

The Exchange Boundary Framework: Understanding the Evolution of Power within Collaborative Decision-Making Settings

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Abstract Many community decision-making bodies encounter challenges in creating conditions where stakeholders from disadvantaged populations can authentically participate in ways that give them actual influence over decisions affecting their lives (Foster-Fishman et al., *Lessons for the journey: Strategies and suggestions for guiding planning, governance, and sustainability in comprehensive community initiatives*. W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, MI, 2004). These challenges are often rooted in asymmetrical power dynamics operating within the settings (Prilleltensky, *J Commun Psychol* 36:116–136, 2008). In response, this paper presents the Exchange Boundary Framework, a new approach for understanding and promoting authentic, empowered participation within collaborative decision-making settings. The framework expands upon theories currently used in the field of community psychology by focusing on the underlying processes through which power operates in relationships and examining the evolution of power dynamics over time. By integrating concepts from social exchange theory (Emerson, *Am Soc Rev* 27:31–41, 1962) and social boundaries theory (Hayward, *Polity* 31(1):1–22, 1998), the framework situates power within parallel processes of resources exchange and social regulation. The framework can be used to understand the conditions leading to power asymmetries within collaborative decisionmaking processes, and guide efforts to promote more equitable and authentic participation by all stakeholders within these settings. In this paper we describe the Exchange Boundary Framework,

apply it to three distinct case studies, and discuss key considerations for its application within collaborative community settings.

Keywords Collaboration · Community decision-making settings · Power

Introduction

An increasing number of influential decision-making bodies are attempting to engage youth and adults from disenfranchised communities (e.g., the poor, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, etc.) in processes intended to promote shared decision-making (Israel et al. 1998; Lasker and Weiss 2003; Laurian 2007). In fact, many federally and internationally funded efforts now require grantees to involve disenfranchised community members or consumers in their decision-making processes, often with little guidance on how to do so (Gaventa 1998; McFarlane 2001; SAMHSA 2011). Despite good intentions, many of these decision-making bodies encounter challenges in creating conditions where stakeholders from disadvantaged populations can authentically participate in ways that give them actual influence over decisions affecting their lives (Foster-Fishman et al. 2004; Sullivan et al. 2001). One barrier to authentic participation is the unequal power dynamics operating within these settings (Dworski-Riggs and Langhout 2010; Gruber and Trickett 1987; Jordan et al. 2001; Prilleltensky 2008; Rich et al. 1995). Repeated calls have been made for a greater emphasis on the concept of power within community change processes (Angelique and Culley 2007; Prilleltensky 2001, 2008; Speer and Hughey 1995). Specifically, there is a need for better frameworks regarding the complex processes through which power

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dynamics manifest themselves in these contexts in order to foster more authentic, empowered participation.

Based on Prilleltensky's (2008) concept of psychopolitical power, this paper defines power as a relational, context-dependent construct that connotes the ability and opportunity to fulfill or obstruct personal, relational, or collective needs. This paper specifically focuses on power that emerges through participation in collaborative decision-making settings (e.g., advisory boards, collaborative research partnerships, community coalitions, etc.), and thus the ability of disenfranchised stakeholders within these settings to have authentic influence over decisions affecting their lives. Several theories have been used to examine how power is enacted within the community psychology literature, for example Lukes' (1974) instruments of social power and French and Raven's (1959) bases of power. In general these theories focus on conflict and control over resources within various types of relationships, and have been applied to research in a variety of community contexts (Speer and Hughey 1995; Culley and Hughey 2008; Klein et al. 2000; Salem et al. 2000).

However, some have recognized that these theories provide limited understanding into the underlying processes through which power operates in relationships, and thus offer little guidance on how to shift unequal power dynamics (Droege 2009; Neal and Neal 2010; Dworski-Riggs and Langhout 2010). Social exchange theory (Emerson 1962) has been suggested as a way to provide clarity around these processes as it provides a straightforward equation for explaining the core factors that predict the "structural patterns" of power within social relationships (Droege 2009; Neal and Neal 2010). In essence social exchange theory proposes that power develops through exchanges of resources between agents (e.g., individuals, groups, institutions) attempting to satisfy their needs. Actors who possess key valued resources (e.g., decision-making power, knowledge, money, relationships)—and can control others' access to resources—can exploit people's dependency on their resources to gain power. However, in addition to possessing resources, stakeholders must have the capacity to activate and value the assets available within a setting (their own and those of others) to make them available for exchange (Lareau and McNamara Horvat 1999) and to incorporate them into the decision-making process.

While social exchange theory sheds light on the processes that promote and hinder power relationships, it maintains a sole focus on the possession and control over resources. We propose that in addition to resources, theories of power must also take into account *systems of social regulation and discourse*. Many have argued that power not only relies on the control over and exchange of resources, but also on socially constructed norms, structures, discourse, knowledge, or "social boundaries" that

determine stakeholders' power within a setting by legitimizing or illegitimizing their resources (Foucault 1979; Gaventa and Cornwall 2008; Hayward 1998; Prilleltensky 2008). For example, over time societies develop shared paradigms or perceptions about who has the authority or legitimacy to exchange certain types of resources, in what ways, for what purpose, and in what contexts; these paradigms in turn create unspoken social regulations or boundaries that govern people's actions and influence their identities as powerful or powerless actors (Hayward 1998). Social boundaries are expressed within society's social norms and institutional practices and are often "reproduced" within nested social settings (Bourdieu 1977), making it possible for individuals who have control over valuable resources to *still* be denied influence over decision-making processes (e.g., power) if the social boundaries operating within a setting illegitimize the exchange of their resources. As Freire suggests (1970), unless stakeholders can build the capacity and motivation to engage in discourse that can lead to changes in the conditions upholding these social boundaries, unequal power dynamics will continue to develop within collaborative decision-making settings. Thus, control over resources provides a necessary yet insufficient explanation of power dynamics, suggesting a need to revise current theories to take into account both resources *and* social discourse.

The purpose of this paper is to expand our field's understanding of power in order to promote more authentic participation by diverse stakeholders in collaborative decision-making processes, and in doing so to address unequal distributions of power in these settings. By gaining a more sophisticated understanding of the processes through which power operates, change agents will be better equipped to foster conditions that promote authentic participation by all members. Authentic participation of diverse stakeholders is important because it can lead to better community outcomes, but also because the process of participating itself has been found to be valuable and beneficial to those involved (Florin and Wandersman 1990). To carry out this purpose, the paper introduces the Exchange Boundary Framework, a model that weaves together two theories from related disciplines—social exchange theory and social boundaries theory—that, when combined, offer a more comprehensive view of power in collaborative decision-making settings. Below we describe the two theories, explain the Exchange Boundary Framework, and illustrate its application to three unique case studies.

Social Exchange Theory: Shifts in the Value and Valuing of Resources

Social exchange theory (Emerson 1962, 1972) defines power as the ability to leverage the dependencies of others

through the exchange of valued resources within a social network. The theory is based on the assumption that people, groups, or institutions must exchange resources with one another in order to satisfy their needs. Resources can consist of tangible elements like money and materials, or intangibles like time, knowledge, relationships, opportunities, and skills. According to the theory, the ability of a particular person, group, or institution (agent A) to exercise power over another person, group, or institution (agent B) is determined by two dependency conditions: (1) the degree to which agent B desires agent A's resources; and (2) the degree to which agent B can acquire these resources from sources other than agent A (Cook and Emerson 1978; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). For example, if agent B highly desires agent A's resources and can only acquire these resources from agent A, agent A has the opportunity to leverage agent B's dependency through the control of those resources. This dynamic has been observed in the literature when stakeholders (often from dominant groups) leverage others' dependency on their resources to gain power or sustain their more powerful positions (Gaventa 1980; Martín-Baró 1986).

In many ways, collaborative decision-making settings are established to promote the exchange of resources across stakeholders in a community. Coalitions aim to promote the exchange of information and other resources across different participants (Provan et al. 2005), collaborative research partnerships are formed to foster the exchange of knowledge, support, and skills between researchers and community stakeholders (Israel et al. 1998), and advisory boards are created to encourage the exchange of information and ideas between decision-making bodies and their constituencies (Crosby et al. 1986). However, some researchers argue that simply possessing a resource does not guarantee that an agent can engage in an exchange (and leverage dependencies) unless that agent has the capacity to *activate* the resources in a particular social setting (Larreau and McNamara Horvat 1999). As Gruber and Trickett (1987) and others (Culley and Hughey 2008; Gaventa 1980; Rich et al. 1995) have well illustrated, the presence of disadvantaged stakeholders at decision-making tables does not ensure the valuing, access, or use of their resources. Instead, disadvantaged participants must have the capacity (e.g., awareness, communication skills, confidence) to make available the unique resources they bring to the table, more privileged stakeholders must be aware of and value these resources, *and* all participants must have the collaborative capacity to access and incorporate these resources into the decision-making process. Unfortunately, when collaborative decision-making settings fail to activate available stakeholder resources, disadvantaged stakeholders are typically blamed for this outcome on account of their inability to activate their resources; privileged

stakeholders are rarely held accountable for their role in this restricted exchange (such as their devaluing of these resources or their own lack of capacity in accessing and integrating these resources; Gruber and Trickett 1987; Rich et al. 1995).

Thus, in order for disadvantaged stakeholders to increase their power (i.e., ability and opportunity to leverage resource dependencies) within collaborative decision-making settings, two alterations in the resource exchange dynamic could occur. First, conditions could be shifted within these settings to create opportunities and capacity-building for disadvantaged stakeholders to better cultivate and activate resources that are desired and valued by other setting stakeholders (so as to increase others' dependency on their resources) as well as to access multiple sources for their desired resources (so as to avoid becoming dependent on any one agent). Second, capacity building could be provided to other setting stakeholders in order to increase their awareness and valuing of disadvantaged stakeholders' resources and their ability to access and incorporate these resources into the collaborative decision-making process.

However, these alternations in the resource exchange dynamic may still be insufficient to promote authentic participation. While stakeholders may have opportunities and capacity to activate, value, and incorporate diverse resources into decision-making exchanges, disenfranchised stakeholders may still be unable to leverage the *full range* of their resources to influence current or future collaborative decision-making processes unless the social regulations and boundaries operating within a given setting provide legitimacy to those resources. Therefore, in order to expand the authentic participation of disenfranchised stakeholders within collaborative decision-making settings, efforts must also attend to social regulations and discourses in order to promote the legitimate exchange of stakeholders' activated resources.

Social Boundaries Theory: Shifts in Social Regulation and Discourse

Hayward (1998) argues that power can be conceptualized as operating through a "network of social boundaries that constrain and enable action for all actors" (p. 2). Hayward asserts that power (i.e., the ability or opportunity to fulfill or obstruct needs by influencing community decisions) is determined by a series of *socially constructed boundaries* that define what actions (exchanges) are normal or legitimate for any given individual. Social boundaries evolve from social and historical distinctions between members of society (e.g., gender, class, race, age, etc.) that dictate acceptable and unacceptable actions for stakeholders (e.g., teachers can legitimately exchange their resources to

determine curriculum, students cannot) and eventually become codified in laws, policies, standards, social practices, norms, and institutions that maintain unequal power relations (Hayward 1998). Over time, people internalize these social boundaries and self-regulate their own behavior (i.e., exchange of resources) within a range of normatively acceptable limits without the need for coercion or discipline from dominant groups (Foucault 1979; Prilleltensky 2008). From this perspective, unequal power relations can only be realigned when settings involve opportunities and capacity-building for members to engage in social discourses that ignite social critique and critical consciousness (Friere 1970; Ulrich and Reynolds 2010) of existing social boundaries, and encourage members to value the expansion of those boundaries. This in turn can promote changes in the conditions maintaining the social boundaries (Hayward 1998) and expand opportunities for stakeholders to legitimately exchange all of their resources in collaborative decision-making settings.

For example, a parent advisory board could be created to provide a local mental health organization guidance on how to create more accessible and useful services for children and families. Societal norms around professional-consumer relations are reproduced as an unspoken boundary within the advisory board which discourages parents from openly criticizing the organization's performance and encourages organization executives to discredit negative parental feedback as illegitimate complaining. Instead of speaking their minds, parents withhold the activation of their knowledge and critiques about the service delivery system because they recognize that the exchange of these resources falls outside of their social boundary within the setting. The social boundary is reinforced by the parents' dependency on the organization for the limited services available in the community, and the fear that violating this boundary will jeopardize their access (i.e., exchange relationship) to needed resources for their family. Organization executives do not encourage parents' feedback because they too are operating according to their own social boundary which affords them a stance of complacency toward critical feedback. There are no opportunities or capacity-building efforts to encourage discourse or critical consciousness around these issues, and consequently the social boundaries remain unchallenged. In turn, the organization executives take the parents' lack of critique as evidence that parents do not care and/or are not able to participate in such processes and conclude that their current services are acceptable. As a result of these social boundaries, the setting is unable to provide parents with the opportunity to influence decisions affecting their families' wellbeing.

Previous studies of collaborative settings have documented how the distribution of power across stakeholders has been bounded by a variety of social boundaries (Gruber

and Trickett 1987; Rich et al. 1995; Sullivan et al. 2001). In most cases, without explicit attention to and discourse about these social boundaries, attempts to alter power dynamics faltered. For example, the authentic participation of parents and students in Gruber and Trickett's (1987) classic study of a school planning council was influenced by social boundaries upheld by policies privileging teacher roles in the schools, practices determining the information flow to parents and students, and norms around expertise and knowledge. While all stakeholders—including teachers—on the board were in favor of student and parent participation and capable of activating or incorporating stakeholder resources into the decision-making exchanges, the lack of attention and capacity-building related to critical discourse about the setting's social boundaries prevented the group from addressing these inequalities and actually maintained existing power dynamics. In a second example, Dworski-Riggs and Langhout (2010) conducted a case study of a participatory action research project aiming to increase stakeholder participation (i.e., exchanges) in a school's decision-making processes. Similar to Gruber and Trickett's case, social boundaries operating within the school setting—upheld by policies controlling information flow, practices on time allotted for decision-making and social norms discouraging parental involvement—prevented authentic parent engagement in the project. Again, the lack of attention and capacity building to support critical discourse among stakeholders regarding these boundaries hindered the project's goal of restructuring power within the school. By illuminating the social regulation affecting stakeholders' actions within collaborative decision-making settings, social boundary theory could guide efforts to develop critical discourse to change these conditions. The next section will integrate the two theories of social exchange and social boundaries into a unified framework.

Toward an Integrated View of Power: Exchange Boundary Framework

The Exchange Boundary (EB) framework integrates social exchange and social boundaries theories to create a more comprehensive lens for understanding and leveraging power dynamics within collaborative decision-making settings. The Exchange Boundary framework suggests that approaches to redressing power inequalities in collaborative decision-making settings must simultaneously incorporate the following two critical processes:

Critical Process 1: Increase opportunities and build capacity for disenfranchised stakeholders to *cultivate, obtain, and activate valued resources*, and for all stakeholders to *value, access, and incorporate these resources* into the collaborative decision-making exchanges.

Fig. 1 Critical processes within the exchange boundary framework

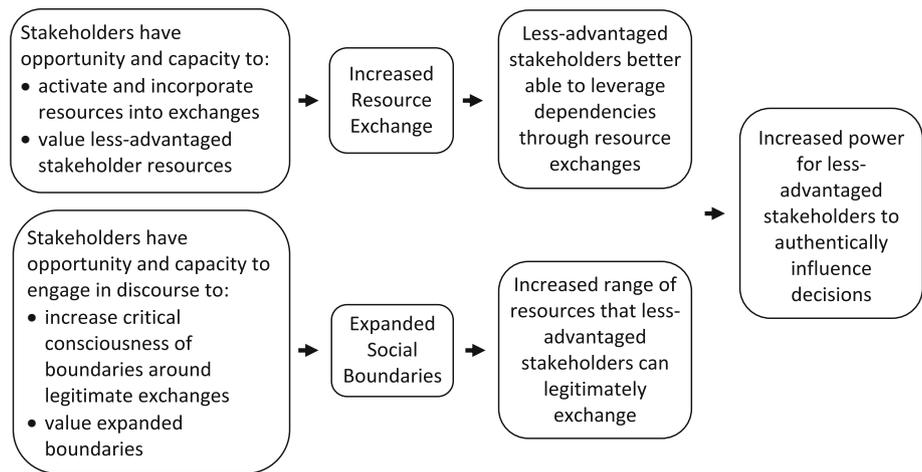


Table 1 Exchange boundary framework outcomes

	Increased resource exchange	
	Yes	No
Expanded social boundaries		
Yes	Increased power	Tokenism
No	Cooptation	No change in power

Critical Process 2: Increase opportunities and build capacity for all stakeholders to engage in *critical discourse to expand the social boundaries* limiting the range of legitimate resource exchanges with disenfranchised stakeholders.

As these critical processes intimate, the Exchange Boundary framework attends to the dynamic interplay between resource exchanges and social boundaries. The need to increase opportunities and capacities related to resource exchanges *and* discourse that can expand boundaries is critical because, as mentioned above, the legitimate exchange of any stakeholders’ activated resource is contingent on the social boundaries operating within the setting. Meanwhile, increasing opportunities and capacities to expand social boundaries can only lead to more authentic participation if they *also* open up opportunities for new forms of exchange relationships between more and less privileged stakeholders—and provide the necessary capacity-building supports to ensure that *all* members can effectively activate and incorporate resources into those exchanges (Fig. 1).

The Exchange Boundary framework suggests that settings can foster four different types of outcomes depending on the degree to which they engage processes to bolster resource exchanges and expand social boundaries (see Table 1). For example, a setting where all stakeholders have the capacity to engage in resource exchanges could

eventually lead to *co-optation* if critical discourse is not created to expand the social boundaries limiting the perceived legitimacy of disadvantaged stakeholders’ resources. Here, resource exchanges may serve to distract stakeholders (e.g., perhaps due to their eager anticipation of such exchanges) from the need to shift the social boundaries. Similarly, a setting that successfully expands disadvantaged stakeholders’ social boundaries but is unable to foster opportunities and capacities for members to take advantage of exchanges could lead to an outcome of *tokenism*. Here individuals may all agree that exchanges involving disadvantaged stakeholders’ resources are legitimate, but stakeholders may lack the capacity to activate, value, and incorporate those resources into the decision-making exchanges. As implied by these two situations, settings that can neither bolster resource exchanges nor expand social boundaries have limited potential for increasing power. Only when settings can provide opportunities and build capacity for stakeholders to engage fully in exchanges *and* critical discourse to expand social boundaries can disadvantaged stakeholders increase their authentic participation.

The next section will describe how we have applied the Exchange Boundary Framework to three case studies of collaborative community settings from our work over the years. The cases illustrate three of the four outcomes of engaging the critical processes mentioned above.

Case Studies

Case 1: Cooptation within a Resident Advisory Board

Methods

The setting for the first case study is a resident advisory board created by several local fiduciaries (power brokers)

for a community-building initiative operating in a small, racially diverse city in the Midwest of the United States with high rates of poverty. Data were collected through three methods. First, in-depth observations were made of 34 board meetings and 2 community events involving board members by a team of participant-observers familiar with the setting. Second, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 resident board members within 6 months of leaving the board in order to investigate their experience on the board. The interviews lasted approximately 90 min and contained questions about the exchange of resources on the board and shifts in the discourse about resident roles. Third, archival data review was conducted on the board's meeting minutes and policy documents, and local media articles describing the board.

Description of Setting

The resident advisory board (RAB) was created in conjunction with a series of grants the power brokers were preparing to disseminate to the community. The purpose of the RAB was to gather a group of adult residents from targeted neighborhoods to review these grant proposals, whereby providing a venue for engaging resident input into a community decision-making processes. In total 12 residents, both male and female, participated on the RAB (although 3 did not participate for the entire duration of the board); all came from low-income neighborhoods and were racially diverse. The recruited residents were locally known for their extensive leadership and involvement in the community, a notable distinction (resource) considering the community's resident population was largely inactive and unorganized at the time of the board's inception. The residents were aware of this special status as illustrated in the following comment by one of the RAB resident members:

Some of us were an obvious choice [for the RAB] because of our activities. If they hadn't invited us people would have [asked,] "well, why didn't you pick [them?]." ...we were the most obvious choice because of the messages we were willing to convey and the activities that we were all involved in across the board.

The RAB setting was the power brokers' first attempt to formally engage (i.e., exchange with) community residents in their decision-making processes. Prior to this setting very few exchanges of any kind occurred between the power brokers and local residents. The power brokers' history of isolationism had created an "us and them" narrative among residents which contributed to a social boundary defining residents' role in the community. This social boundary is clearly articulated in the following comment by one of the RAB resident members:

I don't know if I can correlate it to this, but it was kind of like we were chosen like the 12 disciples and the [power brokers] was God, and God really wanted to bless the community but he wanted his 12 disciples to carry the message and we were selected as those people who could carry the message.

The RAB occurred within a larger community-building initiative funded by the power brokers; one goal within this initiative was to expand the norms (social boundaries) around resident power and influence in the community. Thus, the RAB represented a tangible and visible demonstration of the power brokers' commitment to this goal. The setting lasted for a little over 3 years, meeting about monthly for the first 6 months, bi-monthly for the next 2 years, and then gradually less frequently as the board continued. The number of residents attending each meeting also decreased after the second year. Eventually the RAB was terminated by the power brokers for the stated reason that the setting had outlived its original purpose.

Setting's Ability to Foster Exchanges and Expand Boundaries

The RAB was fairly successful at both fostering exchanges and expanding social boundaries during the first half of its existence. For example, the very creation of the board shifted the discourse around resident engagement in the community and expanded social boundaries limiting residents' opportunities to influence community decisions. During its early phases the RAB also promoted active exchanges by engaging the residents in reviewing dozens of grant proposals within the power brokers' grant-funding cycle. The power brokers had a strong interest in fostering this particular exchange relationship because they wanted to shift their public image in the community by demonstrating that they took the value of resident voice seriously; the residents' status in the community allowed them to leverage the power brokers' dependency in this exchange. As seen in these comments, residents felt empowered during this phase by successfully exchanging their knowledge of the community for an influence over the power brokers' decisions:

...there were several times where we said, 'no, this is what's really going on at this organization and if you give them this money what you're going to tell the community is you don't care'. And they didn't get funded.

...there have been times where [the power brokers] pulled the plug and they had [the grantees] resubmit the grant with the suggestions or with the modifications or with the recommendations or with

the questions that we may ask. And that was encouraging. That was encouraging.

To me it, it felt...so good to be a part of something that was actually a solution to change, working with people. There were a lot of different things that we had input on, and I think we were actually being heard.

While the exchanges on the board during this period were very active, and all members had the capacity to engage in those exchanges, there was no discourse to extend the residents' social boundaries beyond the power brokers' clear purpose for the RAB (to gather resident input).

Eventually the power brokers' community granting campaign came to a close and they were no longer in need of (dependent on) engaging the residents in their decision-making process. As a result, the power brokers stopped bringing proposals to the RAB for the residents to review, and the residents' experienced a dynamic shift in the valuing of their resources. Some of the residents were frustrated by this shift and tried to revive the initial exchanges by requesting to review other grant proposals within the power brokers' decision-making process. While these requests aligned with the boundaries established by the board's original purpose, they were ultimately denied because the residents' knowledge (resource) was no longer relevant to the power brokers' needs. The power brokers struggled to find a new purpose (i.e., exchange relation) to define the setting in the absence of grant decisions; they eventually decided to use the board to develop the residents' community leadership capacity, as this also aligned with the goals within their larger community building initiative and community relations efforts.

Tensions began arising when the residents, given their increased capacity, attempted to shift the group's discourse by talking about expanding their social boundaries *beyond* the original purpose of the setting. Specifically, the residents asked the power brokers to support them in organizing two different resident-led efforts to increase citizen participation in the community. The residents' willingness to lead the efforts (a resource) was strongly aligned with the goals of the power brokers' larger community initiative and, according to social exchange theory, should have resulted in a successful exchange. Despite this alignment, the power brokers declined to support (exchange with) the residents in organizing these efforts, whereby shutting down the discourse related to expanding resident social boundaries beyond the limited and easily controllable roles within the RAB's initial purpose. The power brokers' lack of support was influenced by the discourse within their own institutions maintained by specific norms, policies, and standards regarding legitimate roles for residents within

their public relations efforts. This discourse around legitimate resident roles was reproduced in the setting as illustrated in the following comments during RAB meetings in response to the resident's proposed efforts:

...my only caution is that I don't think you want to be community organizers...From a RAB perspective, do you really feel you want to be organizers? (Power Broker)

Resident: I want to engage youth, single parents, seniors...help them to formulate their problems and send them to the right person to secure funding. Both [roles] fit into advisory.

Power Broker 1: I don't really envision RAB members creating a forum.

Power Broker 2: Share [information] internally with the RAB to keep [us] informed of issues and concerns within the community, not organizing these events.

This reproduced discourse influenced the power brokers' readiness to value expanded social boundaries around the legitimate exchange of the residents' full range of resources. Thus, the residents' attempts to use the RAB as a way to expand the social boundaries limiting their opportunities to influence community conditions affecting their lives were unsuccessful.

Although they showed initial enthusiasm in requesting these roles, the residents did not actively challenge the power brokers when they reinforced the social boundaries in the RAB, and eventually dropped their ideas for the resident-driven efforts. When asked why they had not pursued their plans independently of the RAB, several residents said that without the power brokers' support (resource exchange) they felt powerless to organize these efforts. Because the RAB's purpose did not foster critical discourse about residents' social boundaries in the setting, the act of engaging in favorable (while limited) exchanges on the board may have actually solidified the residents' internalized view (social boundary) of themselves as dependent on the power brokers. This dependency is illustrated in the following comment by a resident:

I think that was kind of like the mindset... I mean who are we to say? We do what you do, you're the [power brokers]. You've got the power, you've got the money. So who are we to say—we're just community residents.

Setting Outcomes

As the board entered its third year, and continued to function without a clear purpose despite the residents' willingness to take on new expanded roles (i.e., exchanges), the power brokers decided to terminate the setting.

Thus, even though the RAB was initially established to create a venue for promoting residents' voice and power within the community, the lack of an explicit focus on critical discourse to expand social boundaries beyond the constraints of the board's initial short-lived context undermined that very possibility. A key lesson from this case is the unintended consequences of planning and facilitating a community decision-making process that builds disadvantaged community members' capacity to engage in new forms of exchange while inhibiting discourse related to expanding their social boundaries.

Case 2: Tokenism within an Integrated Board of Directors

Methods

The setting for the second case study is a board of directors for WORK, a large nonprofit that primarily served the housing, employment, and neighborhood improvement needs of low-income residents in a small city in the Midwest of the United States. Data for this case were collected through two methods. First, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 7 board members, 3 WORK administrative leaders, and 14 leaders of other organizations that partnered regularly with WORK. Interviews were approximately 90 min long and included questions about the impact of resident involvement on the board and factors facilitating and impeding authentic resident influence over board decisions. Second, results from a local survey collected from a representative sample of community residents ($N = 656$) and organization leaders ($N = 32$) were analyzed for evidence of norms and attitudes around resident engagement.

Description of Setting

As part of a larger initiative within the city that aimed to build a more responsive service delivery system, WORK decided to reformulate its board of directors, adding for the first time in its history three residents from the targeted service area as board members. Prior to this shift, the 11 board members were primarily leaders from wealthy local businesses or nonprofits who lived in surrounding suburbs. WORK was well known in the community for its commitment to resident empowerment and resident engagement. The organization relied on a large number of resident volunteers to support its neighborhood improvement efforts and the CEO was respected by other nonprofit leaders and residents alike for his efforts to transform local conditions and end urban poverty. As a testament to the CEO's commitment to resident empowerment, WORK was the first organization in the community, as part of the larger

initiative, to add residents to its board of directors. As the CEO explained:

Organizations now understand the value of working with residents. I think this initiative has opened the door for my organization to have a higher level of resident engagement. ...We are now more willing to build those relationships for that input and feedback than perhaps before.

The three residents invited to join the board were respected neighborhood leaders that had played a visible and successful role in other community change efforts. Today, 4 years later, residents continue to serve as board members, making up 27 % of the board membership.

Setting's Ability to Foster Exchanges and Expand Boundaries

The actual inclusion of residents from low-income neighborhoods as members of WORK's board of director was a significant act in redefining and expanding the social boundaries for residents within this organization. For the first time, residents were provided real decision-making authority within WORK; they were given access to the most powerful decision-making body within the organization which included having a voice in funding and programming decisions. In many ways, this reconfiguration of the board expanded the role of residents in WORK from simply acting as service recipients and volunteers to include positions as decision-makers and authority figures. According to the CEO who was interviewed when this change first took place:

I think that residents have had greater opportunity to be creative with what they would like to see done in this community. This has opened the window for them to develop their own leadership and what they would like to see and then work toward that.

Importantly, this expanded boundary within WORK was also a visible and significant statement within the broader community context. WORK was a highly esteemed organization within the community; its CEO was considered one of the most important nonprofit leaders in the local area. Having WORK take the lead on expanding the boundaries for residents started a discourse among other nonprofits about the opportunities they should create for residents in their agencies.

Within 8 months of this change, however, it became clear that expanding boundaries was insufficient for real transformations in power and decision-making authority within this context. While membership on the board of directors certainly positioned residents to influence critical decisions within WORK, residents and other board

members did not have the capacities needed to activate this potential. This lack of capacity presented itself mostly within the limited resource exchanges that occurred within the board. Simply put, new and old board members alike did not understand how to activate and incorporate the unique resources held by residents. For example, residents did not understand exactly what information to provide or how to provide it in ways that were useful for the decision-making process; other board members did not fully understand the resources residents brought to the table, the value of these resources, nor how to best access their knowledge or skills and incorporate these resources into board decisions. As a result, exchanges occurring between resident and nonresident board members during meetings were often tangentially related to the decisions at hand. This dynamic, coupled with the lack of discourse about the inadequate exchanges, resulted in residents becoming more token board members than empowered participants who actually influenced critical operating decisions.

Unfortunately, as is common in such tokenistic endeavors, board members primarily blamed the residents for this lack of fruitful exchange. As WORK's CEO explained:

I think the challenge is that sometimes, maybe to a fault, a program like this is developed and we get false hopes that the residents can be really empowered and make significant change when they don't have the background and ability to really communicate effectively. And as a result it is frustrating for the organization because residents don't know what the real issues are so they share a lot of noise, not a lot of substance. That's been my experience sometimes with board members. If they are fairly new to the board, all of a sudden they feel empowered and they talk a lot, but they aren't really speaking with knowledge and enough background to give substantial input. As a result maybe the other board members just tune them out or pass them on, and that's not fair. But at the same time maybe they (the residents) weren't given enough to grow into the role.

As this quote well illustrates, unequal power dynamics are exacerbated when disadvantaged stakeholders engage in decision-making settings that do not develop the capacity of *all* stakeholders to activate, value, and exchange available resources. Through such tokenistic efforts, existing social boundaries may actually be constricted whereby increasing the oppression of disadvantaged stakeholders. For example, disadvantaged stakeholders may become reminded of their "less than valued" status, and more privileged stakeholders may become more convinced that it is unproductive to include disadvantaged stakeholders in these processes.

Setting Outcomes

Unfortunately, three years into the broader community initiative little had changed in regards to the residents' power within the broader community. Longitudinal survey data from 656 residents indicated that residents' perceptions of their own power and influence within the community had not shifted, even though they had expanded their social boundaries by becoming more engaged citizens within the community, including participating on more governance and advisory boards like WORKS' board of directors. Survey data suggested that local organization leaders also did not shift in their perceptions of resident's power within the broader community or resident's capacity to influence local decisions. In fact, local organizations that were the most engaged with involving residents in local decision-making processes, as WORK was, actually decreased in their perceptions of residents' power within the local community. This was perhaps due to the inability of these systems to adequately support the exchanges between residents and local power brokers, even though expanded opportunities (social boundaries) for these exchanges had been provided. A key lesson from this case is the importance of attending to the capacity needs of all members, both marginalized and privileged alike, in order to promote favorable exchanges within collaborative decision-making settings.

Case 3: Genuine Power within a Disability Coalition

Methods

The setting for the third case study is a community coalition comprised of people with disabilities, family members of people with disabilities, and disability service delivery professionals in a suburban community outside a large city in the Midwest of the United States. Data were collected through three methods for this case. First, in-depth participant observations were made of 8 coalition meetings and 2 coalition events per year for 4 years (total of 32 meetings and 8 events) by the second author. Second, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 members of the coalition in year four. The interviews lasted approximately 90 min and contained questions about the participants' perceptions of group dynamics, the extent to which their voice was valued and attended to within the group, and factors influencing participant power. Third, archival data review was conducted on the coalition's meeting minutes, local media articles, and the coalition's annual reports.

Description of Setting

The coalition was formed to improve the local disability service system, particularly service coordination and the

relationship between professionals, parents, and people with disabilities. Prior to the formation of the coalition, parents distrusted service delivery professionals, people with disabilities felt disempowered by how local services were structured, and service organizations were well known for their lack of coordination. In addition to these objectives, the coalition also aimed to become a venue for promoting voice and power for participating people with disabilities. The coalition operated for 5 years; interviews with stakeholders at year four and an assessment of the documented successes achieved by the coalition suggested that the coalition was quite successful at accomplishing its goals and at promoting authentic participation for participating people with disabilities.

Setting's Ability to Foster Exchanges and Expand Boundaries

Prior to the disability coalition's development, people with disabilities had no opportunities to influence decisions made in the community or the disability service delivery system; parents were also placed in a "service recipient" role by local organizations and had little opportunity to inform decisions influencing service delivery processes. In response, the coalition was intentionally designed to challenge and expand the existing social boundaries within the community and disability service delivery system. Towards that end, coalition founders developed several structural and operational procedures designed to promote the legitimacy of the exchanges with people with disabilities in this coalition. For example, to reduce tokenism or silencing of any one group, the coalition membership was required to include equal numbers of parents, persons with disabilities, and providers. In addition, particular effort was taken to demonstrate the legitimacy of including those most often silenced in the disability community; only individuals with cognitive or severe emotional disabilities were included in the coalition. Coalition founders also structured roles and responsibilities to provide legitimized venues for people with disabilities to have increased influence and voice. For example, coalition policies mandated that a person with a disability always serve in one of the coalition co-chair leadership positions and that a person with a disability be included as a keynote speaker in all public events.

To ensure these legitimized opportunities enhanced the power of people with disabilities, coalition founders intentionally linked these opportunities with other efforts designed to promote the successful exchange of resources across setting members. For example, all individuals selected for leadership or public speaking opportunities participated in capacity-building sessions designed to enhance their abilities to perform these roles successfully. In addition, active support was provided to all people with

disabilities prior to, during, and after each meeting to assist them in the identification and activation of resources they had available for exchange in the coalition setting. Potential resources included, but were not limited to: ideas, opinions, or information they had to offer related to each agenda item; skills to support coalition activities; and linkages to other people with disabilities to expand the coalition's constituency base. Coalition discussions were intentionally designed to identify the available resources across all members during each agenda item and to explicitly tap into the resources available from people with disabilities. It is important to note that this process revealed several important and useful resources that would have gone unnoticed. For example, one agenda item was the development of a graphic that could become the coalition's logo. Although one of the coalition's founders had offered to pay a local marketing firm to create this product, the norm of explicitly seeking untapped resources caused the group to first seek the resource amongst their membership. During the group discussion, one individual with disabilities shared that he had always dreamed of becoming a graphic artist and often drew at home; this person drew the adopted logo.

Perhaps most importantly, coalition founders consistently sought to sustain the expanded boundaries of their members with disabilities by facilitating leadership opportunities outside of the group. Founders frequently nominated members with disabilities for board membership roles in other organizations, highlighted their accomplishments in local media outlets, and recognized their contributions at local, state, and even national levels. By year four, all of the people with disabilities had become connected to at least one other leadership role within the community.

Setting Outcomes

An evaluation of the coalition 4 years after its inception concluded that this effort significantly expanded the power of members with disabilities. People with disabilities were included in more decision-making roles both within and outside the coalition and reported feeling more empowered and powerful; other coalition members also sought and used multiple untapped resources provided by these participants. Even when the coalition ended at year 5, many networks that were developed within the coalitions were sustained. For example, coalition service provider members offered additional decision-making roles (exchanges) within their organization (e.g., advisory boards, board of directors) to people with disabilities and family members; one family member that ran a state-wide parent advocacy organization created an advisory group including several people with disabilities and providers from the coalition; and several people with disabilities were offered paid

Table 2 Description of critical processes and outcomes within the case studies

Case	Social exchanges processes	Social boundaries processes	Outcomes
Case 1: Resident advisory board	Capacity building for residents to engage in exchanges, no capacity building for power brokers	Discourse to expand resident social boundaries supported by residents, denied by power brokers	Resident participation restricted due to power brokers' eventual de-valuing of exchanges and fixed social boundaries
Case 2: Nonprofit board of directors	No capacity building for any stakeholders to engage in exchanges	Discourse to expand resident social boundaries supported and encouraged by all stakeholders	Resident participation restricted due to stakeholders' lack of capacity to exchange, despite expanded social boundaries
Case 3: Disability coalition	Capacity building for all members to engage in exchanges	Discourse to expand social boundaries for members with disabilities supported and encouraged by all stakeholders	The participation of members with disabilities enhanced due to increased exchanges and expanded social boundaries

positions to consult (exchange) with other groups on how to promote the empowerment of the disability community. Overall, the successes of this coalition highlight the value of efforts aimed at intentionally seeking the exchange of untapped and undervalued resources while simultaneously expanding social boundaries. Ongoing critical discourse during coalition meetings created the normative expectations for all group members to value each other, seek unused resources across the group, and identify venues both within and outside the group to expand power opportunities. Critical to the success of these strategies was the provision of capacity-building supports so individuals—when provided with opportunities to exchange resources or join another venue—could effectively offer their skills and insights in ways that reinforced their inclusion and enhanced power position (Table 2).

Conclusion

The Exchange Boundary Framework introduced in this paper presents a promising approach for understanding power and authentic participation within collaborative decision-making settings and begins to address current gaps in the theorizing around power within the community psychology literature. The two critical processes suggested in the framework can serve as a useful guide for promoting authentic participation within these settings. For example, as case one and two illustrate, settings that fail to simultaneously promote opportunities and capacity for stakeholders to engage in exchanges *and* to create critical discourse to expand social boundaries can potentially produce disempowering outcomes by creating conditions of cooptation and tokenism. In contrast, settings that engage processes that simultaneously promote resource exchanges while continually supporting discourse to expand social boundaries can lead to more empowering outcomes, as illustrated in case three.

Overall, the case studies highlight two important lessons that have implications for the creation of collaborative decision-making settings aiming to expand authentic participation within communities. First, the three cases illustrate the critical role of building stakeholder capacity to exchange resources and expand boundaries. Stakeholders who have never engaged in collaborative decision-making exchanges must be supported in identifying their strengths and assets, articulating and activating these resources, and negotiating the exchange of their resources in the setting. Likewise, all members of the setting—especially those from dominant groups—must be able to understand, value, and incorporate the full range of diverse stakeholder assets to achieve the setting's goals. In addition, settings members must have the capacity to: engage in critical discourse to identify current social boundaries; value the expansion of those boundaries for all stakeholders by recognizing the change as necessary, appropriate, feasible, and beneficial to themselves, the setting, or the community (Holt et al. 2007); and to address the systemic conditions maintaining those boundaries such as access to resources, policies, practices, norms, and relationships (Foster-Fishman and Watson 2011). Case one and two show the disempowering consequences of failing to address stakeholder capacity prior to engaging in a collaborative decision-making setting, while case three illustrates the empowering outcomes related to intentionally building this capacity.

Second, the case studies emphasize that efforts to promote power must be analyzed and adapted over time. Power is context specific (Prilleltensky 2008) and alternative settings such as collaborative decision-making bodies are particularly vulnerable to contextual shifts (Cherniss and Deegan 2000). Thus, opportunities and capacity-building efforts to promote exchanges and expand boundaries must be continually adapted to evolving conditions affecting the setting over time (Crossan et al. 2005; Foster-Fishman and Watson 2011). This situation presented itself as the power brokers' in case one struggled to adapt their

valuing of resident resources and acceptance of expanded resident roles after their granting cycle ended. It is inevitable, however, that existing community decision-making settings will eventually disband and new settings will form. In response to this natural cycling, future research should explore processes through which disadvantaged stakeholders can successfully transfer empowering resource dependencies and expanded social boundaries to new settings. Case three provided examples of processes used to facilitate this transfer, including expanding members' social networks outside the setting and promoting new opportunities where traditionally disenfranchised stakeholders' could legitimately leverage resources for influence and power.

There are several limitations to the current study. First, the inclusion of only three cases in the analysis makes broad generalization of these findings to other settings difficult. Second, the inductive and iterative analysis process within case study methodology limits the extent to which the reliability or validity of findings can be determined. Finally, despite systematic review of the evidence, the authors' experiences and theoretical biases may have influenced which aspects of the cases were emphasized within the analyses. These limitations could be addressed through future research by independent researchers in new settings. Additional future research could explore whether critical processes within the framework are moderated by factors such as the age of stakeholders, degree of power differences within the setting, and goals of the collaborative. Continued exploration of the Exchange Boundary Framework will help to provide new directions for promoting more equitable and authentic participation by all stakeholders within community-based collaborative settings.

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