .44$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = .26 to .62) and leaders ($\gamma = .51$, $p < .05$). Although somewhat smaller in magnitude, collective efficacy is also a positive predictor of neighborhood norms among both followers ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$, 95% CI = .01 to .25) and leaders ($\beta = .23$, $p < .05$). The magnitude of the relationship between hope and collective efficacy is almost identical between followers ($\gamma = .28$, $p < .05$) and leaders ($\gamma = .30$, $p < .05$). Hope is not a significant direct predictor of norms for activism for either followers ($\gamma = .09$, *ns*) or leaders ($\gamma = .07$, *ns*). Finally, at first glance organizing skills appears to be a weaker predictor of norms for activism among leaders ($\gamma = .27$, $p < .05$) than among followers ($\gamma = .40$, $p < .05$), but the CI around the latter estimate (95% CI = .26 to .54) contains the estimate for leaders, indicating that the difference is not significant.

Model 4 accounted for similar amounts of variance in collective efficacy in both groups (14% among followers, 13% among leaders). Finally, although Model 4 accounted for somewhat less variance in norms for activism among followers than among leaders (49% vs. 57%, respectively), this pattern was reversed with respect to accounting for variance in citizen participation (28% among followers, 20% among leaders).

DISCUSSION

This study takes an important step toward extending our understanding of citizen participation behavior in low-income neighborhoods. Similar to previous studies (e.g., Foster-Fishman et al., 2007), we found that community conditions matter; when residents feel connected to their neighbors and believe that by working together change is

feasible, they are more likely to be active, engaged citizens. However, this study went one step further to describe *why* community conditions matter: because they build the expectation that residents will be involved. As we hypothesized, residents' perceptions of the degree to which residents in their neighborhood were likely to be active citizens fully mediated the relationship between neighborhood capacity and readiness and citizen participation behavior. In other words, in these low-income neighborhoods, greater neighborhood capacity and readiness for change was associated with individuals' perception that their neighbors would be engaged citizens—and when they thought their neighbors would be engaged, individuals were more likely themselves to be active in their neighborhoods and communities.

As expected, collective efficacy partially mediated the relationship between hope and neighborhood norms for activism. It also partially mediated the relationship between sense of community and neighborhood norms for activism, a path that we had not hypothesized—but one that makes sense and suggests that when residents feel that there is a future of possibility *or* that neighbors are connected and supportive of one another, they are more likely to feel that by working together, they can make changes in their community. Notably, sense of community, a measure of capacity, was a much stronger predictor of neighborhood norms for activism than either hope or collective efficacy, measures of readiness. This suggests that although residents may feel hopeful about the future and that neighbors have the ability to work together to successfully effect change, interventions aimed at building strong connections between neighbors may be more important for fostering norms for activism.

However, the results also suggest that community-building initiatives need to expand beyond improving community conditions to target the development of specific capacities that support residents in their participation efforts. Individuals' levels of organizing skills significantly and directly predicted the extent of their citizen participation. In fact, entering organizing skills into the model eliminated the effect of neighborhood norms for activism—residents who felt better able to plan and engage others in neighborhood activities were more likely to engage in civic activities regardless of the local norms for activism. This is concomitant with Bandura's (1986) work; when individuals believe that they have a strong probability of success at a new task, they are more likely to engage in that task.

Does this suggest that initiatives desiring to increase citizen participation should focus exclusively on enhancing resident organizing skills? Well, no—because a resident's leadership status affects whether neighborhood norms for activism or organizing skills are the critical leverage point to promote citizen participation. As expected, although some relationships within the model were consistent for both leaders and followers, critical differences emerged due to the moderating effect of leadership status. For leaders, organizing skills was the only significant predictor of how much they engaged in citizen participation activities. In contrast, for followers, organizing skills and neighborhood norms for activism were equally important in predicting citizen participation, while neighborhood problems were weak but significant factors.

These results suggest that the self-identified leaders in our sample really do view themselves as neighborhood leaders. They do not necessarily require others in the neighborhood to be active to impel them toward engagement, nor do they wait until problems are severe; they primarily need to have the skills and, presumably, the self-efficacy to use these skills. For followers, however, multiple factors influence their levels of engagement—expectations that their neighbors are active, a problem that needs to be addressed, and, again, some degree of skill that can make the likelihood of engagement efforts successful.

Implications

The findings from this study suggest that practitioners should carefully consider whom they want to engage in a community initiative and then focus on the factors most likely to facilitate the participation of that group of residents. To engage the broadest array of residents, it may be necessary to use multiple strategies. Building readiness and capacity may help to establish the norms that encourage greater participation among residents who do not see themselves as leaders. Meanwhile, providing targeted training and opportunities for skill development is important for residents and may be one of the best means for encouraging greater participation among self-identified neighborhood leaders. In neighborhoods where community conditions are weak and residents lack normative expectations for participation, it may be particularly important to build organizing skills among leaders. Developing leadership in neighborhoods with little capacity and readiness for change may provide the impetus for activity by those leaders who can improve community conditions, initiating the process through which regular residents become participants in change efforts. Of course, when neighborhoods have long-standing traditions of isolation and hopelessness, it may take years to create the context where residents believe in the possibility of change and develop the capacity to effect change.

Limitations and Future Directions

The sample for this study was identified by local community organizers. Although the sample included both residents who viewed themselves as leaders and residents who did not, most survey respondents were likely to be more engaged than a typical resident because they were “nurtured” by a local organizer. Thus, the nonleaders in this study are best considered “engaged residents” or “active followers” rather than residents from the general population.

Because leaders in this sample were self-identified, we did not have confirmation that all were considered leaders by residents in their neighborhoods. We attempted to address this issue by collecting additional information about leadership in formal organizations and running a contingency analysis between these data and our list of self-identified leaders. Although the results supported the validity of the self-identified leader variable, many of the self-identified leaders were not confirmed by this process. Although it is possible that some of the self-identified leaders do not meet our definition of a resident leader, it is also possible that unconfirmed leaders are not known by local organizers or may operate as leaders in informal settings. Because some of the most intriguing findings in this study were associated with the moderating effects of self-identified leadership status, future research should examine factors that contribute to residents’ identifying themselves as leaders.

The present study was grounded in a social–cognitive perspective wherein residents infer norms for citizen participation behavior by observing and talking to other residents. Although we did not directly test whether the actual behavior of other residents played a causal role in creating a resident’s perceptions of neighborhood norms, the broad base of research supporting social–cognitive theory is a reasonable basis on which to make this assumption. Similarly, because testing a process model with cross-sectional data is not ideal, a longitudinal study of how these processes unfold over time is required and, in fact, is under way. Finally, although our framework is also embedded in ecological theory, we only tested one of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological layers. A more thorough analysis that considers the impact of other ecological systems, such as the capacity of local service delivery systems, on citizen participation behavior is under way.

Note

1. Although this percentage is somewhat low, our local informants acknowledged that they did not yet fully know all residents who could be considered leaders in the neighborhoods.

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