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CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH POWER: RESIDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF
EMPOWERMENT ON A RESIDENT ADVISORY BOARD

By

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ABSTRACT

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH POWER: RESIDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF EMPOWERMENT ON A RESIDENT ADVISORY BOARD

By

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Theoretical frameworks are useful for examining empowering processes and outcomes within collaborative settings, particularly settings such as resident advisory boards which often involve complicated power dynamics occurring between members. The current study utilized three theoretical frameworks to understand empowerment within a resident advisory board that engaged disenfranchised residents and community power brokers. Qualitative interviews were conducted with the resident participants of the board. Analyses found that while the residents experienced many shifts to their capacity through participating in the empowering processes on the board, the link between this capacity and empowerment in the setting was moderated by a series of socially constructed boundaries initiated by the power brokers. These boundaries were maintained by the power brokers' lack of dependency on the residents' resources in the setting. In contrast, the residents' experience on the board did facilitate their empowerment in the community context. Implications for theory and practice are discussed as well as directions for future research.

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Literature Review

The following literature review introduces the concept of empowerment as it applies to residents participating in a resident advisory board. The theory of empowerment involves a combination of both processes and outcomes and is defined in a variety of ways throughout the literature. The following review will describe the theory of empowerment and illustrate its application within one popular context for engaging disenfranchised groups within community decision-making processes – a resident advisory board. Resident advisory boards are used to solicit community members' input and advice regarding a governing body's decision-making process and often involve stakeholders who vary in their levels of power and resources (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Laurian, 2007). There is evidence from empowerment research that because of this diverse membership, resident advisory boards often encounter challenges to promoting resident empowerment due to the complicated power dynamics occurring between different members in the setting.

To better understand the facilitating and constraining factors of empowerment within these settings, the current study utilized three separate theoretical frameworks to explore the empowering processes and outcomes experienced by residents participating in a resident advisory board. The first framework offers a description of empowering processes that could develop the residents' capacity in the resident advisory board setting, including their knowledge, skills, problem-solving actions, and consciousness (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). The other two frameworks, based on the theories of social boundaries (Hayward, 1998) and resource dependencies (Emerson, 1972), provide models for understanding potential moderating conditions to residents' empowerment in a resident

advisory board.

The following review will begin by introducing the history of resident advisory boards, and then describe empowerment theory and the three theoretical frameworks in order to provide a foundation for the four research questions that guided the study. The research questions examined in this study include: 1) To what extent do residents experience shifts in knowledge, action, and consciousness through participation in a RAB?; 2) What about the RAB fostered or inhibited these shifts; 3) To what extent does the RAB experience shift social boundaries or resource dependencies moderating residents' empowerment?; and 4) To what extent did the RAB experience foster empowered outcomes for residents?

History and Current State of Resident Advisory Boards

Appeals for greater citizen participation within efforts to improve disenfranchised people's lives have been made for decades by theorists and revolutionaries alike, from Engel's' work with the working class in England to Friere's efforts with Brazilian peasants. Resident advisory boards (RABs) are a recent example of this movement. RAB structures first started appearing in the 1980's partly in response to federal government mandates pushing for the "maximum feasible participation" of citizens in the local governance processes (Crosby, Kelly, Schaefer, 1986). RABs typically involve a diverse group of stakeholders from the community who meet to advise governing or decision-making bodies such as government agencies or research teams (Crosby et al., 1986; Cox, Rouff, Svendsen, Markowitz, Abrams, & Terry Beirn Community Programs, 1998; Mercurio, 1979). The average RAB usually engages about 15 stakeholders and meets over the course of many months, or even years (Laurian, 2007). The general purpose of a

RAB is to provide a setting where governing bodies can solicit information and feedback from community members regarding their efforts in the community (Crosby et al., 1986). Over the years RABs have been used in programs designed to address a diverse array of public issues including policing, prison correction, environmental justice, transportation, health planning, education administration, and government defense (Cox et al., 1998; McShane & Krause, 1995; Ziegenfuss, 2000; Laurian, 2007). These boards have also come to play an increasing role within comprehensive community initiatives funded by agencies such as the CDC, the National Institute of Environmental Health, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Sullivan, Kone, Senturia, Chrisman, Ciske, & Krieger, 2001). The current study will focus on an RAB within a comprehensive community initiative involving residents living in low-income neighborhoods.

Community members can engage in a variety of advising roles while serving on a RAB. Ingram (1996) found that typical resident roles within RAB structures include assisting and advising the governing body in creating their mission statements, developing their programming, hiring staff, evaluating a program's progress, maintaining accountability, and improving public relations. The literature gives examples where RABs have: advised researchers on how to design and implement studies that are ethical, culturally appropriate, and responsive to the community's needs (Strauss, Sengupta, Quinn, Goeppinger, Spaulding, Kegeles, & Millett, 2001); recommended effective policies for promoting institutional reform within education systems (Mercurio, 1979); helped a governing body gain a better social and political understanding of the community and served as liaisons for them in the community (Saunders, Greaney, Lees, & Clark, 2003); and highlighted potential challenges confronting local efforts to improve

public health (Laurian, 2007). The current study examined a RAB where residents advised a governing body on how to align their funding and community-change efforts with the actual needs of the community (Droege, Mahaffey, McNall, Deacon, Morales, & Foster-Fishman, 2007).

Because of the opportunities for active participation afforded by RABs, many stakeholders in the community and at the foundation and federal levels have come to believe that these settings can not only improve governing bodies' effectiveness, but can also foster empowerment for residents (Lasker & Weiss, 2003; Ziegenfuss, 2000). In response to this belief, millions of dollars have been invested in forming structures to solicit the advice and participation of residents in support of community initiatives (Lasker & Weiss, 2003; Mitchell & Shortell, 2000; Laurian, 2007). In fact, many funding agencies mandate that organizations or programs create RAB-like structures in order to gain funding for their work (Butterfoss, Wandersman, & Goodman, 2001), and they are quickly becoming a staple in community change initiatives (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Siebold, & Deacon, 2004). Yet despite the political momentum behind these boards and the corresponding expectations for resident empowerment, little research has examined if these structures actively promote resident empowerment and, more importantly, how residents themselves perceive empowerment in the RAB context. This oversight echoes the tendency for power brokers (including researchers) to make assumptions about the efficacy of certain projects without always consulting the recipients of those efforts. Taking into account the popularity of RABs, it seems only prudent to examine the viability of empowering processes and outcomes within these settings from the residents' perspective in order to ensure that boards are equipped to reach their empowering

potential.

It is important to highlight that RABs often involve stakeholders who vary in their levels of power and influence in the community. As a result, many of these boards include both participants from populations who have historically been excluded from access to power and resources within their community (i.e., low-income residents) and various types of power brokers (i.e., researchers, organizational leaders, elected officials, or funders; Sullivan et al., 2001; Israel et al., 1998). For example, the current study examined a RAB that involved residents from a low-income community and power brokers from a community funding organization. The opportunity for these different stakeholders to collaborate is no trivial matter. For some communities, RABs provide the first chance for disenfranchised residents to sit at the same table with power brokers and influence decisions being made about their community (Droege et al., 2007).

The literature suggests that resident empowerment can be more complex in settings like an RAB that involve participants with different levels of power and influence in the community (Israel et al., 1998). For example, although the initial intent of an RAB may have been to represent the voice of the community and to empower residents, many settings encounter challenges in creating conditions where collaboration between residents and power brokers can occur (Foster-Fishman et al., 2004; Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Jordan, Bogat, & Smith, 2001; Sullivan et al., 2001). As a result, many RABs around the country have disbanded due to internal dysfunction (Foster-Fishman et al., 2004). Despite these findings, there are few theoretical frameworks within the literature that have been suggested for understanding why empowerment does or does not occur within these settings. This study attempted to contribute to both research and

practice by utilizing several theories to help reveal the factors underlying whether or not a RAB setting was able to foster empowerment for residents. The next sections will introduce the theory of empowerment as it relates to a resident advisory board, and then define the theoretical frameworks that will be used to model empowerment within the study.

Resident Empowerment in the RAB Setting

There are many definitions of the term empowerment in the literature. The following is one definition that is useful for understanding empowerment in the RAB setting:

> *Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989)*

As seen in the above definition, the theory of empowerment includes the constructs of empowered outcomes and empowering processes. One key assumption within the theory of empowerment is that the processes and outcomes of empowerment express themselves in ways that are relative to who is being empowered, in what setting, and at what point in time (Zimmerman, 1995; Foster-Fishman, Salem, Chibnall, Legler, & Yapchai, 1998). For example, empowering processes and outcomes would look different for a low-income resident who had joined a resident advisory board for the first time than a power broker who had managed a large organization for 20 years. Taking these assumptions into account, the following sections will first describe how empowered outcomes and empowering processes have been defined in the literature, and then introduce three theoretical frameworks for understanding how these constructs could apply to a residents' experience in a RAB.

Empowered Outcomes

Previous research has suggested that empowered outcomes can include conditions

such as perceived personal efficacy (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988), perceived

collective efficacy (Wandersman & Florin, 2000), sense of control (Zimmerman, 2000),

critical awareness of the socio-political environment (Zimmerman, 2000), knowledge and

skills (Mcmillan, Florin, Stevenson, Kerman, Mitchell, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995), and

participation in behaviors aimed at achieving goals (Zimmerman, 1995). All of the

outcomes listed above are classified within the concept of psychological empowerment.

In contrast, Riger (1993) argued that the most essential empowerment outcomes are those

that have the potential of bringing people actual gains in resources and power. She

criticized definitions of empowered outcomes that focus primarily on the internal

psychological "sense" of empowerment because they often ignore people's real lack of

power in their sociopolitical environment. Riger further stated that without these tangible

gains in power, such as control over the resources and decisions affecting one's life,

psychological empowerment serves simply as an illusion to actual empowerment. Oakley

(2001) also saw the improvement of people's actual life conditions as central to

empowerment, particularly within community initiatives:

> *Many development agencies see empowerment only in terms of the "self*
> *contained world of projects," yet in doing so they underestimate or ignore much*
> *deeper power structures which have a much greater bearing on people's lives.*

In a similar vein, researchers adopting a critical theory standpoint argue that the

definition of any empowered outcome must incorporate the issues of power and injustice

because empowerment cannot be isolated from the injustice and oppression present in all

societal structures (Patton, 2002). This latter argument is especially relevant to

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empowering outcomes within the RAB context because research has shown that power and resources are often unequally distributed across members in these settings, just as power and resources are typically unequally distributed across broader social structures in society (Israel et al., 1998).

The current study will define an empowered outcome as a person's increased influence over community decisions or conditions affecting his or her life (see Table 1). Unlike psychological empowerment that classifies a person's *attempts* to gain influence as an empowered outcome, empowered outcomes within the current study refer specifically to a person's realized state of influence in the community. For example, an empowered outcome could include an increased influence over the decisions guiding a local change effort aimed at addressing the community's needs, or a greater influence over the community's access to services, resources, or opportunities. This empowered outcome satisfies the assumptions within empowerment theory because the particular decisions or conditions being targeted for influence can vary across people, community contexts, and points in time. The next section will summarize the literature on processes that could facilitate empowered outcomes.

Empowering Processes

The literature gives many examples of processes that could facilitate empowered outcomes for individuals. Gutiérrez (1995) suggested that empowering processes involve "increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations." On a an individual level, Zimmerman (1995, 2000) suggested that empowering processes give people opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of their socio-political environment,

participate in decision-making or problem solving in their community, develop skills, and expand social networks (Zimmerman, 1995). Other research has also highlighted the importance of developing one's critical consciousness to the process of becoming empowered. For example, Faulk-Rafael (2001) found that the empowering processes for patients receiving care in a hospital involved becoming progressively more aware of: their personal strengths and weaknesses; their right to have control over the decisions impacting their lives; and the socio-political factors affecting their health and treatment. Similarly, Gutiérrez (1995) found that a group of Latino youth became more willing to engage in social action as they participated in an empowering process that shifted their critical consciousness of themselves and their environment. Like empowered outcomes, empowering processes can take on different forms depending on who is becoming empowered, in what setting, and at what time (Foster-Fishman et al., 1998).

Empowering processes often occur through participating with others in community settings that allow participants to become more involved in community affairs (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Gutiérrez, 1995; Kieffer, 1984; Zimmerman, 2000). For example, participating in a community organizing effort can serve as an empowering process by allowing people to build relationships with others and serve in multiple roles within the effort (Speer, Hughey, Gensheimer, & Adams-Leavitt, 1995). Participating in a participatory action research project has been shown to engender empowering processes by providing opportunities for people to collectively address problems in their environment while learning skills, developing their critical consciousness, and gaining mutual support systems (Zimmerman, 1995). Similarly, participating in an advisory board setting such as a RAB can be empowering by giving people opportunities to take

part in community decision-making processes and to attain skills, knowledge, competence, and efficacy (Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich, & Chavis, 1990). The current study will explore whether the participatory setting of the RAB provided empowering processes for resident participants.

Some research has also investigated the characteristics within participatory settings that facilitate empowering outcomes for participants. For example, Maton and Salem (1995) examined three group settings and found four common conditions that promote empowering processes. First, empowering processes are more likely to occur when a setting's culture, norms, and belief system encourages participants to set goals for personal growth, convinces them of their ability to achieve their goals within the group, and allows them to see themselves as part of a larger cause. Second, settings are better able to facilitate empowering processes when they provide multiple roles for all participants that allow them to work towards their goals and build skills and competencies. Third, settings are empowering when they develop peer-based social support systems that can help members deal with stress and achieve their goals. Finally, empowering processes are better facilitated by settings that offer shared leadership opportunities that provide further support and empowerment for members. Maton and Salem's (1995) study did not include a RAB context and there has been limited research exploring the empowering characteristics pertaining to these types of settings. In response, the current study will examine the setting characteristics that facilitated or inhibited empowering process for residents in a RAB.

Some researchers have also suggested that empowering processes occur according to developmental principles. For example, Keiffer (1984) examined the processes through

which activists participating in community settings became empowered and concluded that empowering processes follow a developmental course and eventually result in what he called "participatory competence." Participatory competence refers to the skills (i.e., organizing skills, leadership skills), self-efficacy, socio-political awareness, and abilities one needs to engage in "proactive community mobilization and leadership." Kieffer found that the empowering processes for developing participatory competence occurred over time and through iterative cycles of reflection and community engagement. Kaminski, Kaufman, Graubarth, and Robins (2000) conducted a similar study and also found that empowering processes facilitated empowered outcomes for union activists through several developmental cycles.

There is evidence in the literature that many of the empowering processes described above could foster the empowered outcome of increased influence over community decisions and conditions. For example, process for developing knowledge, skills, and consciousness have been shown to increase a person's capacity to influence the social agenda and improve the community (Saegert, 2004; Williams, Shinn, Nishishiba, & Morgan, 2002). Other empirical and theoretical research has also made the link between these empowering/capacity-building processes and a person's ability to influence relevant decisions and circumstances in his or her environment (Robbins, 2002; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). However, despite these findings there is also evidence in the literature suggesting that a person's capacity may be a necessary but not sufficient condition to ensure the empowered outcome of increased influence over community decisions and conditions. For example, Rich, Edelstein, Hallman, & Wandersman (1995) examined the attempts by a group of residents to influence city

officials' decisions regarding environmental clean-up efforts in their community. This study found that even though the residents had developed the capacity (i.e., knowledge, communication skills, competence) to participate in the officials' decision-making processes, and there were settings in place that provided the residents with opportunities to give their input, the residents did not reach their empowerment outcomes because they were denied access to legitimate opportunities to influence the officials' final decisions. The authors defined a person's ability to "reach decisions that solve problems or produce desired outcomes" as their "substantive empowerment" and emphasized that this type of empowerment requires power brokers to collaborate with residents in their decision-making processes (Rich et al., 1995). While the Rich et al. (1995) study acknowledged that there were certain boundaries within the setting that moderated the residents' empowerment, it did not provide a theoretical framework for understanding how these boundaries operate within collaborative processes.

Similarly, Gruber and Trickett (1987) analyzed a school-based governance board involving parents, students, and teachers and found that the teachers (representing the power brokers in this setting) were also able to maintain boundaries around the students and parents' ability to influence decisions and conditions related to the school. For example, like most power brokers in RAB settings, the teachers controlled the role of carrying out all decisions made by the group. This not only limited the students and parents' ability to engage in efforts to influence the condition of the school, but also gave the teachers leverage to prevent them from influencing group decisions. For example, if the teachers perceived that one of the group's decisions about the school was not in their best interest, they simply refused to carry it out and in doing so left the students and

parents dependent on the teachers for influence over the school. Sullivan et al. (2001) examined a similar setting where a group of researchers (i.e., power brokers) had engaged a group of local residents to advise them about their community-based research project. The residents recounted that although they were knowledgeable about the community and could give the researchers useful advice, they were unable to have an influence over the researchers' decisions because there were boundaries set up within the setting that prevented the residents from sharing decision-making power with the researchers. Both of these studies highlight how empowerment can be moderated by certain boundaries and dependencies within a setting. Yet like the Rich et al. (1995) study, they did not provide a theoretical framework for understanding these moderating factors.

In light of these examples, it appears that the degree to which empowering processes can facilitate empowered outcomes for members of an advisory board is moderated by the various constraints on members' roles and opportunities within the setting. Thus, while participants may have the necessary capacity to influence community decisions and conditions, settings must provide the conditions that allow participants the ability to actually put that capacity to use in order for them to become empowered (Robbins, 2002). This is no trivial matter because in most RABs residents are in subordinate positions to power brokers and have many limitations placed on their actions or influence in the setting (Sullivan et al., 2001; Israel et al., 1998). Therefore, in order for residents to become empowered through participating on a RAB, two separate processes would need to occur: 1) the residents would need to develop the necessary capacity to be able to influence community decisions and conditions; and 2) any constraints to the residents' empowerment within the setting would need to be eliminated.

The current study will examine whether both of these processes occurred within the RAB setting to enable resident empowerment.

Due to the potential complexity surrounding the phenomenon of resident empowerment within a RAB, the current study utilized three separate theoretical frameworks to examine the various processes occurring within the setting (see Figure 1). The first theory was drawn from the Action Research field and provides a model for understanding capacity-building processes within the RAB setting (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). The other two theories were drawn from the fields of Political Science (Hayward, 1998) and Sociology (Emerson, 1972) and offer models for investigating moderating factors within the setting that affected the residents' ability to use their capacity to become empowered. The following sections will describe each of these three theories in detail and relate them to the RAB setting.

Theoretical Frameworks for Resident Empowerment within the RAB Setting

The current study used Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) theoretical framework of empowerment to examine the empowering processes within the RAB. As will be described below, this model of empowerment involves iterative capacity-building cycles and is compatible with the experience of participating in a RAB setting. The current study also used two complementary theories of power to explore moderating factors to residents' empowerment on the RAB. While these theories conceptualize power quite differently, one being rooted in social constructions and the other in resources, together they form a more complete picture of the necessary conditions for empowerment than either theory in isolation. The first theory comes from Hayward (1998) and introduces the notion that an individual's empowerment is determined by socially constructed

boundaries that define their ability to influence decisions and conditions affecting their life. The second theory, social exchange theory, was introduced by Emerson (1972) and presents the idea that an individual's empowerment is determined by resource dependencies that define one's ability to influence community conditions and decisions. The following sections will begin with a description of Gaventa and Cornwall's theoretical framework for empowering processes, followed by explanations of the two theories for modeling the moderating factors to resident empowerment in the RAB.

Gaventa and Cornwall's Model of Empowering Processes

Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) suggest a model of empowerment that is based on iterative processes of knowledge production, problem-solving actions, and consciousness-raising that occur during participation in a setting. According to the literature, these three processes could affect a person's ability to influence community decisions and conditions by building his or her capacity to become "self-consciously directed in shaping [their] future" (Saegart, 2004; Williams et al., 2002). The model states that as participants generate knowledge about the community in a setting they become more capable of taking actions to address problems affecting their lives. The process of carrying out these problem-solving actions allows participants to gain more knowledge about their situation and this feeds back into their capacity to act. Through reflection on the knowledge and action cycles, participants gain a more critical understanding of why oppression exists in their lives; this in turn allows them to generate more "authentic" knowledge and to carry out more effective actions aimed at improving the community. As can be seen in this description, one unique feature of the model is that the three processes not only build participants' capacity to affect change in their

community, but they also build off of one another creating a form of praxis (Gaventa &

Cornwall, 2001). It is important to note that according to the model, empowerment will

only occur through participation if the setting can create opportunities for all three

processes.

It is possible that the RAB setting could promote all three of the participatory

processes within Gaventa and Cornwall's model. For example, the setting could promote

knowledge processes by providing opportunities for residents to participate in discussions

on the board. These discussions could relate to topics such as the power brokers'

programming, other residents' lived experiences, or conditions within the community.

Residents could also participate in problem-solving actions by helping the power brokers'

make decisions about their efforts in the community. Because most RABs meet over

extended periods of time, the residents would likely have the opportunity to engage in

multiple cycles of empowering processes during their participation; this prolonged

engagement could encourage the residents to reflect on the knowledge and problem-

solving actions generated within the setting and gain a more critical awareness of their

role in the community. The next sections will further describe these three processes

within an RAB context and illustrate how they could empower residents by building their

capacity to influence community decisions and conditions that affect their lives.

Knowledge generating process. The knowledge process within Gaventa and

Cornwall's (2001) model involves democratically creating and using knowledge in a

group setting and could facilitate empowered outcomes in several ways. First, the process

of creating knowledge could be an empowering process because it gives all participants

the opportunity to share their "local realities" and converts typically unrepresented

perspectives into authentic knowledge in the setting (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). This knowledge process could facilitate empowered outcomes by helping participants guide the group's decision-making process as well as informing the problem-solving efforts of individual participants. Processes that allow all members to democratically share their knowledge are also important because they recognize the expertise of all contributors no matter their degree of social status (Nelson & Wright, 1995). By reflecting on the fact that "knowledge" in any setting depends on who is constructing it, participants could realize that each group member has an equally legitimate role in contributing to knowledge and this could bolster their willingness to share in the group (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). This last example demonstrates a form of praxis between the knowledge and consciousness processes in the model. Second, the process of using the knowledge generated through this process could also be empowering by building participants' skills. For example, using knowledge to make decisions in the group could help participants develop skills related to affecting the political process, managing resources, and making better decisions affecting their lives (Gutiérrez & Ortega, 1991; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Through generating and using knowledge through the processes described above, members could increase their capacity to influence community decisions and conditions.

Residents could participate in similar knowledge processes within the RAB setting. For example, residents could generate knowledge with other members of the RAB by talking about the impact of the power brokers' efforts in the community or discussing ideas for future community change efforts. Generating knowledge about the community through this process could facilitate empowered outcomes for residents in

two ways. For example, participating in this process could improve residents' knowledge of the community's needs and in turn give them more credible things to say when trying to influence decisions being made about the community. This knowledge could also inform the residents' own personal actions aimed at improving the conditions of their community, for example by helping them to target appropriate needs in the community. This latter affect would be especially likely if the knowledge produced in the RAB setting was purposeful, "not knowledge for knowledge sake but knowledge which will lead to improvement" in the community (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Second, residents could learn skills through using knowledge in the RAB setting that could also facilitate empowered outcomes. For example, using knowledge in group discussions to advise the power brokers' decisions could help residents develop communication and decision-making skills that could improve their capacity to effectively influence decisions about the community. Similarly, developing problem-solving skills through helping the RAB plan community change initiatives could improve the residents' own efforts to creatively address issues confronting the community. The current study will explore whether the RAB setting facilitated any knowledge processes for resident participants (see Table 1).

Problem-solving process. The problem-solving process within Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) model occurs when participants take actions either collectively or independently to address relevant issues affecting their lives. This process could facilitate empowered outcomes for participants in several ways. For example, learning knowledge about the community in a participatory setting could motivate participants to engage in efforts to address problems affecting their lives. These problem-solving efforts could lead to empowerment by actually increasing participants' influence over the community's

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conditions. Additionally, by carrying out these problem-solving actions over time, participants could gain additional skills and knowledge as they interact with the environment (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Not only could these skills and knowledge further enhance the participants' ability to influence community decisions as described in the previous section, but it could also improve their capacity to engage in future efforts in a cycle of praxis. As participants reflect on the problem-solving process through the consciousness-raising process they could also develop knowledge about the types of action that are effective for solving community problems; this in turn could build their capacity to influence community conditions by making their actions more effective and sophisticated over time (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001).

Like the knowledge process described above, residents could participate in problem-solving processes on the RAB that could lead to empowering outcomes. For example, according to the literature it is typical for residents participating in advisory boards to give advice to power brokers about their community programs or to help evaluate the initiative's efforts (Ingram, 1996). Engaging in these efforts could facilitate residents' empowerment by providing them with opportunities to influence decisions being made by the power brokers that affect the community and consequently their lives. Although less typical, it is also possible that the RAB setting could facilitate other types of problem solving actions for residents aimed at affecting community conditions, such as providing opportunities for engaging in community projects. The current study will explore whether residents engaged in any problem-solving processes while participating in the RAB (see Table 1).

Consciousness-raising process. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) argued that the

consciousness-raising process is the cornerstone of their model of empowerment and is embedded in the two processes of knowledge and action. Like the knowledge and action processes, consciousness-raising could also affect empowered outcomes. For example, as members reflect on everyone's life experiences in the group they could become more aware of "the nature and root causes of social problems" in their sociopolitical environment and begin to redefine their own reality (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Hall, 1981). This higher awareness could allow participants to critically evaluate potential community change strategies and in turn increase their capacity to influence decisions about future directions for the community. This reflection could also affect participants' capacity to influence community conditions by helping them to identify ways to personally engage in change efforts that address social problems and to make this engagement a priority in their lives (Friere, 1970; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001; Paulhus, 1983; Speer & Hughey, 1995). One of the strengths of the consciousness-raising process is its ability to bring the other processes together in praxis. For example, the consciousness-raising process can lead to more critical and authentic forms of knowledge and in turn can facilitate more effective actions; as participants delve deeper into generating knowledge about their reality and taking actions to improve their lives, they are more likely to experience further shifts to their consciousness. Over time, the interaction between these three processes can creates a cycle of praxis for participants.

A RAB setting could potentially facilitate a consciousness-raising process for residents that could provide opportunities to reflect on the knowledge and action processes within the setting and increase their empowerment. For example, if residents were involved in a RAB over the course of several years they could have the opportunity

to observe multiple cycles of knowledge and action processes on the board. As a result of these observations, residents could gain a new understanding of the issues in their community and shift their "interests and priorities" to engage in action cycles to improve those issues (thus increasing their capacity to influence community conditions; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). This new understanding could improve the quality of the residents' knowledge, whereby increasing their capacity to influence community decisions, and motivate them to seek out additional opportunities to have an influence in their community. The current study explored whether the RAB facilitated consciousness-raising processes for residents participating on the board (see Table 1).

In conclusion, Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) theory suggests that if RABs could create opportunities for knowledge, action, and consciousness-raising processes, then these settings would be more likely to build residents' capacity for empowered outcomes. The current study examined whether Gaventa and Cornwall's model served as a useful framework for examining the empowering processes on the RAB (see Figure 1). The next sections will introduce two theoretical frameworks that describe processes that could potentially moderate whether the empowering processes within Gaventa and Cornwall's model lead to the empowered outcomes of increased control over community decisions and conditions.

Hayward's Theory of Social Boundaries

The first theory to provide a framework for understanding moderating factors to resident empowerment in the RAB setting comes from Hayward's (1998) work within the field of Political Science. The following sections will describe Hayward's theory of social boundaries, illustrate how this framework could help to understand the moderating

factors to resident empowerment within a RAB, and finally describe how participating in the RAB could serve as a process for shifting the residents' social boundaries.

Social boundaries. Hayward (1998) argued that individuals become empowered when their "fields of social possibility" are expanded, or in other words when they gain more freedom and capacity to act. In the RAB context, this could apply to a resident's capacity to take actions to influence community decisions or conditions. According to Hayward, one's ability to act is determined by a series of socially constructed "boundaries" or limits that define what actions are "normal" or "possible" for any given individual in society. These boundaries can include things like laws, rules, norms, customs, standards, policies, social practices, institutions, or personal identities (Hayward, 1998). Some social boundaries can directly affect a person's capacity to act, such as discriminating policies that discourage certain groups of people from participating in leadership roles. Social boundaries can also affect a person's capacity to act more indirectly by systematically hindering (or supporting) them in developing the skills, beliefs, desires, or priorities necessary to carry out specific forms of action (Hayward, 1998). For example, it would be difficult for a person to learn the skills and confidence necessary to carry out leadership roles if their social boundaries had systematically excluded them from having access to opportunities for leadership development (i.e., cultural norms that encourage women to avoid pursing leadership positions). On the flip side, a person would have more freedom to carry out leadership roles if they had encountered fewer boundaries to developing their leadership capacity (i.e., being raised in a family valuing leadership roles, attending a school with leadership norms and standards). As these examples demonstrate, social boundaries determine the

ability to act for both powerful and powerless people in society (Hayward, 1998).

Social boundaries as a moderating factor to empowerment. As mentioned in previous sections, it is likely that residents could encounter different types of constraints or social boundaries as they participate in a RAB (Israel et al., 1998). For example, there are often policies within RAB settings that put residents in subordinate roles within their collaborative relationships with power brokers, such as policies that arbitrarily assign power brokers to the role of final decision-makers in the setting. (Israel et al., 1998; Nelson, Prilleltensky, & MacGillivary, 2001; Sullivan et al., 2001). Policies such as these could be mandated by outside institutions or simply adopted from previous norms for advisory board functioning (Sullivan et al., 2001). Hayward (1998) would argue that these policies serve as social boundaries that limit the range of possible roles for residents to engage in within the setting, such as the role of using their capacity to influence the power brokers' final decisions regarding the community. By preventing the residents from engaging in this role, the social boundaries could limit the degree to which the residents could have an influence over decisions affecting the community and in doing so serve as a moderating factor to their empowerment. Furthermore, the social boundaries could also indirectly limit the residents' empowerment by affecting the capacity-building cycles within Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) model. For example, by preventing them from engaging in the problem-solving process of helping the power brokers make their final decisions, the social boundaries could eliminate opportunities for the residents to use these processes to develop the capacity (i.e., knowledge, skills, and critical consciousness) necessary for them to increase their influence over community decisions.

In addition to the policies defining residents' roles on a RAB, in many

communities there is also a shared belief that power brokers are more suitable to carry out actions to influence conditions in the community than residents (Speer, Ontkush, Schmitt, Raman, Jackson, Rengert, & Peterson, 2003). This belief could create a social boundary that moderates the residents' capacity to increase their influence over community conditions (i.e. become empowered) in several ways. For example, being exposed to the community's belief system over time could cause residents to internalize the idea that they were incapable of engaging in community action. As a result of these internalized ideas, residents could unconsciously create a social boundary around their identities as community change agents and in doing so limit their capacity to engage in efforts (either in the RAB setting or outside of it) that could increase their influence over community conditions. Other stakeholders in the community (i.e., the power brokers) could also internalize these beliefs and in response create social boundaries in the form of policies or practices that limit opportunities for residents to engage in efforts to influence community conditions. Thus, even if residents could overcome their own internalized social boundaries, their empowerment could still be moderated by the social boundaries upheld by other members of the community. Again, these social boundaries could also indirectly affect the residents' empowerment by eliminating opportunities for them to engage in some of the capacity-building cycles (i.e., problem-solving processes within the community) described in Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) model. The current study identified whether residents encountered any social boundaries that affected their capacity to influence community conditions and decisions (Table 1).

Processes for shifting social boundaries. How might the residents' social boundaries be shifted in a RAB setting to allow for their empowerment? The social

boundaries that limit residents' influence (both within the RAB and in the community) over community decisions and conditions could potentially be expanded over time as group members participate in the setting. For example, as members of the RAB generate authentic knowledge about the community the group could begin to shift their understanding of why power and influence are unevenly distributed across people in society; these shifts in critical awareness could encourage both the residents and power brokers to take efforts to eliminate the social boundaries that limit residents' empowerment (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). In another example, residents could increase their agency to influence community decisions and conditions by learning about the community, developing problem solving skills, and becoming more aware of their own ability to affect change through participating on the RAB (Friere, 1970; Selener, 1997). This desire for action could expand the residents' social boundaries by encouraging them to reject previous representations of themselves as powerless dependents and take on new identities as capable community change agents. In addition, community stakeholders could begin to shift their own beliefs and social boundaries limiting the residents' empowerment as they witness the residents effectively participating in typical RAB roles, such as advising the power brokers or promoting community buy-in for the power brokers' efforts (Ingram, 1996). The current study examined whether any social boundaries limiting the residents' empowerment were shifted as a function of the residents' participation in the RAB setting. The next section will describe another theory for conceptualizing moderating factors to residents' empowerment in a RAB.

Social Exchange Theory of Resource Dependencies

  The second theoretical framework utilized within the current study to help

understand the moderating factors to resident empowerment is based on the concept of resource dependencies as defined within Emerson's (1972) social exchange theory. The following sections will describe the concept of resource dependencies within social exchange theory, illustrate how this framework could help to understand the moderating factors to resident empowerment within a RAB, and finally discuss how participating in the RAB setting could provide processes for shifting resource dependencies.

Resource dependencies. Another way to conceptualize the factors moderating resident empowerment in a RAB is with social exchange theory. Social exchange theory defines empowerment as a person's "range of possibilities" to act in ways that increase their resources and decreases their costs (Emerson, 1972). This definition sounds surprisingly similar to Hayward's definition of social power yet differs in that here a person's ability to act is determined by: 1) the degree to which they are dependent on other people's resources; and 2) the degree to which they can leverage other people's dependencies on their own resources (Emerson, 1972; Molm & Cook, 1995). In the RAB context these resources could consist of tangible elements like money and materials, or intangibles like time, knowledge, relationships, opportunities, and skills. The degree to which a person is dependent on the other is contingent on how valued a person's resources are within their social network, as well as the availability of resources at any given time (Cook & Emerson, 1978; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The exchange relationship between residents and power brokers can serve as an illustration. If the residents controlled resources that were very valuable to the power brokers and only available through the residents, then the residents would have a great deal of leverage in that exchange relationship and would have more freedom to act in ways that benefited

them. If these roles were switched, then the power brokers would have the upper hand in the exchange relationship. The next section will describe how these dependencies could affect residents' empowerment within a RAB.

Resource dependencies as moderating factors to empowerment. As described above, residents are often in subordinate positions to power brokers in RAB settings and in the community, a position that makes them dependent on others for their influence (Israel et al., 1998). This dependency affects the residents' ability to utilize their capacity to influence community decisions and conditions, and thus serves as a moderating factor to their empowerment. In order to reduce this dependency and allow residents to gain a "structural advantage" in their influence over community decisions and conditions (i.e., to become empowered), exchange theory posits that either: 1) the residents would have to find multiple sources to obtain the resources they need to influence community conditions or decisions; or 2) the power brokers' or other relevant stakeholders would have to increase their dependency on the resources controlled by residents, whereby allowing the residents to leverage their resources to gain more influence over community conditions or decisions (Emerson, 1972, Molm, 1997; Molm & Cook, 1995).

For example, residents are often dependent on stakeholders like the power brokers for opportunities (i.e., resources) to influence community decisions (Israel et al., 1998). If residents could offer the power brokers a unique and valuable resource, such as relevant information about the community that could guide community programming, then the residents would be better able to influence the board's decisions because they could leverage this resources in their exchanges with the power brokers. In this scenario, the resource dependencies within the RAB would not limit the residents' ability to use their

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capacity to become empowered. If, on the other hand, the power brokers did not need the residents' resources, or if they were able to find other people in the community to obtain the same resource, then the residents' would have less leverage because their resources would have little value in the exchange relationship with power brokers. In this case, the resource dependencies would limit the residents' ability to use their capacity to gain empowered outcomes. The residents' only defense in this latter situation would be to find other ways to influence community decisions outside the RAB setting. This could be difficult in communities that have few mediating structures where residents can interface with community decision-makers.

Resource dependencies could also moderate the residents' ability to use their capacity to influence community conditions. For example, residents may require tangible resources (i.e., money to purchase supplies) or intangible resources (i.e., the community's support) to influence conditions in their community. Again, if the residents' resources provided them with leverage in their exchange relationship with the power brokers, it would be easier for them to acquire these needed resources from the power brokers. On the other hand, if the residents did not have leverage in their exchange relationship with the power brokers, these resources would be more difficult to obtain and the residents would become dependent on the power brokers for their influence over community conditions. This latter scenario illustrates a condition where the resource dependencies within the RAB could limit the residents' ability to use their capacity to become empowered. If the residents were left with having to find alternative sources (i.e., people, organizations) to exchange with for these resources, they could encounter some challenges. For example, according to the literature many community stakeholders with

resources to offer (i.e., organization leaders or researchers) are more likely to directly or indirectly support power brokers' actions in the community than disenfranchised residents' actions (Foster-Fishman et al., 2004; Israel et al., 1998; Swain, 2001). Overall, resource dependencies within the RAB setting or within the community can serve as a strong moderating factor to residents' influence over both community decisions and conditions. The current study identified whether residents encountered any resource dependencies that affected their capacity to influence community conditions and decisions (Table 1).

   Processes for shifting resource dependencies. How might participating in a RAB setting help to overcome the resource dependencies affecting residents' capacity to become empowered, both within and outside the RAB setting? Like social boundaries, resource dependencies could also be shifted as group members participate in the RAB setting. There are two main ways in which participation in the setting could facilitate these shifts. First, participating on the RAB could decrease residents' dependency on others for the resources to influence community conditions or decisions. For example, residents could decrease their dependency on the power brokers by expanding their social networks to include people or organizations who could give them alternative opportunities (i.e., resources) to influence community decisions outside the RAB context. Residents could meet these types of people and organizations through participating in typical RAB roles in the community, such as helping to assess program effectiveness and promoting buy-in throughout the community (Ingram, 1996). In addition, residents could also become less dependent on the power brokers' (or other community members') expertise to influence community conditions by developing their own skills and

knowledge through participating on the board. The current study explored whether participating on the RAB affected the moderating relationship between resource dependencies and empowerment by reducing the residents' dependencies on other stakeholders, including the power brokers, for their influence over community conditions and decisions.

Second, participating on the RAB could increase other people's dependency on the residents' resources and in turn give the residents more leverage to influence the community in their exchange relationships. For example, the residents could make their resources more appealing to the power brokers or other community members by gaining knowledge (i.e., about community conditions) and skills (i.e., ability to promote community-buy in) through participating in the empowering processes on the board. The more power brokers or other community members perceive the residents' resources as valuable to their efforts, the greater leverage (and thus freedom to act) the residents would have in their exchange relationships with these stakeholders. Again, stakeholders outside the RAB could become aware of these resources by witnessing the residents participate in typical RAB roles in the community. The current study explored whether participating on the RAB affected the moderating relationship between resource dependencies and resident empowerment by causing other stakeholders (including the power brokers) to become more dependent on the residents' resources whereby providing the residents' with more leverage to influence community decisions and conditions.

In conclusion, social boundaries and resource dependencies offer two different ways to conceptualize the moderating factors to resident empowerment in a RAB (see Table 1). The current study explored whether using these two theories together could

provide a useful framework for illustrating the moderating factors to residents' empowerment within the RAB context. The next section will build on this literature review to give a description of the current study.

Current Study

The current study attempted to understand the residents' experience on the RAB and whether they perceived an increase to their empowerment through their participation. The study was guided by four questions: 1) To what extent do residents experience shifts in knowledge, action, and consciousness through participation in a RAB?; 2) What about the RAB fostered or inhibited these shifts; 3) To what extent does the RAB experience shift social boundaries or resource dependencies moderating residents' empowerment?; and 4) To what extent did the RAB experience foster empowered outcomes for residents?

Empowerment, specifically in terms of influence over community conditions and decisions, is clearly a relevant topic for residents from low-income communities who have been systematically denied access to sufficient power and resources. Because the literature suggests that empowerment on a RAB is not a simple process and could be moderated by factors like social boundaries and resource dependencies, it is important to investigate the experience of residents serving on the board in order to discover ways to promote empowerment in these structures. This is not only of practical interest, given how much money has been invested in promoting advisory board structures around the country, but also of ethical concern in order to ensure that RABs do not contribute to the further disenfranchising of low-income residents by promising them empowerment while simultaneously limiting their ability to influence the community.

In addition to these reasons, the study also attempted to address several gaps in

the literature. First, while there are many assumptions regarding the outcomes of participating on a RAB, there have been few attempts in the literature to examine whether these settings foster empowerment for residents. Instead of relying on indirect observations of the RAB processes, the current study explored empowering processes and outcomes on the board by gathering perspectives from the residents who directly experienced the RAB.

Second, the study made a contribution to the literature by applying Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) model of empowering processes to understanding residents' experience within a RAB setting. The model's unique characteristics distinguish it from other empowerment models and have the potential to provide alternative theoretical perspectives of the empowerment process. Because Gaventa and Cornwall's work originates from the field of Action Research, utilizing their model of empowerment within the current study could promote theoretical links between Community Psychology and Action Research. In addition, the study examined features of the RAB setting that facilitated empowering processes and this could contribute to the literature on empowering settings (Maton & Salem, 1995).

Third, the current study examined the utility of using the theoretical frameworks of social boundaries (Hayward, 1998) and resource dependencies (Emerson, 1972) for understanding potential moderating conditions to empowerment within RAB settings. Both of these theories incorporate issues of inequality, power, and action and have the potential to inform community psychology theory and practice within a diverse range of settings and populations. Additionally, the two theories are taken from different disciplines (i.e., Hayward's definition of social boundaries is taken from the political

science literature, Emerson's theory of social exchange is taken from the sociology and economics literature) and the study attempted to illustrate conceptual linkages between these different disciplines. The current study also examined the benefits of using both of these theories simultaneously to more fully explain the phenomenon of empowerment in a RAB setting.

Methods

Use of Qualitative Methods

The topic of resident empowerment on RABs has received little investigation in the literature despite the wide spread use of these structures. Because of this lack of research, qualitative interviews were selected as the method for the current study for three main reasons. First, qualitative interviews are appropriate because they are more able to fully explore the unique perspectives of the resident board members (Banyard & Miller, 1998). For example, qualitative methods can be more useful than quantitative measures for exploring a complex human experience like participating on the RAB because they do not force participants to conform to the predetermined assumptions of the researcher. This in turn produces findings that are more relevant to the residents' actual experience on the board and can be used to design future interventions that are valid for the populations they are serving (Banyard, 1995; Banyard & Graham-Bermann, 1995; Harding, 1991).

Second, with its "thick description" qualitative interviews allow researchers to delve into the specifics of a particular phenomenon or context (Geertz, 1973). This is of importance because one of the main values of community psychology is taking context into account for people's behavior and experiences (Riger, 2001; Trickett, 1996). The

ability for qualitative interviews to take context into account is also useful for developing future measures that are appropriate for specific contexts like RABs (Maton, 1993).

Third, qualitative interviews were selected as the method for the current study because they have the potential to empower participants. Banyard (1995) suggests that qualitative methods have the potential to empower participants because they allow the interviewees to answer questions in their own words and can create space for reflection and interpretation.

Setting Description

The setting for the current study was a resident advisory board created for a community initiative operating in a small Midwestern city with high rates of poverty. The RAB met from 2004 to 2007 and involved approximately 12 residents from low-income neighborhoods (some members departed before the board ended while other members were brought on after the board had begun), 2 hired facilitators, and 2 power brokers. While serving on the board, the resident participants lived in different neighborhoods within the city that were targeted by the power brokers initiative. The power brokers had a high degree of decision-making power regarding the future of the initiative as well as how funds were allocated through community grants. The RAB was created as a setting where residents could provide feedback to the power brokers on the community initiative and was one of the first attempts to involve residents from low-income neighborhoods in an ongoing advising role within the city. The RAB met about every month for the first year yet gradually convened less frequently as time progressed. Eventually the RAB was terminated by the power brokers for the stated reason that the setting had outlived its original purpose. A more in-depth examination of the board's history and context based

on information gathered through the interview process will be presented in the results section.

Qualitative Approach

Patton (2002) argues that it is important for researchers to be explicit about the "theoretical framework being used and the implications of that perceptive on study focus, data collection, fieldwork, and analysis." The current study adopted elements from two theoretical orientations: phenomenological and critical theory. First, a phenomenological framework focuses on how people retroactively make sense of their lived experiences and how that sense-making process can influence their consciousness (Van Manen, 1990). Thus, the study involved in-depth interviews with residents about how they perceived and made sense of their experiences on the RAB and how these perceptions influenced their current consciousness of their empowerment. Second, the study employed a critical theory framework to guide its exploration. A critical theory orientation aims to understand and critique how "injustice and subjugation shape people's experience and understandings of the world" (Patton, 2002). This framework aligns with the current study's focus on the processes for increasing disenfranchised people's access to community influence in order to gain genuine empowerment in their lives.

Study Procedures

Sample. This study targeted the 12 residents who participated on the RAB during its three years of operation. In order to be included within the study's final sample, residents needed to have served on the RAB for at least six meetings. Upon contact, only nine residents fit these criteria. The three residents who dropped out of the board prior to attending six meetings were asked why they chose to leave the board. Two of these

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residents said that personal or family health problems had forced them to leave the board. The third resident said that shortly after starting the RAB he was transferred to a new job that was located out of state.

Of the nine residents who served for more than six meetings, 8 residents agreed to be interviewed. This was the final sample size for the study. Of these eight participants, six were female and two were male. The residents' ages ranged from 47 to 82 years. Prior to serving on the RAB, six out of the eight residents had served on another resident-driven committee connected with the power brokers' efforts that oversaw small community-development grants being awarded to residents in the community. In addition, one resident also said that he had served on a community development advisory board for the city. All eight of the residents were engaged in the community in some way prior to joining the RAB. For example, several residents were heavily involved with their neighborhood associations and others volunteered through local organizations in the city. All of the residents lived in low-income neighborhoods within the city.

The study also targeted the 2 hired facilitators who served on the board, although neither of these people could be interviewed for the study for the following reasons. One of these facilitators had moved out of state since the termination of the board and was unable to be reached. The other facilitator was successfully contacted, but refused to be interviewed.

Recruitment. Participants were recruited through records of the RAB members. A letter of intent was sent to each resident and facilitator describing the study and inviting them to contact the investigator if they were interested in participating. One week after participants received the invitation letters they were contacted by phone regarding the

study and asked about their interest in participating. During this conversation the investigator reviewed the study again, answered any questions, and if the participant was still interested set up an interview. Interviews were held in the city at a location convenient for each participant. For participants no longer residing in the city, interviews were conducted over the telephone. Before each interview began, participants were brought through a consenting process (see Appendix A). During this process the investigator: 1) introduced the purpose and background of the study; 2) described what participation involved (e.g., length of the interview, types of questions, presence of digital recorder); 3) notified them of their rights as participants (right to stop the interview at any time, refuse to answer any question, or decline to be recorded); 4) explained the potential risks and benefits of participating; and 5) explained the processes for ensuring confidentiality. In this process participants were given the option of allowing the investigator to contact them after the interview was completed as a way to authenticate the findings (member check). Participants were given the investigator's contact information as well as the appropriate contact information for the chair of this committee. After the above information was explained, participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions or bring up any concerns. After this point, participants were asked to sign a consent form indicating their agreement to the terms of the study and their understanding of their rights as participants (see appendix A for consent form).

Semi-structured open-ended interviews. The eight residents were interviewed using a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol (see appendix B). The questions in the interview protocol inquired about: 1) the residents' phenomenological experience of participating in the RAB; 2) how the RAB experience impacted residents' level of

empowerment; 3) residents' descriptions of the RAB processes (e.g., opportunities for sharing knowledge, gaining skills, reflecting, etc.); 4) residents' perceptions regarding their social boundaries and resource dependencies in the RAB and community; and 5) demographic information. Interviews took about 90 minutes and did not go over 2 hours. The interviews were recorded using digital recorders. At the beginning of each interview, participants were given an identification number that was used to identify all data pertaining to their interview.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim by the investigator and verified against the original recordings. In this process, all identifying information was removed from the transcript to maintain participants' confidentiality. Audio recordings and transcriptions were saved on the investigator's password protected computer and hard copies of the transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's MSU office. When all study analyses are completed, the digital audio files are to be erased from the computer. After the audio files were transcribed and cleaned, transcriptions were downloaded into NVIVO 7.0 software for analysis on a password protected computer in the investigator's MSU office. Hard copies of transcriptions are to be destroyed five years after the IRB expiration date and electronic copies of the data are to be destroyed seven years after the IRB expiration.

Analysis Plans

Although all residents in the case study shared the experience of coming from low-income neighborhoods of the same city, it is likely that every person still retained their distinct historical and contextual phenomenological experience of the board. As a result, the study used a within-case analysis to contextualize each resident's individual

experience of the board. In order to capture how the RAB processes affected all members of the setting, cross-case analysis were used to identify patterns across residents' experiences. In addition, the study incorporated inductive and deductive strategies for analyzing the data.

Within-Case Analysis. The method of within-case analysis was used to examine residents' individual accounts of the RAB experience. Brief case studies were developed for each resident that brought to light details of each resident's life history and their unique perceptions of empowerment on the board. Each participant's case study included a summary of his or her response to each of the main interview questions, as well as a summary of each person's demographic information. This method was useful because it allowed the analysis to take into account how contextual factors of residents' life circumstances influenced their particular experience of the RAB. The case studies were then compared across each other to understand more fully the experiences of all residents participating on the RAB.

Cross-Case Analysis. The cross-case analysis occurred in two phases, beginning first with an inductive content analysis phase and then moving into a deductive content analysis phase. Inductive content analysis involves abandoning pre-existing frameworks and strictly using the data to discover patterns and themes (Patton, 2002). Coding during this phase was explicitly data-driven and was sensitive to the setting's unique context. The inductive phase began by coding each interview transcript to find patterns and themes pertaining to the research questions. As analysis proceeded, initial coding schemas were revised as new ideas emerge during the coding of further transcripts. When the inductive coding produced a satisfactory number of codes, the codes were entered

into an analysis codebook along with detailed definitions of each item and decision criteria for coding procedures. The full set of codes was then applied to all of the interview transcripts. After this step, coded sections of the transcripts were examined to distill more encompassing categories called second-order themes which can integrate meaning across multiple codes. Throughout the inductive analysis phase the investigator was in continuous contact with the chair of her committee for feedback and guidance.

After the inductive phase, the investigator coded the data a second time using a deductive content analysis strategy. Deductive content analysis involves using an existing theory or framework to code the data for similar patterns and themes (Patton, 2002). During this phase, Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) model, Hayward's (1998) definition of social boundaries, Emerson's (1972) definition of resource dependencies, and the defined empowered outcomes served as a framework to guide coding of the interview data across residents (see Table 1). The deductive codes were added to the codebook along with detailed definitions of each item and decision criteria for coding procedures. After the resident data had been coded according to the framework, the coded data was examined just like it was in the inductive phase for possible areas where themes can be combined or integrated into higher order themes. To aid in managing and displaying the data, coded sections were organized using several types of matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Again, the investigator was in continuous contact with the chair of her committee for feedback and guidance.

After the inductive and deductive phases were completed, data derived from these two analyses was compared and used to inform the conclusions drawn from each method. For example, codes developed in the inductive phase that did not overlap with codes used

in the deductive phase provided input to the adequacy of the deductive framework. In addition, themes created in the inductive phase that aligned with those found in the deductive phase supported the use of the framework for explaining residents' experience on the RAB. Combining insights gained from both the inductive and deductive processes provided a richer account of residents' experience on the board than either process alone. In order to make both the inductive and deductive processes transparent and thorough, in every stage of the analysis detailed notes were kept of all coding decisions and the rationale behind them. This included how feedback from both the committee chair and member checks was incorporated into the analysis.

Data Triangulation. Data from the current study was verified using the strategy of source triangulation. Source triangulation compares qualitative findings from the current analyses with other relevant sources of information collected through qualitative methods. For example in the current study, analyses of resident interviews were compared with the findings from a qualitative analysis previously carried out on the RAB's meeting minutes (Droege et al., 2007). While these previous analyses did not examine all of the constructs in the current study, they explored other aspects of empowering processes that served as a useful comparison with the current study's findings. Comparisons between the RAB's meeting minutes and the results from the current study are included in the results section below. In addition, source triangulation was used to compare residents' experiences with observations and conversations about the RAB collected by the investigator through field notes taken during initiative events and meetings with power brokers. The results from the triangulation process are discussed in the results section.

Data Authentication. Several strategies were used to authenticate the findings for their validity and credibility. These strategies included: 1) member checks; 2) negative case analysis; and 3) peer debriefing with the chair of the committee. Member checks involve bringing descriptions and interpretations of the analysis findings back to the participants to verify that they are accurate, plausible, and complete. Member checks were conducted with three residents over the phone and reviewed parts of the participant's within-case analysis for clarification and accuracy. These three residents were selected because there was some ambiguity surrounding some of the comments they had made during their interviews; the member checks served as a way to verify whether these comments were coded correctly in the analyses. If a participant's member check produced a discrepancy with their within-case analysis, a note was attached to the participant's interview data and the analyses were reviewed to take into account these participants' feedback.

Negative case analysis involves testing the authenticity of study interpretations by examining cases that do not conform perfectly to the overall findings. Through examining the details of these negative cases, the investigator was forced to take all participant perspectives into account and to consider other possible explanations for interpreting the findings. The analysis paid particular attention to any RAB members who left the board before it was terminated. Finally, the findings were authenticated through the guidance and feedback of the chair of this committee. These conversations brought to light further alternative explanations for the findings as well as investigator biases that may have surfaced during analysis.

Study Limitations

The current study has several limitations. First, the interviews were conducted about 6 months after the RAB was terminated. It is possible that this time influenced residents' memories of the board processes as well as their interpretations of their experiences. On the other hand, this elapsed time could have allowed residents to experience ways in which their participation on the board affected their empowerment after leaving the board. Second, RAB power brokers were not interviewed for the study due to political sensitivity of the investigators role in the initiative. This eliminated one perspective from the board to triangulate the residents' experiences. Third, the current study investigated resident experiences from one specific RAB and therefore can only be generalized to other settings with caution.

Results

The current study explored whether participating in a resident advisory board increased residents' influence over community decisions and conditions and if so, what processes on the board facilitated, inhibited, or moderated these empowered outcomes. Analyses examined whether residents experienced shifts in their knowledge, skills, consciousness, or action through participating in the RAB and whether these shifts increased their capacity to influence community conditions and decisions. This analysis also explored what about the RAB setting facilitated or inhibited residents from gaining this capacity. In addition, the study investigated whether social boundaries and resource dependencies served as moderating factors to residents' empowered outcomes, and whether these factors were affected by residents' participation in the RAB. Overall, the study found that residents experienced shifts to their knowledge, skills, and consciousness as a result of participating on the RAB. There were also shifts to residents'

action as a result of the board, although to a lesser extent. In spite of these gains, the RAB experience only allowed residents to partially overcome some of their social boundaries and resource dependencies with the power brokers in the RAB setting and thus their empowerment was very limited in the board context. In contrast, the RAB experience allowed residents to shift some of their social boundaries and resource dependencies in the community and as a result the residents did experience modest shifts to their empowerment in the community context.

In order to fully address the research questions examined in this study, the results have been divided into four main sections which illustrate the residents' experience on the resident advisory board. The first section describes how the RAB provided processes for residents to shift their knowledge, skills, consciousness, and action through participating in the setting. Section two illustrates what elements within the RAB setting facilitated or inhibited these shifts to residents' capacity. Section three explains how participating on the RAB affected the social boundaries and resource dependencies moderating residents' empowerment both within and outside the board setting. The final section discusses the overall affect of participating on a RAB on residents' influence over community decisions and conditions. An introduction to the board's history and context will be presented prior to these four sections. The results summarize findings from both the cross-case and within-case analysis of residents' interviews.

History and Context of Board

The resident advisory board was created by several local fiduciaries (power brokers) who oversaw a community initiative as well as the funding going to several organizations in the community. The purpose of the RAB was to gather a group of

residents from targeted neighborhoods around the city to update the power brokers on the community's needs and review some of the power brokers' potential grant decisions. The RAB setting was the first attempt by the power brokers to engage community residents in this way and lasted for a little over three years. Twelve different residents participated on the RAB, although some did not participate for the entire duration of the board. The following will give an overview of the board's timeline as well as a description of the specific roles residents carried out while participating on the RAB.

RAB Timeline

The RAB was created in a small Midwestern city in 2004 in conjunction with a series of grants the power brokers were preparing to disseminate to the community. The board was created as a setting where residents could provide feedback to the power brokers on their funding decisions regarding the community and was one of the first attempts to involve residents from low-income neighborhoods in an ongoing advising role within the city. The resident RAB members were recruited from eight neighborhoods that the power brokers were targeting for their grant related activity. Residents recalled that they were chosen for the board primarily because of their leadership experience and involvement in the community. As one resident recalled:

> *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.*
> *(Participant 04)*

All meetings were held at the power brokers' office and each meeting included a shared meal (provided by the power brokers) and formal meeting discussions. Residents were paid roughly $100 for attending each meeting; this was a considerable amount of money

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for the residents and provided them a privileged opportunity in the community because as one resident recounted, "no one was getting paid to go to a meeting for $100. No one."

During the first year the board met often, roughly once or twice a month. During these meetings the residents had opportunities to advise the power brokers on funding decisions related to the community. The climax of this beginning phase was one particular meeting where the residents collectively argued against a decision proposed by the power brokers that would have reduced support for community-led action in the community. In response, the power brokers took the residents' advice and radically changed their course of action. This meeting was a turning point for many of the residents on the board because it showed them that, at least initially, they could have a real impact on the decisions being made about their community.

As time went on, the power brokers' granting cycles ended and as a result they brought fewer grants to the RAB for the group to discuss; instead, they began offering training sessions for the residents and involved them in a series of community networking events. The power brokers also involved the residents in discussions regarding internal planning for the RAB. For example, the residents were engaged in discussions about the RAB's mission statement, operating procedures, and vision for the future. During these discussions some residents started talking about ideas for new roles on the board that incorporated direct action in the community. It was during this later phase that some of the residents perceived a "shift" taking place in the RAB where the power brokers subtly started moving away from soliciting the residents for their advice regarding the power brokers' decisions. In 2007 the power brokers announced that the RAB had outlived its purpose and proceeded to terminate the group. The residents were not consulted in this

decision.

Overall, the board was active for a little over three years. During this time the residents participated in a variety of roles and opportunities through their participation in the group. These roles are summarized below based on the residents' recollection of their experience on the board.

Residents' Roles on the RAB

Residents spoke about carrying out a variety of roles while participating on the RAB. As mentioned previously, most of these roles had never been available to members of the community prior to the initiation of the RAB and many of the residents felt honored and privileged to be chosen to work with the power brokers in this capacity as seen in the following comments:

> *I was honored that they tapped into me to even get my view. (Participant 05)*

> *And I never dreamed of working with the [power brokers]. It was like a dream come true. A dream come true that I was tapped for this. (Participant 01)*

Residents participated in four types of roles while on the RAB including: 1) advising; 2) collecting information; 3) representing the RAB in the community; and 4) planning internal RAB processes.

Advising. One of the primary roles for residents on the RAB was to give input and advice to power brokers about their funding decisions regarding the community. The residents participated in several grant reviewing cycles on the board. Prior to each meeting involving the grant review process, residents would receive a packet of materials that described different proposals for community programs. During the actual meetings, residents would give their opinions about the quality and appropriateness of these proposals, advise the power brokers about whether to accept or reject the proposals, and

make recommendations for alternative ideas. Sometimes the residents' input was very critical, for example pointing out areas of the proposals that they considered to be "a waste of money" or disapproving of unneeded "pork" in some of the grant requests. One resident mentioned that the power brokers gained a great deal of information from the residents and really "picked our brains" at the meetings to make sure they understood the residents' feedback. In addition to these proposals, resident gave the power brokers advice about some of their other programming in the city, their evaluation efforts, and their public relations materials for the community. The residents' roles also included assisting the power brokers in planning a series of convening events in the community. Overall, the RAB experience gave residents the chance to advise the power brokers on a wide range of decisions and activities impacting the community.

Collecting information. Another RAB role mentioned by residents was collecting different types of information from the community and reporting it back to the group. Residents collected information for the RAB through two primary methods. The first method was to attend local community events in order to speak with people about their reactions and observe the activities. Residents would then report back to the group about their experiences and relate their perceptions of "how the community took it in." In addition to attending events, residents were also given the opportunity to participate in an evaluation project sponsored by the power brokers where they went door to door to talk with residents in their neighborhoods about the community. This opportunity had a big impact on one of the residents as seen in the following comment.

> *So being able to go door to door was very important for all of us on the committee because then we could actually say we're a voice because we heard what the community was saying and what they needed, and the fear that they had. So that was a biggie to me, going out doing those. (Participant 05)*

The experience of directly talking with residents in the community, whether attending

local events or going door to door, appears to have affected some of the RAB residents'

consciousness of themselves as community leaders; these effects will be discussed in

later sections.

   Representing the RAB in the community. Residents had several opportunities to

represent the RAB in the community while participating on the board. For example,

residents interacted with organizations and helped facilitate some of the activities at the

community networking events sponsored by the power brokers. Participating in these

events was a very new role for some of the residents and allowed them to display their

facilitation skills (some of which they gained through their participation on the RAB):

> *I had not done that particular thing before...[but facilitating that activity] was a*
> *great experience for me because I had all these people, these organizations, in*
> *this room and I'm suppose to be running this thing so that was great. (Participant*
> *03)*

In addition to the networking events, the residents' also represented the RAB at other

local events occurring in the community. For example, during these events the residents

would come before the community as "fellow residents" and talk to them about what the

RAB was "trying to do," describe some of the power brokers' plans for the community,

and answer community members' questions. The residents served as a "buffer" between

the power brokers and the community at these events by deflecting some of the

community's historical mistrust of the power brokers for always "telling them what

[they're] going to do once again and how [they're] going to do it." This representative

role suggested to some residents that the power brokers had specifically chosen the RAB

members to serve as their esteemed ambassadors to the community as seen in the

following comment:

> *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 Jesus, 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. (Participant 07)*

As the comment illustrates, this resident had elevated the power brokers' authority and power to an almost supernatural status on the board and defined the residents' power as subordinate to that of the power brokers. The impact of this differential status will be discussed more below. Overall, residents were able to carry out the public role of representing the RAB in a variety of settings while participating on the board.

Internal RAB processing. Residents also had roles in terms of planning some of the internal processes for the RAB. The residents carried out this role throughout the course of the board. The planning roles included working with the power brokers to develop things like the RAB's mission, vision, purpose, and code of conduct. Residents also took part in some of the recruitment efforts of new members for the board. While participating in these planning efforts provided additional roles for residents on the board, according to residents these processes went on for many months and took up a significant amount of meeting time. This made some residents question the purpose of these roles as seen in the following comment:

> *Dear God we spent a lot of time figuring out what we were going to be, what we were going to be called, where we were going to get members. That was some bullshit time that we spent. I don't believe they paid us to do that, I'm sorry. That was just a waste of time and I don't know if they were trying to waste our time because it shouldn't have taken that long... to decide who you are and where you're going. (Participant 04)*

Towards the end of the board, some residents sensed that the power brokers had changed their minds about the purpose of the group and were using the planning processes as a

way to stall decisions about the fate of the RAB.

Overall, the residents enacted a variety of roles while participating on the RAB. These roles set the backdrop for the different capacity-building processes occurring for residents in the setting. The next section will describe how the board processes shifted residents' knowledge, skills, consciousness, and action, and how these elements increased residents' capacity to influence community conditions and decisions.

Capacity-Building Processes within the RAB

Although each of the residents joined the board with some initial capacity as community leaders (this was the reason why they were recruited to the board in the first place), participating on the RAB allowed each resident to further develop their capacity. Gaventa and Cornwall's model was used as a framework for examining the capacity-building processes on the RAB. Analyses found that residents experienced shifts to their knowledge, skills, and consciousness as a result of participating on the RAB; residents also increased their action, but to a much lesser degree. In addition to the Gaventa and Cornwall framework, the study also found that residents experienced shifts to their social networks through their participation on the board. The following pages will describe each of these shifts in more detail and highlight the idea of praxis – a cycle where individual processes for increasing capacity can feed back into each other to create a form of synergy.

RAB Processes for Generating Knowledge

Overall, residents gained a wide spectrum of knowledge while participating on the board that served to increase their capacity to influence community conditions and decisions. Residents expanded their knowledge in three areas as a result of their

participation in the RAB: 1) community information; 2) residents' life histories; and 3) community organizations (see Table 2). The following paragraphs will describe these shifts in residents' knowledge and how they came about on the board.

Community information. All eight residents reported becoming more aware of different aspects of the community as a result of participating on the board. This awareness included knowledge about neighborhood conditions and community resources. First, the RAB meetings gave group members the opportunity to have some "serious discussions about the issues in the city" and community conditions; this process was facilitated by the group's willingness to listen and share information. These group discussions gave residents an awareness of what was "really going on in the community" and provided a comprehensive look at the local conditions throughout the city because each resident came from a different area of the city and could share information reflecting the conditions of their own particular neighborhood. Several members of the group were unaware of some of the problems going on in certain parts of the city and these group discussions gave them access to new information. The following quotes illustrate how the residents' knowledge was shifted by this process:

> *I was enlightened because I didn't know that those things were happening [in certain neighborhoods], or a program like that was needed. (Participant 09).*

> *As I lived in a different area...I didn't know that it was that bad until I hear what they're saying what it's like to live in that area. (Participant 01).*

Gaining knowledge about community conditions appeared to have facilitated some of the residents' capacity to influence community conditions and decisions. For example, one resident said that this knowledge increased her capacity to influence community conditions because it equipped her to:

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...reach out more [to the community] than I would have been before because I am much more aware of some of the issues in the communities - especially the neighborhoods that I don't live in. (Participant 03).

This resident also said that gaining a "broader picture of the community" through the knowledge generated by the group gave her "something to say" as she tried to influence the decisions of community members and organizations in the community. This latter point also demonstrates a shift to her resource dependency and will be addressed again in a later section.

In addition to neighborhood conditions, residents also learned about different types of resources and activities within the community by engaging in different processes for generating knowledge on the RAB. For example, each meeting had time set aside where residents could give updates to the group about local events or programs and give a general idea of "what was happening in the community." Residents also learned about community services, programs, and resources by attending the power brokers' networking events where they could gather and process information by talking directly with stakeholders from around the city. According to the investigator's field notes taken while attending one of these networking events, the events provided an informal atmosphere for stakeholders and residents to interact with each other and in addition allowed attendees to gather a plethora of information (i.e., brochures) about the organizations in the city. Learning about all of these community resources facilitated the residents' capacity to influence community conditions by motivating them to develop a list of available services in the county and city that they could use to help their neighbors' gain access to needed resources. One resident said that the knowledge process, combined with encouragement from the group, was instrumental in pushing him to start engaging in

this type of neighborhood outreach and demonstrates how generating purposeful

knowledge in a RAB can help spur participants to action.

Residents' life histories. Seven out of the eight residents talked about learning the

life histories and experiences of the other resident members through the stories shared

during board meetings. These stories not only reflected the diversity of the group, but

also highlighted how the residents shared an identity and purpose as community leaders.

For example, residents learned about the "roots where people came from" and some of

the unique episodes that "shaped them" into becoming involved in the community. These

stories represented an assortment of different experiences and reflected the group's

diversity in terms of each member's culture, neighborhood, education, and demographics

as seen in the following comment:

> *We were an extremely diverse group - single moms, [former] teenage moms.*
> *Going to school as an adult, going back to college. Things that being a black*
> *female - if you're not that, or never walked in those shoes, you may not even be*
> *able to imagine. So that was with all of us. Everybody had a different story.*
> *(Participant 08)*

> *...[the RAB] had people from all different walks, from diverse backgrounds in life.*
> *You had people who had retired, folks that were still working, folks from poverty,*
> *folks with different ethnic backgrounds, from different parts of town, and from*
> *different parts of the city. (Participant 01)*

Yet despite this diversity, through reflecting on these stories shared in the group residents

were also able to gain a new awareness of the commonalities across their diverse

experiences. For example, through learning about the "different aspects of [each

member's] involvement throughout the community" residents realized that they were all

"suffering through the same things…and trying to deal with the same things" in their

neighborhoods. Not only did hearing these stories make residents feel less isolated in

their efforts, but it also gave some of them new ideas for ways to affect the community,

because as one resident put it:

> *We were all doing the same thing, all fighting the same things, and sometimes the same tactics will work more than once. You just have to figure out how to us them and whose brain to pick. (Participant 04)*

For other residents, the process of hearing stories about everyone's efforts in the community gave them hope and inspired them to continue their commitment to their own efforts:

> *[Interviewer: What did it mean to you to...hear everyone sharing their experiences?] It meant that there was actually going to be some change. Because you can talk all day long and that's very frustrating to me. But to see people so vested in what it was they were vested in - and doing something about it...That man, we're not just talking. We can actually see the results of the labor that we're doing...I mean just to be able to see things actually moving. Things getting accomplished, that was a big satisfaction. (Participant 05).*

According to the literature, this increased sense of commitment could serve as a resource for engaging in social action to affect community conditions (Keiffer, 1984). These comments also illustrate how the sharing processes on the board gave residents opportunities to get to know each other and increased their social networks. Overall, the process of sharing and reflecting on group member's life histories built the residents' capacity by giving them new change strategies and renewed commitment to influence community conditions.

Community organizations. Seven out of eight residents said they gained knowledge about organizations in the community through participating on the RAB. The power brokers' organization was included within this group of community organizations, but will be discussed in a separate section following an initial summary of the residents learning about the local community-based organizations in the city. First, residents shifted their knowledge about local organizations in the community through participating

on the RAB. While many of the residents had previous experience with some of these organizations prior to joining the board, the RAB gave them an opportunity to expand this knowledge in several ways. For example, the residents were able to speak directly with stakeholders from over a dozen key organizations in the city at the power brokers' networking meetings and learn more about how these organizations were attempting to serve the community. One resident said that through the networking meetings she gained:

> ...new perspectives on the personalities of the people who work [at certain organizations]. And probably cleared up some false ideas that I may have had about organizations, what their goals are, how they're run. And what their future plans might be. A lot of times people just don't know and they don't have any way of finding out because it's not like you just call up and ask. (Participant 03)

The residents also increased their knowledge by learning how the different organizations were "interconnected with other agencies" in town at these networking meetings.

In addition to the networking meetings, residents learned about local organizations' budgets, goals, and responsibilities through the grant reviewing process on the board, specifically by reading the organizations' proposals and hearing other residents talk about their experiences with some of the agencies. This latter process was particularly informative because several residents had been heavily involved with some of the local organizations and they "weren't afraid to give their opinions" and let the group know what was really going on behind the scenes at these agencies. For example, one resident learned about the business angle of the non-profit sector by reading grants detailing the salaries earned by stakeholders within some of the organizations in town:

> Because some of those groups you just don't know about...I can use [one organization's grant] for instance. They wanted to bring in a new person that would run different programs...and it looked to us like an awful lot of money to pay somebody. And I'm like, is this really how much this costs for this person to run this and do this and be a little facilitator person? I just, it was phenomenal money and I was like people actually get paid this kind of money! Because I just

didn't know at that time. And they're like yeah, this is about right. I was like dang, I'm in the wrong business here. So, you learn a lot. (Participant 09)

Similarly, the grant review process enlightened another resident about the operations and responsibilities within many organizations and as a result gained a more realistic perspective about how non-profit organizations actually work:

[Reviewing grants] also let me learn about some organizations and some groups and different things that I didn't know about, as far as knowing what they do, and how they do what they do and why they're supported. Sometimes from the outside you are just like "what are you [organizations] good for?"... But then when you see [their] budgets and you see the people and you see different things you're like, "oh, I never actually realized that that was that hard to do." (Participant 08)

There was evidence that all of this learning about the local community-based organizations facilitated the residents' capacity to influence community conditions. For example, one resident said that gaining knowledge about organizations in town, as well as expanding her social networks to include organization stakeholders (see section below), helped her facilitate action through her neighborhood association:

And you know I am chair [of my neighborhood association] right now so I can say, "You know, we can contact so and so, or there is this organization that does this or that and I will bet that they'd love to talk with us..." Where I wouldn't be able to do that before if I didn't know how these organizations worked, who to talk to, what their goals are. (Participant 03)

This latter example will be revisited in the final section on residents' empowerment.

Second, six out of eight residents said they also learned information specifically about the power brokers' organization while participating on the board. This information included background, policies, procedures, and terminology related to the power brokers' organization. This learning primarily came about while residents were attempting to influence the power brokers' decisions during the grant review process. For example, through conversations on the board power brokers told residents about how and why their

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agency was founded and described their organization's guiding principles and mission statement. This gave residents a better understanding of why the power brokers were interested in investing money into the community and some of their responsibilities. In addition to this background knowledge, residents also learned privileged information about some of the technical aspects of the power brokers' current policies and procedures for dealing with community grants. For instance, residents learned some of the technical "grant language" that accompanies the grant review process as well as the power brokers' procedures for determining which grant requests should receive funding as seen in the following quote:

> *They showed us how you take a grant in and evaluate it, process it, how to determine what the programming needs are and how they eventually award those grants. And then the follow-through, what they're looking for as far as the evaluation piece and the impact on the community and this type thing. So we learned quite a bit. (Participant 01).*

Residents also learned about some of the power brokers' underlying goals for structuring community programming, such as requiring grantees to partner with other organizations in order to receive funding and pushing the requirement of sustainability in their applications.

Learning about the power brokers' history and current practice facilitated the residents' capacity to influence community conditions and decisions in several ways. For example, one resident said that learning privileged information such as the power brokers' "protocols and how the back door stuff works" helped build her capacity to better navigate the "system" of community funding in the city to obtain resources for community work. Another resident said that learning this information increased his capacity to advise community members about grant writing and in doing so helped to

increase his influence over community decisions. In both of these examples residents gained resources in the form of knowledge that helped to decrease their resource dependencies, a topic that will be discussed again in a later section.

Overall, residents gained a plethora of knowledge while participating on the RAB. From information about the community to the lived experiences of the members themselves, the knowledge gained through the RAB experience increased the residents' capacity to influence community conditions and decisions. The next piece of this section will expand on this discussion and incorporate the skills residents developed on the RAB.

RAB Processes for Developing Skills

Although each of the residents on the RAB came into the board with a certain set of skills, the RAB gave them the opportunity to develop new skills or continue to hone their existing skills in the following areas: 1) communication; 2) group facilitation; 3) leadership; and 4) problem solving (see Table 2). Each of these skills also contributed to the residents' capacity as change agents as will be described below. The following paragraphs will describe these shifts to residents' skills and how they came about on the RAB.

Communication. The majority of residents (6/8) said they developed their communication skills while participating on the board; communication skills were also the most frequently mentioned across all of the skill categories. The residents learned a variety of skills related to clearly presenting their ideas to various audiences through the processes of advising the power brokers, receiving formal training, and engaging in experiential learning. For example, the residents learned how to present information to a professional audience by receiving formal training from the power brokers during board

meetings. This formal instruction taught residents how to develop talking points for presenting information, defend their ideas, and put things into "concise terms" instead of just saying "a lot of mumble bumble." Some residents were timid when they joined the board, partly because they had never worked in a setting like the RAB, and this formal training played a big role in helping them develop confidence as illustrated in the following quote:

So I had to learn new skills because I had never been exposed to that type of environment before...I wasn't a person that could talk ... I was somewhat bashful and shy and [the power brokers] taught me to do my background and learn what the topic [was] that I'm talking about and present it the best way I know how...So I'm very confident in what I talk about now and those kinds of things. I had to learn new skills. (Participant 01)

In addition to the formal training, the residents also developed and practiced their formal communication skills by advising the power brokers. For example, advising the power brokers about grants during board meetings gave residents a chance to practice explaining their ideas and helped them to "paint clearer pictures for each other...and provoke mind thought." One resident recounted that developing these skills was important because "some of us were bullies" and "rough around the edges" upon joining the board; by engaging in advising discussions on the RAB with the other residents and the power brokers, these residents learned how to listen to each other, use their "wits," and back up their ideas with "proof" instead of "bullying your way into making people do things." Practicing these skills in the group also built the confidence of some of the residents and was facilitated by the fact that the setting promoted a safe culture for sharing as demonstrated in the following quote:

The setting gave you a voice. And hearing your voice bounce off of other people and they come back to resonate with you, let you know that you were like dead on...I think it's strengthened the ability to say what I needed to say, to make the

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point, and then feel confident enough to stick with it. (Participant 08)

In addition to learning communication skills for a professional audience, the residents also learned strategies for conveying information to community audiences as well. Again, the residents gained these skills by receiving formal training, engaging in experiential learning, and advising the power brokers. For example, during one meeting the residents participated in an activity where the power brokers taught them strategies for how to give short concise descriptions of their work with the RAB to people they encountered in the community. As part of this activity, the group engaged in an experiential learning process to practice how to deliver these "elevator speeches" to community members through participating in role playing exercises with the other residents on the board. The residents also learned informal strategies for communicating with community members, particularly people who are distrustful and intimidated by authority, through peer to peer learning processes. For example, one resident recounted that while advising the power brokers the group occasionally talked about strategies for communicating information to community members in ways that they could understand. Some of these strategies included avoiding the use of "50 cent words that go over people's heads" and approaching residents who are withdrawn and fearful in specific ways to make them feel comfortable. In addition to learning skills for face to face communication with community members, the residents also learned how to disseminate messages to wide public audiences through the process of giving the power brokers advice about how to fine tune their public relations materials for the community. Overall, through the RAB residents learned the "importance of the communication angle" and increased their ability to communicate with diverse types of stakeholders.

Developing communication skills for both professional and community audiences through participating in the RAB facilitated the residents' capacity to influence community decisions and conditions. For example, as mentioned above these skills improved the residents' capacity to advise the power brokers within the RAB setting by allowing them to clearly argue their ideas during board meetings. These skills also built the residents' capacity to influence the community outside the RAB context. For example, one resident said that the RAB built her capacity to influence community decisions by giving her "strategies to be able to get my ideas out to the community." Another resident said that the RAB gave her the skills and confidence to turn ideas and observations into action plans for working in the community:

> *[The RAB] helped perfect us and helped us be more specific in articulating...and making the transition from what we see in the community to how it maps out or how it rolls out when it comes to working with the [power brokers] or with community groups...I think it helped us to kind of develop as community leaders. (Participant 07)*

Either within or outside the RAB context, learning communication skills on the RAB increased the residents' capacity to influence the community. The next section will describe how the RAB experience gave residents the opportunity to further expand their skills by learning strategies for facilitating groups.

Group facilitation. Residents also developed their facilitation skills on the board primarily through workshops and direct trainings that the power brokers provided for the group. Residents recalled that some of these trainings were intensive and lasted entire weekends. Some aspects of the training taught residents technical strategies for facilitating groups. For example, residents learned everything from introducing oneself at the first meeting and developing "house rules" with the group, to identifying outcomes

and activities for each session.

> *And there was another workshop where it helped us...in facilitating a group....When you have a group coming together and they want to be able to do x y and z, how do you facilitate that group? How do you bring the partners together? Who are the stakeholders? What are your desired outcomes? What are some of the things that you want to make sure that you address. (Participant 07).*

In addition to these technical strategies, residents also learned more nuanced skills from these facilitation trainings, such as dealing with different types of audience members, making the group feel comfortable sharing, and mediating conflict. As with the communication skills described above, one key element of these trainings that helped the residents to solidify their learning was the opportunity to practice their skills in the group through experiential learning activities. For example, residents practiced their facilitation skills at the training sessions by participating in role playing exercises where board members would simulate difficult group situations and test each others' responses.

> *We had a really good series...on how to run kind of a forum type meeting...it was great. It took us quite a few weeks to do that, and then we had to get up and you know sit there with our comrades and run this. And of course they're set up to ask you questions and [test] how you deal with it. And then we worked with the difficult person in the audience, the one that just goes on and on and on. Yeah, it was an excellent experience and we all appreciated it a lot because we got the books to take home. (Participant 03)*

Residents were also able to practice their skills at the networking meetings by helping to facilitate break out sessions and some of the event's activities. There was evidence that these facilitation skills helped to increase the residents' capacity to influence community conditions. For example, at one point in the board several residents felt so confident in their facilitating abilities that they asked the power brokers to support them in using their skills to independently organize and facilitate a resident-driven community forum to help community members engage in change efforts around the city.

But that was our goal, the end goal was that forum. We learned it and now we want it out there in mass communication. Because you could get a bunch of people who would feel comfortable to come in... have a couple speakers...get some PR.... emphasize there are opportunities for you to do something [to promote change]...a volunteer opportunity or a part-time opportunity...It might open something up for people that they would not have thought of before. (Participant 03)

The outcome of these requests to put on the community forum will be discussed again in a later section related to social boundaries and resource dependencies. The next section will describe how the RAB setting continued to build residents' capacity through providing them training on leadership development.

Leadership. In addition to facilitation skills, residents also developed their community leadership skills through the RAB. It is important to note that many of the residents were already considered leaders in the community and came into the RAB with a certain set of skills. Yet continuing to develop and hone these existing leadership skills was important to residents because as one resident put it, "a leader has to be sharpened...[and] continuously learn how to be able to work with their constituency." As with the communication and facilitation skills, the power brokers provided formal training for the residents on how to become a better community leader. According to residents, the purpose of the leadership training was to "empower" them as community leaders. For example, one of the trainings helped residents identify their own personal leadership style and showed them how to utilize their strengths in the community. Overall, residents gained many skills out of the training and for some it was a "totally encompassing experience as far as being able to be a better community leader."

All of this training, provided by the power brokers, gave residents specific skills that built their capacity to influence community decisions and conditions. For example,

one resident drew upon the leadership capacity she gained through participating in the RAB to eventually become elected to the school board where she was able to have a bigger influence over community decisions. Another resident said that gaining the capacity to be a better community leader motivated him to lead an effort with a local organization to improve conditions for youth in the city:

> *So I think it was a totally encompassing experience for me as far as being better, being able to be a better community leader. So that's why I'm here where I am today [working with this youth organization]. Because I wouldn't have wanted to do this unless they built up my confidence and showed me that everybody has something to give no matter how old you are or where you come from, you have some resources that you can give to your community. (Participant 01)*

Overall, the residents gained the skills and confidence to improve their leadership capacity in the community. The next section will describe how the residents also gained skills that enhanced their problem solving capacity through participating on the RAB.

Problem solving. Residents developed several types of problem solving skills related to issues in the community through engaging in group discussions on the board and receiving direct training from the power brokers. For example, residents learned different problem-solving strategies for how to systematically approach big issues in their community, like crime or health care, by advising the power brokers on their community change efforts throughout the city. These strategies included how to identify solutions that could have the biggest impact on the community while taking account of available resources. The power brokers also provided formal training to the group on how to use different methods of voting and consensus building to organize and prioritize the group's ideas during discussions.

In addition to learning how to address large scale issues, residents also developed problem-solving skills to address problems on a smaller and more local scale. Some

residents gained local problem-solving strategies by learning how other residents and organizations were attempting to make community change during group discussions on the board. For example, some of these skills dealt with developing community projects to address different local issues and encompassed everything from coming up with a project design to funding the efforts on the ground. The following comment describes some of the project development skills one resident gained through the RAB:

> *I specially [learned] how to - when you're involved with a project how do you start? What do you look for? Talk about the when and the how and all those things. [What are] the sequence of events that take place? How to organize to ensure that you get the results that you want. So that [training] I think helped most of us. (Participant 02)*

Regardless of whether the issue was big or small, participating on the board allowed residents to learn "better ways" and "better methods" to address community problems. Several residents mentioned that these strategies increased their capacity to influence community conditions. For example, one resident said that these problem-solving skills gave him the confidence to join with others to tackle any community issue:

> *We know how to go about problem solving...if you have an issue, no issue is too big that you can't get together with a group and solve. You have to talk through it, you have to rationalize, and see what you want to do. You have to identify the problem or the issues and then see what's the best way to tackle it, and then what are your resources. You have to systematically approach this. We learned that. (Participant 01)*

Another resident said that she is better able to take efforts to improve community conditions "now that I know how to go about getting support and formulating different programs." In sum, the RAB experience gave residents the opportunity to develop a variety of problem-solving skills and this helped some of the residents build their capacity to influence the community.

Overall, the RAB provided an opportunity for residents to develop a gamut of

skills that could be used while participating on the board or while working in the

community. It is important to note that being provided with skills training suggested to

several residents that the power brokers were interested in investing in them as future

leaders and change agents in the community:

> *[The power brokers] brought in a consultant...and we had [training] sessions.*
> *And the sessions were all day long sessions, I think we might have even started on*
> *a Friday evening and we were there all day long...that was an investment of*
> *course - you pay consultants. That was an investment in us in terms of*
> *empowerment as leaders. (Participant 07)*

> *I always thought that the [power brokers] wanted us to evolve into a community*
> *group...I thought their whole focus was to develop [us as] community leaders. It's*
> *all about empowering people. Because if you empower me and show me how to*
> *do that kind of stuff, I help myself. I thought that what we should be doing as a*
> *[RAB] is evolving [into a community group]. (Participant 01)*

These perceptions had a direct effect on the residents' desire to expand their action and

roles on the board and will be discussed below in the section on residents' social

boundaries and resource dependencies.

Processes for Engaging in Problem Solving Actions on the RAB

Despite several attempts to pursue additional forms of problem-solving actions on

the RAC, the residents were only able to successfully carry out the act of advising the

power brokers' decisions regarding community programming and grants (see Table 2). A

description of this advising action can be found in the section above explaining the

residents' roles in the RAB. Advising the power brokers can be considered a problem-

solving action within the Gaventa and Cornwall model because it was an attempt by

residents to address issues in the community by giving information to decision-makers

who could channel resources to appropriate places and programs in the city. The process

of advising the power brokers on the RAB not only increased the residents' capacity to

influence community decisions by giving them access (albeit limited) to the power

brokers' decision-making process, but it also indirectly provided opportunities for

residents to continue improving their other forms of capacity on the board. For example,

residents were able to increase their knowledge about the community by participating in

advising discussions about the grant applications during board meetings. The process of

giving advice, specifically summarizing ideas and defending points, also helped residents

to develop and practice their communication skills as described above. Similarly, having

the "opportunity to have a voice [and] put it to work" in the RAB while advising the

power brokers built residents' confidence by showing them that their ideas were "worthy

of being heard" and useful for affecting change in the community. For example, one

resident said that the challenge of speaking at "the table with the executive cloth"

changed the way she felt about herself as a change agent:

> *I think I feel more confidence in my self [as a result of the RAB]. I think I feel*
> *more confident in giving my opinion about how I feel about my community. I think*
> *I feel more confident and more empowered to speak honestly and intelligently*
> *about different things within the community. Perhaps I wouldn't have had that*
> *confidence before. Perhaps I would have felt I was just a no voice...[that] my*
> *voice was not significant...But knowing that decisions that are made from bottom*
> *up does make a difference in bringing about change. I know now that voices from*
> *community are important for organizations, for corporations, for whoever it may*
> *be. Small voices are important to be listened to from the big voices. I understand*
> *that. (Participant 07).*

These last three examples demonstrate a cycle of praxis where advising the power

brokers increased residents' knowledge, skills, and confidence, which fed back into their

ability to advise the power brokers. Although they were limited to this one advising role,

the RAB setting gave residents the opportunity to carry out problem-solving actions and

this experience contributed to their capacity to influence community decisions. The next

section will describe the third capacity-building process within Gaventa and Cornwall's

(2001) model of empowerment.

RAB Processes for Shifting Consciousness

Residents experienced two shifts to their critical consciousness as a result of

participating in the RAB. These shifts included: 1) a critical awareness of community

problems and solutions; and 2) a shift in residents' desired sphere of influence (see Table

2). The following paragraphs will describe how residents shifted their consciousness on

the board and how this process increased their capacity to influence community decisions

and conditions.

Critical awareness of community. Five out of eight residents said that they gained

a more critical awareness of the community's problems and potential solutions for those

problems by participating on the RAB. This awareness came about through engaging in

group discussions with other members of the RAB and interacting with the community

while carrying out their roles in the community (i.e., promoting the power brokers'

efforts at community events, helping the power brokers with their evaluation, etc). For

example, one resident who was unaware of the problems affecting some of the

neighborhoods around the city started thinking differently about the needs of the

community when he heard other members of the RAB describe these conditions:

> *[The RAB] made me think about other people's problems... When you live in a*
> *vacuum you think about only your issues. But when you're exposed to other*
> *people's issues you say, wow I didn't think about that... I didn't know that was*
> *that bad until I hear what they're saying what it's like to live in that area. Maybe*
> *we should help focus on that because that's more critical. So it redirected my*
> *thinking and changed my way of thinking to some degree on some issues.*
> *(Participant 01)*

The RAB discussions also helped this resident to realize that the safety of his own

household could be compromised by the condition of other households in his

neighborhood and this realization helped to change his perspective about the importance of addressing other people's problems. Participating in the different RAB processes also shifted residents' understanding of "why [the city] was the way that it was" in terms of its issues and problems. For example, after attending several community events through her role on the RAB one resident realized that some community members' attitudes of entitlement and distrust were acting as "road blocks" and preventing them from getting involved in community change efforts. Similarly, after learning more about the condition of some of the neighborhoods in the community, another resident started asking critical questions about the problems in the community, such as whether people in poor neighborhoods were in the situations they were in because it was their "mindset that keeps them in that condition or because they're not given the opportunity to do anything." This same resident also started thinking differently about potential solutions to community problems as a result of participating in the RAB. For example, through learning about community conditions and the power brokers' efforts during board discussions, this resident started thinking more critically about the need for solutions to incorporate preventative measures and create "long-term systemic change." Specifically, she realized that the community needed:

> *...changes that are going to be more than just I got some daisies planted out here. But things like okay we have dilapidated houses in the area, we have empty abandoned buildings in the area. What is it that we can do long- term to stop this from happening? We can hold land lords accountable. We can hold home owners accountable. We can talk to people that are migrating from place to place and see what is it that's causing you to not be settled. (Participant 05)*

This comment illustrates how generating knowledge about community conditions, combined with a process for critically reflecting on that knowledge, pushed this resident to think about interventions to alleviate neighborhood problems. A similar effect was

seen by Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, and McCann (2005) in another knowledge generating setting where knowledge of community conditions and a collective understanding of how those conditions affect people's lives led to an "action-oriented critical consciousness" for participants.

There was some evidence that this critical consciousness impacted the residents' capacity to influence community decisions and conditions. For example, one resident said that shifting his awareness of the community's problems and solutions through the RAB experience increased his capacity to influence community decisions (and indirectly community conditions) by helping him to advise local organizations about writing grants that targeted more sustainable and systemic change. Another resident said that shifting her awareness of the community increased her capacity to influence community conditions by giving her ideas about how to develop youth programs that could more effectively address the root causes behind some of the community's problems. Increasing community awareness through the RAB also contributed to expanding the residents' desired sphere of influence in the community as described in the following section.

Shift in desired sphere of influence. All of the residents were already involved in the community in some capacity when they came onto the RAB (this was one of the reasons why they were chosen for the board). But this involvement was primarily confined to either small scale efforts (i.e., providing information or services to individuals, working on neighborhood projects) or efforts sponsored by local organizations (i.e., working for a food bank, volunteering at a community based organization, serving in a church, sitting on a committee). As a result of participating on the RAB, five out of eight residents expanded the sphere of influence that they wanted to

affect or felt responsible for affecting. For example, several residents were inspired by the experience of attempting to impact the power brokers' decisions on the RAB and as a result started looking for other ways to affect actions or decisions aimed at addressing community-wide issues as seen in the following comment:

> [I] feel like okay, if we can work like this [on the RAB,] then why can't everybody work like this? So you know you want to do everything...you want to change how the medical system was running, and how the city government was being ran, the school districts... I think being in the RAB made me feel like there are other decisions that I should have input on, where before [the RAB] I felt like [the community is] not gonna change, what difference does [my voice] make, why should I say anything, why should I do anything...[the RAB] gave me another perspective on looking at every little bit and every determination pushes it in another direction. So if you have enough passion for [changing the community]...you need to put your energy towards it. So I think that it probably shined more hope on wanting to fix [the community]...Whereas before everything kind of felt like nobody was listening to us anyway. (Participant 08)

Learning skills and hearing about other people's successful efforts in the community through participating on the RAB also helped some residents to shift their focus towards expanding their spheres of influence:

> I think learning those skills along the way, it helped to perfect or helped [the RAB residents] to be more specific in what our roles were you know - that we were not just community residents...we're not speaking to be heard anymore. We don't need to do that. We have something to say, it's going to be something important, something that's pertinent, something that's going to add to where we're trying to go...Being involved in [the RAB] I felt that there was so much potential in our residents and if we have the power...to help our community, let's use our power to make a difference... the condition of our community doesn't have to stay the way that it is ...We don't have to continually go up and down these streets and see the poverty or to see the stagnation that we see. We don't have to continue to see the detrimental things happening in our community. We can [make a] change, I mean we really can. (Participant 07)

> [Because of the RAB] now I know why I want to give back, I know how to give back, I hear what other folks doing and I want to do what they're doing to give back...before [the RAB] I would say I know how to do [community action] but I could care less about the rest of the neighborhood. So the [RAB] encouraged me to do a lot of different things. (Participant 01)

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As seen in these comments, as residents shifted the spheres of influence that they wanted to affect, they also increased their passion and motivation (i.e., capacity) to influence community conditions and decisions. This shift to some of the residents' desired sphere of influence also affected their social boundaries as will be described in a later section.

There were two residents who did not expand the sphere of influence they wanted to affect as a result of the RAB experience. These residents explained that they were not looking to expand this sphere because of personal reasons. For example, one resident was already feeling "overwhelmed" by all of the committees and neighborhood projects she was involved with when she joined the RAB. When this resident started having health problems half-way through her participation on the board, instead of wanting more influence in the community she "wanted to be just that little person again" who was less involved and had less stress. This was the same resident who left the board before her term was up. Another resident said that he was not interested in increasing his influence or involvement because he was getting older and wanted to start tapering off his activities to spend more time with his family. While the motivation behind these residents' decisions to avoid increasing their sphere of influence had nothing to do with the RAB, their examples demonstrate that there will always be natural limitations to increasing residents' capacity.

There was also a case where participating on the RAB actually discouraged one resident from wanting to expand her influence. This resident joined the board with a pre-existing desire to increase her sphere of influence but changed her mind as time went on because she became aware of the politics underlying some of the decisions about the community made by powerful stakeholders in the city. For example, she became

frustrated that the power brokers often did not stay accountable to their promises and favored certain organizations over others. This made her question the effectiveness of trying to impact change through higher levels of influence versus creating change at a more grass-roots level:

> *Unfortunately, [the RAB] made me change what I wanted to do because it felt like if at that level you're ineffective, what the hell else is there? You know I might as well go back to helping my neighbor paint their house as opposed to getting all this information and having all this stuff rattling around my head on who to call and how to make connections and how to make this stuff work and then see that at the top level that you still don't make any difference because people won't step up and believe in one thing, set a policy, and keep it...Somebody has to be in charge and they have to stay in charge and they have to have rules that are the same for everybody. And it's not like that. I'm not sure if it's not like that that [for power brokers] all over, but it's not like that for the [power brokers] in [our city]. (Participant 04)*

This resident was extremely involved (and quite outspoken) when she joined the RAB and these conditions could have elevated her expectations of what she wanted to accomplish through her participation on the RAB. Her experience implies that for certain residents the RAB experience could potentially damper residents' desires to expand their spheres of influence by showing them some of the realities that often accompany positions of power. The next section will describe how the RAB experience helped residents to expand their social networks in the community.

RAB Processes for Expanding Residents' Social Networks

Seven out of the eight residents said they increased their social networks as a result of participating on the board. The one resident who did not mention this shift left the board before her term was up and did not experience some of the same opportunities as the other members who finished their terms. Through their involvement on the RAB, the residents developed stronger social networks with three groups of stakeholders: 1)

organization stakeholders; 2) the power brokers; and 3) their fellow RAB residents (see

Table 2). According to the literature on civic engagement, developing social connections

can be valuable for increasing one's capacity to influence community conditions or

decisions by giving residents' access to "actionable resources" that can facilitate action;

these resources can include things like financial or technical support, emotional support,

information, collaboration, influence, and stakeholder trust (Coleman, 1988; Hyman,

2002). Social networks are also important for decreasing resource dependencies by

providing additional sources to obtain resources and this will be further discussed in a

later section. The following section will describe how the RAB experience facilitated the

shifts to residents' social networks and how these connections increased residents'

capacity to influence community decisions and conditions.

Organization stakeholder networks. Seven out of eight residents talked about

developing social connections with stakeholders from organizations in the community

through the RAB. While some residents had already developed organizational

connections as a result of working or volunteering prior to joining the board, the RAB

experience expanded this network by providing an opportunity to connect with

stakeholders from dozens of local organizations. For example, one resident said that

although he had many contacts in the city prior to joining the board, none of these

connections were with stakeholders in the non-profit sector; this resident was able to

expand his network to include these people by attending the networking meetings where

the residents had the opportunity to meet many organization stakeholders, including

organization directors and CEOs. Meeting these powerful stakeholders was a unique

opportunity for the RAB members because most residents in the community did not have

direct access to them on a daily basis. As one resident pointed out, I "probably would not have come in contact with those [organization stakeholders] if I had not been on the [RAB]." During the events residents spoke with stakeholders about their programs and made "good connections for getting involved in" future efforts sponsored by the organizations. The power brokers facilitated these expanding networks by encouraging the residents to stay in touch with organizations after networking events. Like the skills training mentioned above, this encouragement further suggested to residents that the power brokers were supportive of residents becoming more involved in the community. Instead of directly increasing the residents' capacity to influence community conditions and decisions, these social networks affected the residents' empowerment by shifting their social boundaries and resource dependencies and will be discussed in a later section.

Power broker networks. In addition to the organization stakeholders, the residents were also able to develop strong relationships with the power brokers on the board that allowed them to increase their capacity. Residents and power brokers spent many hours with each other at RAB meetings and events and as a result "got to know each other really well" over the years. Over time the RAB became a "close group" and "each one of [the residents] developed a personal relationship and a personal evolution with [the power brokers]." In fact, several of the residents described the group as "one big happy family" and said it shared many of the intimate qualities that actual families possess as seen in the following quote:

> And [the power brokers] are huggers - they will always give you a hug.
> Everybody hugged. You know you come into the meetings, everybody got a hug
> and you ate a meal together it was very relaxing. We had our meetings and you
> always hugged everyone on the way out. (Participant 01)

These relationships increased residents' capacity to influence community decisions on the

board by providing them with more open and available communication lines with the power brokers. For example, the power brokers offered residents the opportunity to communicate with them anytime, whether in or outside the RAB meetings, and encouraged them to contact them with ideas as seen in the following comment:

> *And then if we needed to talk about anything or wanted to share something, we could email [the power brokers] for that period of time [during the RAB]. We were free to do that if we had ideas to share, some comments or concerns. (Participant 07).*

Additionally, these networks increased resident's capacity by providing some residents with referrals to support within the community, even after the RAB had been terminated. For example, one resident said that even now she can "call [the power brokers] up right today and let them know I got an idea" for the community and they can "point me to people that can help me with that idea." According to all these examples mentioned above, the residents appeared to have developed personal relationships with the power brokers while participating on the RAB that increased their capacity to influence community decisions and conditions.

RAB resident networks. Residents also strengthened their networks with the other residents serving on the board while participating on the RAB. Residents made these connections naturally by spending time together in a "relaxed and friendly" setting and hearing each other "open up" while telling their personal stories. Most of the residents on the RAB saw each other as friends and trusted that "you could call any one of those [RAB residents] and they would help you find what you needed" in terms of information, connections, or support. There was only one resident who said that she did not get along with some of the other residents on the RAB and decided not to stay in contact with them after the board. This case was due to personal conflicts between the individual and the

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other RAB members though, and not for a lack of networking opportunities on the board.

These connections increased residents' capacity to influence community conditions in several ways. For instance, one resident used her connections with another resident on the board who had a job with a local non-profit organization to increase her neighbors' access to necessary services and supports in the community. Some of the residents also supported each other's capacity by attending events together and collaborating to address certain issues in the community. For example, while participating on the board one resident recalled working together with some of the other RAB residents in an effort to prevent a school closing in the community. All of these examples will be described in greater detail in the last section on empowering outcomes. Overall, residents developed strong social networks with the other resident members on the RAB and were able to tap into these connections to increase their capacity to influence the community.

Taken together, residents made positive shifts to their capacity to influence community conditions and decisions as a result of participating on the RAB. Through the RAB, residents were able to: increase their knowledge of community issues; develop their skills to communicate, problem solve, and work with others; take actions to influence the power brokers' decisions; develop a more critical consciousness about their community; and form social networks providing them with support and collaboration. Gaining this capacity had a significant impact on how some of the residents viewed themselves as captured in the following comments:

> *One of the other things I learned [on the RAB] is that you can't pay me what I'm worth in knowledge, experience, and skills and then my connections in this community. (Participant 04)*

The [RAB] has made me re-create or rejuvenate my life and know that I have something to give. I rethought my whole life. Rather than going home and saying I'm through with life or I've done my part - I still have something to give. So yes, it rejuvenated my whole life, yes. (Participant 01)

Another resident described the value and relevancy of her experience on the RAB as:

...priceless. In other words, I couldn't put an amount on what I learned and what I gained from being in that setting. (Participant 08)

The empowering processes described above were important for increasing residents' capacity to influence the community. As will be seen in a later section, these processes were also important for facilitating shifts to residents' social boundaries and resource dependencies on the board and in the community. The final part of this section will describe what about the RAB setting facilitated or inhibited these shifts to residents' capacity.

Elements of the RAB Setting Facilitating or Inhibiting Shifts to Residents' Capacity

This section will also summarize how the RAB setting fostered or inhibited the shifts residents' experienced to their knowledge, skills, action, consciousness, and social networks (research question 2). The RAB setting facilitated the shifts to residents' capacity in three ways by creating: 1) a safe environment for sharing; 2) opportunities to engage with powerful stakeholders; and 3) occasions for training and experiential learning. There was only a one example of a setting element that inhibited the residents' shifts to their capacity, namely the residents' lack of decision-making authority. The following will describe these facilitating and inhibiting elements in more detail.

Setting Elements Facilitating Shifts in Residents' Capacity

There were three main elements of the RAB setting that served to facilitate the residents' shifts to their capacity including: 1) a safe environment for sharing; 2)

opportunities to engage with powerful stakeholders; and 3) occasions for training and experiential learning (see Table 2). The following paragraphs will explore how these elements facilitated the capacity-building processes on the RAB.

Safe environment for sharing. One of the elements in the RAB that appeared to have facilitated the capacity-building processes for residents was the setting's safe and welcoming environment that encouraged residents to share their diverse experiences and opinions with the group. According to the residents, group members were "relaxed and friendly" and "willing to open up" and listen to each other while participating in the setting. This created an environment that encouraged the residents to share deeply with the group, no matter how personal or controversial the subject matter may have been:

> *There were sometimes when we would listen to one person the whole night because they felt like they had to express themselves or something was bothering them or they had an issue. (Participant 01)*

> *Being able to come out of the comfort zone and not feel like you were just going to be left high and dry...that takes a certain setting. The perfect example is my brother that's scared of the water because when he was younger somebody let him go out too far in the water and he got water in his lungs...So now he doesn't know how to swim because he's scared of the water. But if he had been in another setting where somebody put water wings on him and took him out, and let him enjoy the water, he could have been a great swimmer. So the difference in the two is the environment that was established, that it was safe or unsafe...[The RAB setting allowed you] to say what you feel, do what you feel, or you know make an opinion that may be totally off what you think everybody else thinks, but the safe environment creates growth because it allows you to go farther then you would if you felt fear. (Participant 08)*

As seen in these examples, the RAB's safe environment encouraged residents to share their diverse experiences and to contribute "different viewpoints" to the group's discussions. Because these diverse experiences and perspectives were included in the knowledge generating processes on the RAB, residents were able to gain a new awareness of the conditions and needs within different areas of their community:

It [the RAB] was about bringing the diverse community together and sharing. For instance, if I live on the north side of town, I don't know what the experiences are on the south side of town. So how else could I better empathize or see what that need was than to interface because we are a city of diverse people. So we did spend a lot of time sharing our diverse cultures and our different genders and races and different background, whether it be how we work, where we were educated at, how we grew up. (Participant 01)

As described in the section on consciousness-raising processes, the inclusion of each resident's diverse experiences within the RAB discussions challenged some of the residents' notions about the community and gave them a new awareness of the interconnectedness of their struggles and solutions. This finding is supported by a study conducted by Foster-Fishman et al. (2005) that demonstrated how a participatory action research setting was able to facilitate participatory competence for participants by providing a safe setting for group members to explore each others' diverse perspectives. Overall, the safe environment that was created within the RAB setting encouraged residents to share their diverse experiences and this facilitated the capacity-building processes within the board.

Opportunities to engage with powerful stakeholders. The RAB setting provided opportunities for residents to engage with two different types of powerful stakeholders as they participated on the board, namely organization stakeholders and the power brokers, and these opportunities facilitated the shifts to residents' knowledge, skills, consciousness, and social networks. For example, residents were given several opportunities to interact with organization stakeholders by attending the networking events as part of their role on the RAB. As mentioned in previous sections, residents built their capacity through engaging with these stakeholders because they were able to learn more about the various organizations and programs in the community and expand their

social networks to include members of the non-profit sector. The RAB setting also gave

residents numerous opportunities to engage with the power brokers over the course of the

board and this facilitated the residents' capacity in several ways. For example, as

mentioned above engaging with the power brokers in the grant review process taught

residents privileged knowledge about the system of community funding. Sitting at the

same table with the power brokers during the review process also boosted some of the

residents' confidence and gave them an opportunity to practice their communication

skills with a professional audience (see above section on skill building processes). In

addition to knowledge and skills, engaging with the power brokers during the grant

review process facilitated shifts to the residents' consciousness and awareness by helping

to expand the sphere of influence some of them wanted to affect (see above section on

consciousness-raising processes). Finally, engaging with the power brokers over the

course of the RAB helped the residents to develop relationships with the power brokers

which further expanded their social networks. Overall, the setting offered many

opportunities for residents to interact with powerful stakeholders during their

participation and these interactions facilitated shifts in the residents' capacity.

   Occasions for training and experiential learning. The most direct way in which

the RAB setting facilitated shifts to residents' capacity was through providing occasions

for formal training and experiential learning on the board. These training and learning

processes provided the major route for residents to develop their skills on the board. For

example, as mentioned above in the section on skill-building processes, the power

brokers provided the residents with direct training that helped them to develop skills

related to communication, group facilitation, community leadership, and problem

solving. A major part of this training that facilitated the residents' shifts in capacity, specifically their confidence, was the fact that the power brokers openly encouraged the residents to feel confident in applying their new skills in the community. In the following comment one resident recounted how this encouragement helped to facilitate the shifts to the residents' skills and confidence:

> *I would say the things that encouraged me the most [to use my skills in the community], and probably for all of us, was the fact that they [the power brokers] made you feel you could all do this. [The power brokers said,] "We asked you what you wanted and you said you guys would like training. All of you wanted that and we brought the training. You know you've got the capabilities to do this." They encouraged us to feel comfortable to be able to...let [organizations] know that we're very aware of what's going on in our community...to communicate better with the people that maybe previously...[we] might have felt kind of a little shaky about approaching because well that's the head of the such and such organization. (Participant 03)*

By helping the residents recognize their own skills, this encouragement and training also facilitated shifts in residents' consciousness by expanding the sphere of influence they felt capable of affecting. The setting also facilitated the shifts to residents' skills by providing space for experiential learning. For example, residents were able to practice their group facilitation and communication skills at the networking meetings by actually helping to facilitate some of the break out sessions and talking with the organization stakeholders (see section on skill-building processes). They also practiced these skills by participating in exercises where they could role play different scenarios with the other residents during training sessions (see above sections for examples). Overall, the residents would probably not have been able to experience as many shifts to their skills or consciousness if the setting had not provided occasions for them to engage in direct training and experiential learning opportunities.

Setting Elements Inhibiting Shifts in Residents' Capacity

While mentioned less frequently than the facilitating elements, there was also one element of the RAB setting that appeared to have inhibited the residents' shifts in capacity, namely the lack of residents' real decision-making authority in the setting (see Table 2). Specifically, this lack of decision-making authority inhibited shifts to the residents' skills and action on the board. For example, one resident recalled that at one point a few residents on the board requested training from the power brokers on how to change public policy. Instead of facilitating the development of this skill by providing direct training as they had done with their other skills (i.e., communication, leadership), the power brokers denied the residents' request. Because the residents had no authority over these types of decisions on the board, they were inhibited from receiving the training. One resident recalled her frustration with this situation in the following comment:

> *What I thought was [the community's problems are] systemic and I don't know how to change it...Several of us said we would like to go to workshops where they talk about how you change policy. I mean I can change policy on the PTA because I can run the damn thing...On the city level, on the state level, I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to run the gamut of that thing and they didn't teach us that and didn't try to teach us that. They may not have wanted us to know. But it seems to me that going from that PTA president to the [RAB] for the [power brokers] should have given me an opportunity to learn how to do those things. (Participant 04)*

This example also shows how the residents were dependent upon the power brokers in the RAB for resources like policy training and will be discussed again in the next section on resource dependencies.

In addition to training, the lack of residents' decision-making authority in the RAB setting also inhibited shifts to residents' action on the board. This action fell into two main categories. First, as mentioned above, some of the residents wanted to use their

newly developed facilitation skills to organize a resident-driven community forum

through the RAB where community residents could ask questions about resident

involvement and learn how to become engaged in community efforts. In addition to the

forum, some resident also had an idea for a resident grant-seeking group where the RAB

residents would go out and find needs in the city, meet as a group to develop plans to

address those issues, and then come back to the power brokers to get resources to enact

their plans:

> *[The RAB residents were interested in] coming up with different ventures that
> needed to be done in the community on our own, getting together collaboratively,
> collectively and saying now they told us how to think outside the box for
> ourselves, what are our community's needs? Not my need, but what are our city's
> needs. What things can we do? Let's tackle it! Let's go forth and say okay, this is
> what we need and then sit down and write out the program for it. And then go to
> [the power brokers] and say, "okay [power brokers], help us do this."...I want to
> create a program and say "there's a need for this, [power brokers]." And they
> say, "Wow, this is a great idea." And we'll say, "We need this in five years and
> this and this and this." [The power brokers would say,] "Wow, we can sit back
> now, we developed you guys." So I thought their whole focus was to develop
> community leaders. It's all about empowering people... I thought that what we
> should be doing as a [RAB] is evolving. (Participant 01)*

Some of the residents on the RAB were excited about both of these ideas for action and

asked the power brokers to support them in carrying out these efforts as part of their

participation on the board. Yet like the policy training, the power brokers did not grant

the residents' requests. Because the residents did not have the decision-making authority

in the setting to override the power brokers' decision they were inhibited from carrying

out this action on the board. These examples also relate to the residents' dependencies on

the power brokers' resources and will be referenced again in the next section. Overall, the

lack of resident decision-making authority in the RAB setting inhibited shifts to

residents' skills and action on the board. The next section will continue the residents'

story on the RAB and explain how participating in the RAB influenced the residents' social boundaries and resource dependencies.

Understanding Shifts to Social Boundaries and Resource Dependencies within the RAB

Although the residents increased their capacity to influence community conditions and decisions through participating on the RAB, they encountered several limitations to actually putting this capacity to use in both the board and in the community. These limitations were conceptualized as two moderating factors: social boundaries (Hayward, 1998) and resource dependencies (Emerson, 1972). While the RAB experience expanded some of the factors limiting the residents' influence, this effect depended on the type of influence the residents were seeking in these contexts. The following sections will describe how the RAB experience affected the moderating factors of social boundaries and resource dependencies both within the RAB and within the community.

Social Boundaries and Resource Dependencies within the RAB Context

The residents' experience of participating on the RAB affected the moderating factors of social boundaries and resource dependencies in different ways over the course of the board. In the beginning phase of the RAB, the RAB experience positively affected the social boundaries and resource dependencies limiting the residents' empowerment in the setting. This was primarily because the residents and power brokers had a dynamic exchange relationship and the residents did not desire any roles beyond their advising position in the setting. In contrast, during the second phase of the RAB the residents' experience became less effective at shifting the social boundaries and resource dependencies within the setting, and in some cases actually made them worse. This occurred because over time the exchange relationship between residents and power

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brokers on the board became stagnant and caused the residents to request roles that fell outside of their social boundaries. The following sections will describe in more detail how the different phases of exchange relationships on the board changed the way in which the residents' RAB experience affected the social boundaries and resource dependencies limiting their empowerment in the setting.

Phase one: dynamic exchange relationships. The RAB experience made modest shifts to the residents' social boundaries and resource dependencies during the initial phase of the board because of the dynamic exchange relationship that was developed between the residents and power brokers. For example, one of the social boundaries affecting the residents' empowerment was the power brokers' historical norms for engaging residents. As mentioned in a previous section, prior to the RAB the power brokers' norm was to make all their decisions independent of resident feedback. The power brokers took actions to shift this norm in response to their desire to gain input (i.e., a resource) from local residents who were knowledgeable about the community. This input was needed to inform the power brokers' decisions regarding a series of large grants they were planning to distribute to the community, as well as their plans for future programming in the community. The following are some of the residents' perceptions of the purpose for creating the RAB:

> *We were told that it [the purpose of the RAB] was to give input from a...resident perspective when it comes to large amounts of money being given to organizations. (Participant 04)*

> *The purpose of the RAB committee for me was so that residents had a voice in who the [power brokers] considered for big grant money. (Participant 09)*

> *My take on the RAB was for the [power brokers] to really hear from the community residents as they make decisions about funding...To make sure the funding that was appropriated, that it is appropriated in the right areas.*

By shifting this social boundary and providing residents with opportunities to influence

their decisions, the power brokers also created a new exchange relationship with the

residents. The exchange relationship was set up where the power brokers would give the

residents opportunities to influence their decisions in exchange for the residents'

knowledge of the community and public endorsement of their efforts. This example

demonstrates how the theories of social boundaries and resource dependencies are

iteratively connected to each other (see Figure 2).

This exchange relationship was dynamic during the first half of the board because

the residents were heavily involved with the power brokers' grant review cycles and gave

advice on dozens of grant proposals. Some cycles were intense according to residents,

where "every two weeks we [the residents] got our grant proposals... sometimes 6-12

grants at a time." In exchange for the residents' knowledge, the power brokers

incorporated the residents' advice into some of their grant decisions as seen in the

following comments;

> *And so when you see [power brokers] that's willing to compromise - I saw them change their mind on grants. Cause we bring the perspective that they don't know anything about and they say, "Let's go check this out" ...or say, "well okay you guys feel like that, it's what you're here for." (Participant 01)*

> *...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 [we don't care]. And they didn't get funded. (Participant 04)*

> *...there have been times where they 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. (Participant 07)*

This finding was also supported by Droege et al. (2007) as seen in the following two

comments taken from the RAB meetings minutes:

> *Yes we are advisory, but I see [the Power Brokers] using that advice...I wanted to be a part of the decision process that helps our community as a whole...I feel validated. (Resident)*

> *This is my opportunity to direct the process for the good of my community. I want to make change in my community, and I think this is one of the best ways to do it. (Resident)*

In addition to the grant decisions, this new exchange relationship also allowed the residents to exchange their knowledge for influence over the power brokers' programming decisions. Like the grant review process, the residents also felt that these exchanges benefited both the power brokers and the residents. For example, at one of the first meetings the power brokers asked the residents for their feedback regarding a major change they were in the process of making to their community programming. The residents drew upon their knowledge of the community to argue why this change would lead to disastrous results in the community and in response the power brokers decided to alter their programming decision according to the residents' suggestions.

Overall, during the first half of the board the residents were quite happy with the influence they were gaining from the exchange relationship with the power brokers, suggesting that they had been able to successfully use their capacity to become empowered in the setting.

> *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. (Participant 08)*

Even though the purpose of the board (as proscribed by the power brokers) was in itself a social boundary limiting residents' influence, it was inconsequential at this point in the residents' experience on the RAB because they did not desire influence outside of this

boundary. While the power brokers did not use the residents' knowledge of the community in all of their decisions, there was evidence that initially they valued the residents' input and in some cases at least partially depended upon it for their decision-making processes. This dependency gave residents a small degree of leverage in the RAB context and increased their ability to influence the decisions the power brokers offered the residents in their exchange relationship. The next section will describe how the RAB experience affected the residents' social boundaries and resource dependencies differently when they started requesting resources outside of their exchange relationship with the power brokers.

Phase two: stagnant exchange relationships. In contrast to the dynamic exchanges taking place during the first phase of the RAB, the residents' experience during the second phase of the board had less of a positive affect on the social boundaries and resource dependencies limiting their empowerment in the setting because the exchange relationship between residents and power brokers became stagnant (see Figure 2). As time passed on the RAB the power brokers started changing the parameters of their exchange relationship with the residents by no longer offering the residents influence over their decisions in exchange for their knowledge of the community:

> *I think initially [the power brokers] were listening. I think initially they were very hungry to hear what we had to say. I think initially or for a good portion of it they really valued our opinions. I think as we continued along the way, for whatever reasons, our opinions or our take on certain things was not as strongly...I don't know what to say, not as strongly necessary because I think there was a shifting that happened to where I think that they were just going to do what they were going to do... (Participant 07)*

> *Why are you bringing me here? Okay I'll take your money. Because they paid us pretty good. But it didn't always feel like it mattered whether we were there or not...I don't know what an advisory committee is supposed to be but [over time] it didn't feel like we gave anybody any advice. (Participant 04).*

This latter comment illustrates a level of frustration that has been documented in other

collaborative groups when citizens or residents are encouraged to engage in advising

processes that have no potential for influencing power brokers' decisions (Reich, 1991).

While the residents were never guaranteed an influence over the power brokers'

decisions, the power brokers' shift away from seeking the residents' input (and revival of

their previous social boundary for residents) contrasted with their dynamic exchanges

that occurred with the residents in the initial stages of the RAB. This shift occurred even

though the residents had significantly improved their ability to advise the power brokers

by developing their capacity through the RAB (which according to exchange theory

should have made the residents' resources more desirable to the power brokers). Clearly,

for reasons outside the residents' control the power brokers had become less dependent

on the residents' input to inform their decision-making in the latter half of the board. This

lack of dependency allowed the power brokers to start rebuilding the former social

boundaries that constrained residents' access by adopting their previous norms for

engaging residents (see Figure 2).

The power brokers' shift away from engaging residents continued when they

stopped bringing grants to the board for review (i.e., into the exchange relationship) after

their initial granting cycles had ended. Once these grant cycles ended and the residents

had nothing to review on the board, the power brokers had the group start spending more

time discussing their internal processes. Some of the residents perceived this internal

planning as a "waste of time" and sensed that the power brokers were stalling to figure

out what they wanted to do with the group:

It just turned into nothing but discussions about...the RAB committee, it wasn't

about things that were going on in the community. You know we tried to come together and make a plan, and when I left there still wasn't a plan. It just seemed like it was a struggle. I don't know if someone was dragging their feet or what was going on...I sat on other boards and I've seen...how long it took us to do those things. And then I'm coming here to the RAB committee and its taking even double the time to do it. (Participant 09)

The resident who made the latter comment left the board shortly after this planning period started. When the power brokers shifted the group towards this planning phase, some of the residents tried to revive the dynamic conditions characterized by their initial exchanges with the power brokers by requesting to review other grant proposals within the power brokers' decision-making process:

I personally would have liked an opportunity for like the smaller grants that came in. Not to make the decisions because that's not what we're there for, you know we knew we were advisory. But for [the power brokers] to ask us on a few more grants that might have been unique or new, ones that have never been asked before, our take on a few of them. And I know several others said that they really would like that experience... I hinted at it [to the power brokers], I was careful how I said it, a couple of them [residents] just plain said, "Aren't we going to be able to see more grants?" (Participant 03)

According to this resident, in response to these requests one of the power brokers replied by saying, "well that's not really the direction of [our] advisory groups." This response again shows how the power brokers were slowly reforming the social boundaries for residents on the board and making the residents more dependent on the power brokers for opportunities to influence decisions.

While some of the residents made efforts to request additional opportunities to influence the power brokers' decisions, most did not fight to expand their social boundaries on the board and instead grew complacent. There are three potential reasons for this complacency. First, as the power brokers became less interested in the residents input as time went on, the board's "discussions got less heated and less passionate" and

many residents became resigned to the fact that they were powerless to change the power

brokers' practices (i.e. social boundaries):

> *I don't think that we felt that it was our right to try and shift what the [power brokers] wanted to do [with the RAB]. I think there was some concerns like "well I thought that we were suppose to do this" and "I thought that we were going in this direction but HEY, if you know this is what you guys decided it's fine!" There was always that fine line to where it got to a point that we would perhaps voice like, "well, I thought that this is what we were suppose to do, but if the decision the [power brokers] wants is to move in this shift, who are we you know? 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. (Participant 07)*

A similar response was seen by Rich et al. (1995) where citizens felt a sense of

powerlessness after their efforts to influence local power brokers were thwarted. This

sense of powerlessness can be thought of as an internalized social boundary that

convinced the residents that they were dependent on the power brokers and helpless to

change their circumstances. Thus, even though some of the residents said that

participating in the board had helped them to develop the desire to affect change at higher

levels of influence in the community (see comments in above section on shifts in

consciousness), the RAB experience did not help them develop enough capacity to

overcome their personal social boundary and challenge their dependency on the power

brokers' authority in the board.

Second, some of the residents may not have challenged the power brokers'

decisions because they did not want to compromise their relationships with the power

brokers. For example, one resident thought that some of the residents did not push back

because:

> *...they were getting jobs and things like that. They were benefiting from their connection to the [power brokers]...And so they felt some of that frustration but were not willing to confront them [the power brokers] on that...[they would say,]*

"I think they're going to do whatever they want to do." And that's not me, I'm like, "...Well what about what we said?" [They would say,] "Well it's not right but you know, they just ask us for advice and then they're going to do what they want to do."...They [the other residents] were going to do what the [power brokers] wanted them to do. (Participant 04)

This comment illustrates that participating on the RAB provided certain benefits to some of the residents on the board and that over time these residents had become dependent on the resources they were receiving from their close connection to the power brokers. Thus, in order to continue receiving their benefits these residents had to constrain their own desires to push back against the social boundaries within the setting in order to remain within the power brokers' favor. It appears that by offering these added benefits, the RAB experience essentially co-opted some of the residents into complacency.

Third, the nature of the shift itself may have contributed to the residents' complacent reaction. According to the residents the power brokers shifted away from engaging the residents by making subtle changes over time and only after they had developed trusting relationships with the residents. By shifting the board in this way, the power brokers could have obscured their efforts to tighten the residents' social boundaries and prevented the residents from even seeing the need to challenge their authority. Overall, when residents began desiring influence over decisions that fell outside of their exchange relationship with the power brokers, the RAB experience stopped expanding the residents' social boundaries or reducing their resource dependencies and actually appeared to reinforce the limitations to their empowerment.

The power brokers' shift away from seeking the residents' advice basically reduced the residents' leverage over the power brokers' decisions about the community on the RAB. In response, the residents tried to initiate a second type of exchange

relationship with the power brokers by asking them for roles on the board that would allow them to carry out efforts in the community. While these roles were outside of the power brokers' initially designated purpose (social boundaries) for resident participation on the RAB, one of the main reasons why the residents requested them (apart from the fact that they no longer had any advising roles on the board) was because the power brokers' training and encouragement had persuaded them to want to use their capacity in the community. For example, after the grant cycles ended the power brokers decided to use some of the meeting time to provide training for the residents to increase their capacity. As mentioned above, over time the power brokers' training and encouragement increased the residents' capacity and motivation to influence community conditions and expanded the sphere of influence that they wanted to affect (i.e., shifting their focus from small neighborhood projects to comprehensive city-wide efforts). The effect of these ongoing capacity-building processes on the residents' desire for additional roles on the RAB is reminiscent of Keiffer's (1984) developmental processes for gaining participatory competence.

As a result of developing this capacity, several residents on the board requested additional roles on the RAB that would allow them to put their capacity to use by organizing two different types of resident-led efforts in the community. As described above, these efforts included a community forum and a resident grant-seeking group. Both of these efforts were aimed at promoting outcomes related to resident engagement and community development and, according to Droege et al.'s (2007) review of the RAB's meeting minutes, were aligned with the officially stated outcomes the power brokers wanted for their community programming. This alignment should have made the

residents' resources and ideas very appealing to the power brokers. In fact, one resident

even recounted that at an earlier point in the board the power brokers had actually talked

to the residents about utilizing their capacity in the community as seen in the following

comment:

> *There was a phase two that was suppose to have happened... they were going to be looking to us to use us in the future for different purposes. You know in leadership roles and developing us as leaders...I think the invitation was given to us that, "we could use you all as leaders as we move forward and we may call upon you for whatever it may be so, as we go through these sessions we want to make sure that you are very sure of who you are and we want to help develop your leadership qualities." (Participant 07)*

Despite this alignment and previous planning, the power brokers refused to engage with

the residents in this new exchange relationship and denied the residents' requests to carry

out roles that could increase their influence over community conditions:

> *And we were trying to do a question and answer forum. And provide a place people could come and maybe have some representatives from the organizations...And then that way people would learn how they could get involved and pick up information and feel comfortable in a learning environment. We wanted to do that, but we couldn't ever really put it together...[because] where we were headed was a little bit different as a group than...their [the power brokers] goal for RAC...it wasn't real clear at first. We just were told "there' some parameters, there are certain things. We know what you're trying to do, and it would be great, but there are some things we can't do." (Participant 03)*

This quote clearly illustrates how the power brokers were maintaining the residents'

social boundaries on the RAB by enacting policies defining the types of things residents

could and could not as board members. Further evidence of the power brokers' efforts to

maintain the social boundaries limiting residents' empowerment can be seen in one of the

power brokers' comments dismissing the residents' requests for additional roles on the

RAB that was taken from the RAB meeting minutes examined by Droege et al. (2007):

> *...my only caution is that I don't think you want to be community change agents...if you want to help your neighbors work around a particular issue that is*

> *fine...from a [RAB] perspective, do you feel you want to be community change agents? (Power Broker)*
>
> *What is your plan here? I don't really envision [RAB] members creating a forum for changing the community here. (Power Broker)*

As with the residents' knowledge of the community, the power brokers did not appear to be dependent on the residents' efforts (i.e., their resource) to reach their goals in the community and this gave them the freedom to constrict the residents' social boundaries.

After being denied by the power brokers on the RAB, some of the residents said that they were unable to carry out these community efforts on their own. One of the reasons they cited was that these efforts were nearly impossible to carry out without the financial resources from stakeholders like the power brokers:

> *So we were trying to get the RAB committee to stay focused and stay a group because I thought with all this learning we had all this togetherness, why disband. Why not stay and be constructive in some way...and show the [power brokers] that we appreciate what they did and we're doing constructive engagement in our community. So I tried to do that...[but] it's not going [today] because it's very hard when you have individuals that are without a job, without daycare, without cars, without gas, without transportation. It's just very hard...[The power brokers] were the cohesive part. We had a meeting place and they took care of some of the gas or getting there, the bus or the daycare. So without those kinds of funds, it's hard to do that. (Participant 01)*
>
> *To do something like that [the community forum], we would definitely need the support of someone like the [power brokers] to do it because you have to have funding. (Participant 03)*

Yet just because the residents could not convince the power brokers (or force them by leveraging their resources) to financially support their efforts does not necessarily mean that the residents were actually dependent on the power brokers to carry out these efforts. For example, according to the interviews there were other sources besides the power brokers that the residents could have sought out to obtain financial resources for their efforts, such as some of the organizations they had met at the networking meetings. It is

unclear why these residents did not seek out other types of funding in the community. It appears that the RAB experience may have limited their ability to think about finding resources outside of the exchange relationship with the power brokers, and as a result created a false resource dependency on the power brokers. Like the residents' dependency on the power brokers' favor mentioned above, this dependency (even if it was not really a dependency) created a social boundary limiting residents' action and influence.

As the board entered its third year, the power brokers reverted back to their initial norm (social boundary) of making all of their decisions independent of resident input and totally eliminated their dependency on the residents:

> *By the time it was all over and said and done, RAB is eliminated and the programming is how it was then to where it is now ...Basically I think the decisions are back to where it was before. The decisions are being made by the [power brokers] and not being filtered through a community group. (Participant 07)*

The termination occurred despite the fact that the residents perceived that they had developed strong relationships with the power brokers through participating in the RAB, a condition that according to exchange theory would have increased the power brokers' motivation to continue exchanging with the residents (Emerson, 1972). Several of the residents requested that the board continue, but these requests were denied just like the other attempts residents had made to sustain their exchange relationship with the power brokers. The residents had limited opportunities to challenge this social boundary because the first time they were informed of the termination was at the last meeting:

> *Because they [the power brokers] knew this transition was coming, we didn't. We weren't right then clear that this transition was coming...that we were [going to be] dissolved... [One of the power brokers] told us at the last meeting that there would be a transition and there was planning going on. (Participant 03).*

Clearly, the termination of the board did not expand the residents' social boundaries or positively shift the resource dependencies affecting their influence over the power brokers' decisions on the RAB.

Overall, the residents' experience on the RAB effectively shifted the social boundaries and resource dependencies limiting their empowerment on the board during the initial phase when the exchange relationships between residents and power brokers were dynamic. In contrast, the RAB experience had a more negative affect on the residents' social boundaries and resource dependencies on the board as the exchange relationship between residents and power brokers slowly disintegrated. The next section will shift away from the RAB context and describe how the residents' experience on the board affected the social boundaries and resource dependencies affecting their empowerment in the community.

Social Boundaries and Resource Dependencies in the Community

The RAB experience affected the social boundaries and resource dependencies limiting the residents' empowerment in the community context by helping the residents to establish exchange relationships with community stakeholders. These exchange relationship were needed because while residents were participating on the RAB it was unusual for decision-making stakeholders in the community, such as organization stakeholders, to actively engage residents in their decision-making or their efforts. The residents said that stakeholders did not "understand how to draw in residents and communicate with them" and "did not take residents seriously" because they assumed that they were unable to help the organization in its efforts. Despite the fact that many of the power brokers' grant requirements included a resident engagement piece, many

organizations in the city were still having a hard time buying into the idea of "pulling" residents into their efforts even after these mandates were enacted. This disregard for resident engagement, like the power brokers' disregard, had become a norm in the community that created a formidable social boundary limiting opportunities for residents to influence the community. The stakeholders were able to maintain this boundary because they did not see themselves as dependent on the residents' resources for their work.

The RAB experience helped the residents overcome these limitations by giving them the resources needed to attract community stakeholders into exchange relationships and become brokers within the community. As mentioned above, residents made significant increases to their resources (i.e., knowledge, skills, and consciousness) by participating in trainings and other capacity-building processes on the RAB. The residents also gained the resource of a reputation in the city through their association with the power brokers on the board:

> *I think people see [the power brokers] as [the city] to some degree. And they say, "whoa, [the power brokers]!" Of course I didn't go there [to the RAB] because of that, but that's what happens. [People would say,] "How can you be involved with a meeting [with the power brokers]?" Well, I am. So that is kind of automatic in a way. (Participant 02)*

> *But that was like the highest honor at that time, to be on that committee.*

> *(Participant 09)*

> *It looks really good on a resume that I was a consultant for the [power brokers]. (Participant 04)*

As residents started displaying these resources in the community, for example through participating in networking events and representing the RAB in the community, several residents thought that some stakeholders started shifting their views of residents. For

example, one resident thought that because of the RAB experience she was taken more

seriously by some stakeholders in the community:

> *[As a result of the RAB] I probably was taken more seriously...[by] people in the community that didn't value my opinion. Like I said in a small town, it's about credibility, and it's about reputation...it's like a click...once you're in, everybody kind of listens, everybody now wanna hear what you got to say. But if you're not in, don't nobody wanna hear what you got to say, regardless if it's the same words. The same person that I was outside of the [RAB] is the same person I am today, but you carry a little bit more clout when you're part of something that has clout, and even more so in a smaller town. Because you're nobody until somebody makes you something, basically that's it...So good or bad, that's what I think the [RAB] did for some of the residents...a light got shown on them. "Okay, oh well if [the power brokers] thinks she works, let's see what she got." (Participant 08)*

Similarly, several residents perceived that *some* of the attending organization

stakeholders gained a different outlook after learning about how the residents were

involved in the RAB and seeing the residents demonstrate their skills and knowledge

(i.e., resources) at the networking meetings:

> *You have people where these kinds of things [networking events] change their minds and give them a different outlook. So I think we had half a dozen to one and half a dozen to the other. I do think that it [participating in the networking event] influenced some organizations, yes. [They started thinking,] "These are people that can make a difference. They can help us with whatever we're trying to do in the community." (Participant 05)*

As seen in the above quote, the stakeholders shifted their attitudes towards residents

because they recognized that the residents had resources that were valuable to their own

efforts. Thus, the residents were able to utilize their resources to expand their social

boundaries because there was an initial demand for the residents' resource in the

community. This same pattern was seen in relation to the power brokers' initial decision

to start engaging residents in the RAB.

As a result of this attitude shift, *some* of the organizations shifted their previous

practices (i.e., social boundaries) and entered into exchange relationships with the

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residents. For example, one resident said that after developing relationships with local

non-profit organizations through the RAB, different stakeholders started contacting him

for guidance about their grants:

> *[Prior to joining the RAB] I had a lot of influence in the community...but it wasn't*
> *in the non-profit sector. And I think I have a lot of influence now in the grant*
> *making arena...because of me being on the [RAB], I brought a whole different*
> *perspective to those who want to write a grant and want help....and so it was out*
> *of the [RAB] I think I'm able to help people in that arena...People still come to*
> *me even now that I'm not apart of the [RAC] and come and ask me about grants.*
> *They come to me and think I'm still involved [with the power brokers]...And I say*
> *well maybe you want to do this, maybe you should go to this person, that's the*
> *wrong place to go for that grant. So I still have an impact - not direct impact - but*
> *I have some advisory impact. (Participant 01)*

The fact that stakeholders continued to pursue his advice over time demonstrates a degree

of dependency on his knowledge. This last quote also illustrates that not only was it the

resident's knowledge of the grant-making process that appealed to these stakeholders, but

also his reputation of working with the power brokers. Similarly, after seeing the RAB

members represent the RAB at a networking event the director of an organization in the

city invited the residents to participate with her organization in a speaking tour to a

nearby city. This speaking tour gave residents the opportunity to talk about what it was

like working with the RAB and to give their ideas for engaging residents. Because the

residents were the only ones in the city who could speak about their experience with the

RAB, the organization was dependent on them to make the speaking tour a success; this

dependency increased the residents' ability to leverage their resources in exchange for

opportunities to influence community decisions. In another example, stakeholders from a

local organization gave two RAB residents the opportunity to help facilitate (and thus

influence) a series of meetings at their organization after seeing the residents use their

facilitation skills (resources which they developed through the RAB training) at one of

the networking meetings. Here again, the organization shifted their practice to engage the residents after becoming more interested in acquiring the residents' resources. In a final example, one resident used several exchange relationships she had developed with organization stakeholders she had met at the networking events to increase her influence. In these exchange relationships the residents served as a broker by feeding information to the organizations in exchange for the organizations' support with several community projects her neighborhood was trying to start:

> *I think that RAB members kind of were expected to maybe keep in touch with organizations. Let them know what you're hearing from residents. And I do that if I'm at something, tell them I talked to so and so...and let them know, if you contacted this resident group here and let them know that you heard that, you know you might be able to start something up with them. And you guys could have some project together...We were encouraged [by the power brokers] to be connectors. (Participant 03)*

As this resident utilized her communication skills and knowledge of the community (both resources) to draw this organization into an exchange relation, she was able to expand the social boundaries for herself and her fellow community residents.

Despite these examples, the RAB experience did not enable the residents to shift all of their social boundaries or resource dependencies. For example, according to the residents there were still many organizations in the city that did not shift their social boundaries for residents despite the potential for them to utilize the residents' resources for their efforts. For example, residents said that many organization stakeholders were still "a little distant" to the idea of resident action because they were struggling to accept the new paradigm of resident engagement. One resident said that some of the organizations were "waiting to see" what happened to some of the organizations that were starting to engage residents in their processes. This hesitation on the part of the

organizations was compounded by the fact that according to several residents many organization stakeholders did not have a good understanding of "who the heck we were" as members of the RAB. One resident said that many community members did not even know that the RAB existed because the board was not publicized enough throughout the city. Other residents recounted that the power brokers did not formally introduce the residents at the networking events or adequately explain to the attendees who the residents were or what they did on the RAB. As a result, some stakeholders tended to overlook the residents' resources, focusing instead on whether the power brokers were going to accept their grants as illustrated in the following quote:

> *I don't think [the organization stakeholders] really got it. I don't think they really knew what we were doing. They just knew we were part of the [RAB]. No one really asked to me personally, "what is it that you guys are doing?" They kind of accepted it for what it was. Maybe I was asked, "So you're part of the advisory team that type of thing."...But they never dug into exactly what we were doing. They just took us for what we were as resident advisors. We were just in the resident advisory committee. And people were like "okay! As long as we get our grants [from the power brokers], it's fine with me!" (Participant 07)*

Nevertheless, while the RAB experience did not shift all of the residents' social boundaries and resource dependencies, it was fairly effective in helping residents become more empowered in the community – certainly more so than their empowerment in the RAB context.

Overall, the RAB experience was mixed in its ability to shift the social boundaries and resource dependencies limiting residents' empowerment. For example, even though the residents were initially successfully able to overcome the social boundaries and resource dependencies limiting their empowerment in the RAB context, these gains were lost (and in some cases reversed) because over time the power brokers reduced their need for the residents' resources and took efforts to dismantle their exchange relationship with

the residents on the board. On the other hand, the RAB experience did positively shift the residents' social boundaries and resource dependencies in the community by allowing them to establish exchange relationships with stakeholders, although they were not able to establish these relationships with all stakeholders. The next section will integrate all of the previous sections into a final discussion of whether participating on the RAB was empowering for residents.

Shifts to Residents' Empowerment as a Function of Participating in the RAB

As described in the introduction, the current study examined resident empowerment in the RAB by with a model suggesting that the relationship between the residents' empowering processes on the board and their empowerment were moderated by social boundaries and resource dependencies (see Figure 1). According to the residents' experiences, the outcome of participating on the RAB was less empowering in the RAB context than in the community context. This was because the residents' empowerment was more limited by the social boundaries and resource dependencies in the RAB context than in the community. The following sections will describe how the overall RAB experience affected the residents' empowerment in both the RAB and community context.

Empowerment in the RAB

As described above, the residents' ability to influence decisions and conditions affecting the community (and gain empowerment) within the RAB context was heavily moderated by their social boundaries and resource dependencies on the board. This occurred despite the residents' gains in capacity. For example, through their participation the residents gained enough capacity (i.e., knowledge, communication skills, etc) to

effectively influence the power brokers' decisions on the RAB. The residents also improved the quality of the resource that they could offer the power brokers in exchange for opportunities for influence. Initially the residents' capacity and resources were effective in gaining them real influence over the power brokers' decisions (and thus gaining empowerment) on the board, as seen in the examples mentioned above where the power brokers actually adopted the residents' advice into their final decisions. Yet over time the power brokers began to recreate the social boundaries for residents in the form of practices that limited the residents' influence to only a constrained set of the power brokers' decisions, and only for a limited time. The power brokers were free to constrain the residents' access to their decisions (and thus their empowerment) because they were not dependent on the residents' resources for their decision-making process. When the power brokers eventually stopped bringing their decisions into the exchange relationship on the board and resurrected their previous norm (i.e., social boundary) of making decisions independently of residents, the residents' capacity to influence the power brokers' decisions essentially became useless. Again, the power brokers' ability to revive these social boundaries was made possible by their complete lack of dependency on the residents' resources to their decision-making process.

The moderating factors also affected the residents' ability to use their capacity to influence community conditions (and gain empowerment) on the board. For example, even though the residents gained the capacity to influence conditions within the community through the training that the power brokers had *themselves* provided on the RAB, the power brokers maintained the social boundaries preventing the residents from pursuing community efforts on the board which again limited their empowerment. These

social boundaries were in the form of traditions regarding appropriate roles for residents in resident advisory board or community initiative contexts. The power brokers eliminated any potential for the residents to become empowered in the RAB when they finally decided to terminate the board. This act signaled the power brokers' complete return to their previous norms (social boundaries) for engaging residents. Overall, while residents were *capable* of becoming empowered on the RAB, they were ultimately prevented from *using* this capacity by their social boundaries and resource dependencies (see figure 3). The story of the residents' experience on the RAB indicates that in contexts where participants are constrained by social boundaries and resource dependencies, capacity alone is not enough to ensure empowerment.

Empowerment in the Community

In contrast to the board, participating in the RAB was relatively empowering for residents in the community context. This empowerment was possible because there were fewer social boundaries and resource dependencies limiting the residents' ability to utilize their capacity to influence community decisions and conditions. In fact, in several cases the residents did not encounter any social boundaries or resource dependencies limiting their ability to directly use their capacity to gain empowerment in the community. For example, some residents used the skills they had developed on the RAB to directly increase their influence over the community and become empowered. One resident said she utilized the skills and knowledge she had gained from the RAB to help her to pursue positions of higher influence in the community:

> *Because [of the RAB] I've learned some strategies to be able to get my idea out to the community...that helped me to be able to go door to door. It even helped me in my campaign for city commissioner. (Participant 02)*

Another resident said that she was able to use the skills she gained on the RAB to help

her neighborhood "take on some projects." Other residents talked about utilizing their

networks with the other RAB residents to become empowered in their community. As

mentioned above in the section on capacity, one resident said developing social networks

with the other residents on the board gave her additional resources to help her neighbors

and influence the conditions within her neighborhood:

> So they [the RAB residents] became resources whether it was just a story to tell
> or something they could actually physically do...And I have no problem calling
> those people even when it's been 6, 8, 10, 12 months. ...I have a friend whose
> boyfriend is coming out of jail. He's going to [get support] at [a local
> organization] because of [Participant 01]. I've got connections with [Participant
> 05] if I need that, [Participant 07], and [Participant 08]... You know I have
> connections in neighborhoods...with [Participant 03] and [Participant 02] that I
> would never have had that I appreciate. So if there were something going on that
> they could help me with, I'm sure that they would step up and do that.
> (Participant 04)

Similarly, one resident talked about several occasions where the RAB residents joined

together to increase their influence over decisions affecting their community:

> There was a couple of people on the [RAB] that their children's schools were
> being closed, and you know discussions came out and it really didn't have
> anything to do with the RAC. It had to do with how we felt about the schools being
> closed, and what could we do to you know help that situation. There were a
> couple situations I remember that happened down in the city, going to a
> commissioner's meetings and voicing what needs to be done. And collectively
> writing letters to government officials and making phone calls for other people
> about situations that just weren't right...there was always some effort that needed
> to be taken care of...so you call someone and see what they can do, and then you
> organize. (Participant 08)

One characteristic that these examples share in common is that the residents did not rely

on any powerful stakeholders to have their influence; instead, residents either carried out

their influence individually or with other residents. In total, these examples demonstrate

how under conditions where residents' empowerment is not heavily affected by

moderating factors, capacity can directly influence empowerment without the need to shift social boundaries or resource dependencies.

In contrast to these examples, some residents were able to use their capacity from the RAB experience to gain empowerment in the community, but only after shifting their social boundaries and resource dependencies. These shifts were necessary because in these cases the residents were reliant on other stakeholders to have their influence. For example, as mentioned in the previous section one resident increased his influence over community decisions and became a sought-after grant consultant by essentially advertising his resources to organization stakeholders at RAB events and convincing them to shift their social boundaries in order to establish an exchange relationship with him. This resident was also hired at a non-profit organization after leaving the RAB based largely on the fact that his capacity and reputation from the board were attractive resources for the organization's efforts. At this organization the resident was able to increase his influence over community conditions by applying the skills and knowledge he had gained from the board to help his organization start a city-wide collaborative for youth. Both his consulting and work with the organization were only possible because certain social boundaries and resource dependencies had shifted to allow for his influence. This same pattern applied to the two residents mentioned above who were invited to facilitate a series of meetings for an organization. This was only possible after the organization stakeholders saw the residents demonstrate their skills at the networking event and decided to shift their social boundaries in order to utilize the residents' resources for their efforts. Also mentioned in the previous section was the resident who was able to use her capacity to become a broker between her neighborhood and several

local organizations after these organizations became interested in the residents' resources and shifted their social boundaries to allow for this exchange. This resident said that being able to combine the skills and knowledge she learned in the RAB with the new opportunities to exchange resources with the organizations had made her into an effective community change agent for her neighborhood:

> *I am chair right [of my neighborhood association] now so I can say, "You know, we can contact so and so, or there is this organization that does this or that and I bet that they'd love to talk with us. I will ask them how can we work with you towards this thing we are thinking about." Where I wouldn't be able to do that before if I didn't know how these organizations worked, who to talk to, what their goals are... (Participant 03)*

While the residents across these examples were not able to rely solely upon their capacity to become empowered, the RAB experience facilitated the necessary shifts to the moderating conditions of social boundaries and resource dependencies to ultimately facilitate empowerment.

Overall, the RAB facilitated empowerment for residents to a far greater degree in the community than in the RAB setting itself. On one hand, this was because the community posed fewer constraints to the residents' empowerment in the form of social boundaries and resource dependencies. As mentioned above, some residents did not encounter any limitations in certain community settings and were able to use their capacity directly to gain empowerment. Even when these constraints did exist in the community, the residents' were able to increase some of the community stakeholders' desire for their resources (a situation that did not occur with the power brokers) and this desire pushed these stakeholders to shift their social boundaries to establish exchange relationships with the residents. While it is unclear how dependent these organizations were on the residents' resources, there was evidence that some of the residents had at

least a small amount of leverage in these exchanges. The final section will provide a

conclusion to the study and offer directions for future research.

Conclusion

As seen in this study, empowerment is truly a complex concept that involves

developing capacity *and* overcoming moderating factors like social boundaries and

resource dependencies. Unfortunately, much of the literature on empowerment often

focuses solely on an individual's capacity (i.e., perceived personal efficacy, critical

awareness of the socio-political environment, knowledge and skills; Mcmillan et al.,

1995; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988), without attending to the

effects of power dynamics that often exist within collaborative settings. By ignoring these

moderating factors, researchers and practitioners could potentially miss the larger picture

and falsely assume that empowerment will occur in settings that are in fact incapable of

facilitating such outcomes due to their immovable social boundaries and resource

dependencies.

These findings suggest that empowerment theory as it is predominantly

represented in the literature gives an incomplete model for understanding the

phenomenon of individual empowerment within settings such as a resident advisory

board. For example, the theory does not take into account potential moderating factors to

empowerment, such as social boundaries or resource dependencies, that were shown in

this study to pose formidable barriers to resident empowerment in the RAB setting.

Additionally, this study demonstrated how defining an empowered outcome as a person's

end state of influence, as opposed to his or her attempt to gain influence as it is often

defined within the literature on psychological empowerment, serves to expand the

process of empowerment to include such moderating factors as social boundaries and resource dependencies. Making these types of modifications to the theory of empowerment could allow it to more accurately reflect the complex power dynamics present within many collaborative settings (Israel et al., 1998).

This study also demonstrated the utility of using theoretical frameworks to understand the processes occurring within the RAB, particularly Hayward's (1998) theory of social boundaries, and Emerson's (1972) theory of resource dependencies. One of the noteworthy conclusions from the study is that using the theories of social boundaries and resource dependencies simultaneously can provide a better explanation of the process of empowerment than either theory used in isolation. For example, using the theory of resource dependencies to illustrate the power brokers' lack of dependency on the residents' resources provided an explanation for why the power brokers were able to constrain the social boundaries limiting residents' empowerment. Likewise, examining the social boundaries enacted by the power brokers in the setting helped to understand how residents became dependent on the power brokers for resources to influence community decisions and conditions. The theories of social boundaries and resource dependencies have not been used together to examine empowerment within the literature and this study would suggests that future research could benefit from a framework that combines the two models.

In contrast, while Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) model was able to capture a wide range of capacity-building processes within the RAB, it was not as easily transferable to the RAB context as the latter two theories. For example, the knowledge, skills, and consciousness processes were a far better match to the RAB setting and than

the problem-solving action process, primarily because all of the residents' actions were socially bound in the setting by the power brokers. Thus, while the action process may provide a good model within Action Research efforts described by Gaventa and Cornwall, it is less applicable to settings were participants' roles are constrained. One additional process that the study discovered which was not included in the Gaventa and Cornwall model was the process of developing social networks. As mentioned above, developing social networks through participating on the RAB proved to be very important in relation to the social boundaries and resource dependencies affecting residents' empowerment and could be included in future capacity-building models.

In addition to the theoretical frameworks, the study also contributed to the literature on characteristics of empowering processes. For example, the current study found that a safe environment for sharing diverse perspectives was able to facilitate the residents' empowering processes on the RAB and this gave support to other research that has identified similar characteristics within other empowering settings (Foster-Fishman et al., 2005). Furthermore, the findings from the current study emphasized how a setting can potentially facilitate empowering processes by providing opportunities for participants to positively engage with powerful stakeholders in a setting. For example, engaging with the power brokers on the RAB enhanced the knowledge, skills, and consciousness (i.e., desired sphere of influence) that the residents were developing through participating in the empowering processes on the board. Finally, the study illustrated how the training and experiential learning opportunities provided on the RAB dramatically increased the residents' capacity in a relatively short amount of time and served as a strong facilitator to their empowering processes in the setting.

In addition to these theoretical conclusions, practitioners can learn several lessons from the RAB setting that have implications for community practice. One of the power brokers' publicly stated goals within their community change initiative was to develop and encourage resident-driven action in the community. Thus, the study suggests that the power brokers made an oversight in creating a setting with processes to develop the residents' capacity to influence community decisions and conditions (processes that were in alignment with their stated goals for the community) while at the same time being unprepared or unwilling to actually support the residents when they eventually (and naturally) began requesting this type of influence on the board. In essence, the power brokers appeared to have publicly stated one goal for resident-driven action, while internally implementing another. For example, the power brokers appeared to be unprepared to determine a new useful role for the RAB after the granting cycle ended because the only activities they decided to arrange for the group included drawn out internal planning processes and training sessions that prepared residents for undefined future roles. Naturally, the successful exchanges that occurred during the initial phases of the board, along with the training and encouragement provided by the power brokers, left the residents dissatisfied with the limits of these latter activities and caused them to desire different roles on the board. The power brokers apparently did not anticipate or desire this reaction because instead of shifting the social boundaries on the board to accommodate to the residents' desire for empowerment, they flatly denied all of the residents' requests for influence (culminating in the termination of the board) and provided only veiled explanations for their decisions. As a result, the power brokers continued their history of abruptly withdrawing support from their collaborations with

residents in the community as described by one of the residents above:

> ...*in the past what has happened is [the power brokers] allowed people to trust [them] and then just when things are starting to make a difference [they] snatch the rug from under people. (Participant 05)*

This unwillingness may have been a product of the rigid social boundaries that the power brokers maintained in the form of constrained roles for residents within community change efforts. These social boundaries were clearly a contradiction to the power brokers' publicly stated goals for resident-driven action. The power brokers' response seems to indicate that they did not value or depend on the residents' resources enough to expand their social boundaries to provide other avenues for the residents to have an influence on the RAB. In sum, the power brokers' lack of dependency on the residents' resources guaranteed that the RAB setting could never become an empowering setting for residents.

In addition to the power brokers' lack planning, the RAB context also jeopardized the residents' empowerment by setting up the conditions for them to become dependent on the power brokers' resources. For example, as a result of participating on the RAB some residents became dependent on the benefits (i.e., job referrals, reputation) that they were accruing through their connections with the power brokers. While all of the residents clearly wanted to influence the power brokers' decisions on the board (this was their primary motivation for joining the board), some of the residents' desires for influence over the power brokers' decisions were overwhelmed by their motivation to maintain a favorable relationship with the power brokers (in order to continue receiving their benefits from this relationship). In turn, the motivation to maintain an advantageous relationship with the power brokers caused these residents to remain complacent instead

of confronting the power brokers about their actions to limit the residents' empowerment on the board. In addition, it also appears that the RAB context may have caused some of the residents to become more dependent on the power brokers' resources by limiting their perceptions of available community resources to support resident action. As a result, some of the residents assumed that they could not find funding in the community after being denied by the power brokers on the RAB and therefore developed a false dependency on the power brokers' resources. One potential reason why the power brokers may not have given the residents more information or encouragement to pursue outside resources for their efforts is because the power brokers themselves maintained social boundaries (i.e., norms, practices) that limited the residents' efforts in the community.

In response to this case, how can stakeholders promote conditions that are capable of empowering residents? According to the current study, one of the key facilitating factors to shifting moderating factors to empowerment, at least in the community context, was the ability for residents to help stakeholders see the value in their resources. By doing so, the stakeholders were more likely to increase their desire (and dependency) on the residents' resources and respond by expanding the social boundaries limiting the residents' empowerment. However, to empower residents, stakeholders must not only initiate these exchange relationships with residents in collaborative settings, but they must *sustain* them over time or at least have a concrete plan for how to accommodate for changes to their dependencies on residents' resources. As seen in the current study, if these latter conditions are not met settings can prove to be more disempowering than empowering for resident participants.

This study suggests several directions for future research. One of the main limitations to this study was the lack of the power brokers' perspectives within the findings. Future studies could interview power brokers within other advisory boards to better understand the factors affecting their dependency on resident resources as well as potential social boundaries that constrain *their* efforts to expand the residents' empowerment in these settings (i.e., regulations or directives from higher management, pressure from community members that would be negatively affected by efforts to increase residents' influence). Future research could also explore whether factors such as social boundaries and resource dependencies moderate participants' empowerment in other types of collaborative settings involving stakeholders with different levels of power and resources. Using additional theoretical frameworks to understand these moderating factors could contribute to the understanding of moderating factors within these settings and contribute to the theory of empowerment. Finally, resident advisory board participants could be followed longitudinally to discover whether the RAB experience has different affects on residents' influence in the community over time.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Tables and Figures

Table 1

Definitions of Empowered Outcome, Empowering Processes, and Moderating Factors.

Definition of construct	Operationalized codes
<u>Empowered Outcome</u> Increased influence over community decisions and conditions.	It was demonstrated that: ● Residents increased their influence over community decisions or conditions within the RAB context or in the community context.
<u>Empowering Processes</u> Gaventa and Cornwall's (2001) empowerment model.	The RAB produced opportunities for residents to: ● Create <u>knowledge</u> by sharing their expertise and learning from the lived experiences of other members (i.e., residents share their expertise about neighborhood issues and develop a new knowledge about the community based on resident experiences). ● Develop <u>skills</u> by using knowledge in a group context (i.e., residents use knowledge to affect the group's decisions and generate solutions to community problems). ● <u>Act</u> purposefully to improve one's life circumstances. ● Raise <u>critical consciousness</u> about the nature of community problems and the role of residents in addressing those problems.
<u>Moderating Factor</u> Hayward's (1998) definition of social boundaries.	It was demonstrated that: ● Residents encountered policies, practices, norms, customs, or personal identities that affected their ability to influence community decisions and conditions (i.e., their empowerment) in both the RAB and community context.
<u>Moderating Factor</u> Emerson's (1972) definition of resource dependencies.	It was demonstrated that: ● Residents encountered resource dependencies within their exchange relationships with key stakeholders that affected their ability to influence community decisions and conditions (i.e., their empowerment) in both the RAB and community context.

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Table 2

Key Themes from the Empowering Processes within the RAB.

| Construct	Major Themes
Knowledge	• Community information • Residents' life histories • Community organizations
Skills	• Communication • Group facilitation • Leadership • Problem solving
Problem Solving Actions	• Advising the power brokers' decisions
Consciousness	• Critical awareness of the community • Shift in desired sphere of influence
Social Networks	• Organizational stakeholders • Power brokers • Fellow RAB residents
Elements Facilitating Shifts in Residents' Capacity	• Safe environment for sharing • Opportunities to engage with powerful stakeholders • Occasions for training and experiential learning
Elements Inhibiting Shifts in Residents' Capacity	• Lack of residents' real decision-making authority in the setting
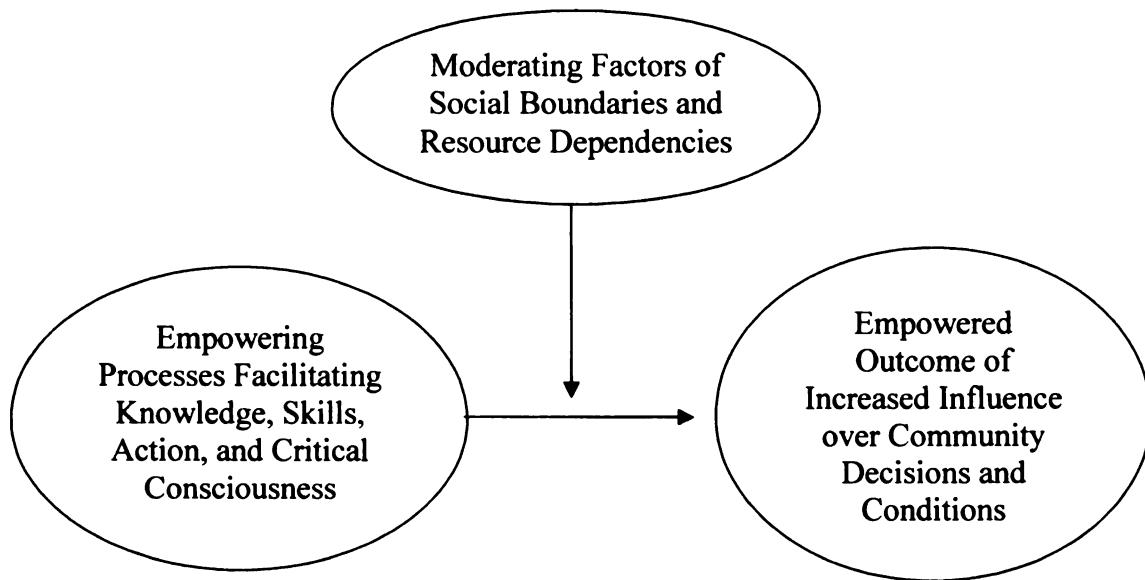
Figure 1. Diagram of empowerment within a resident advisory board context.
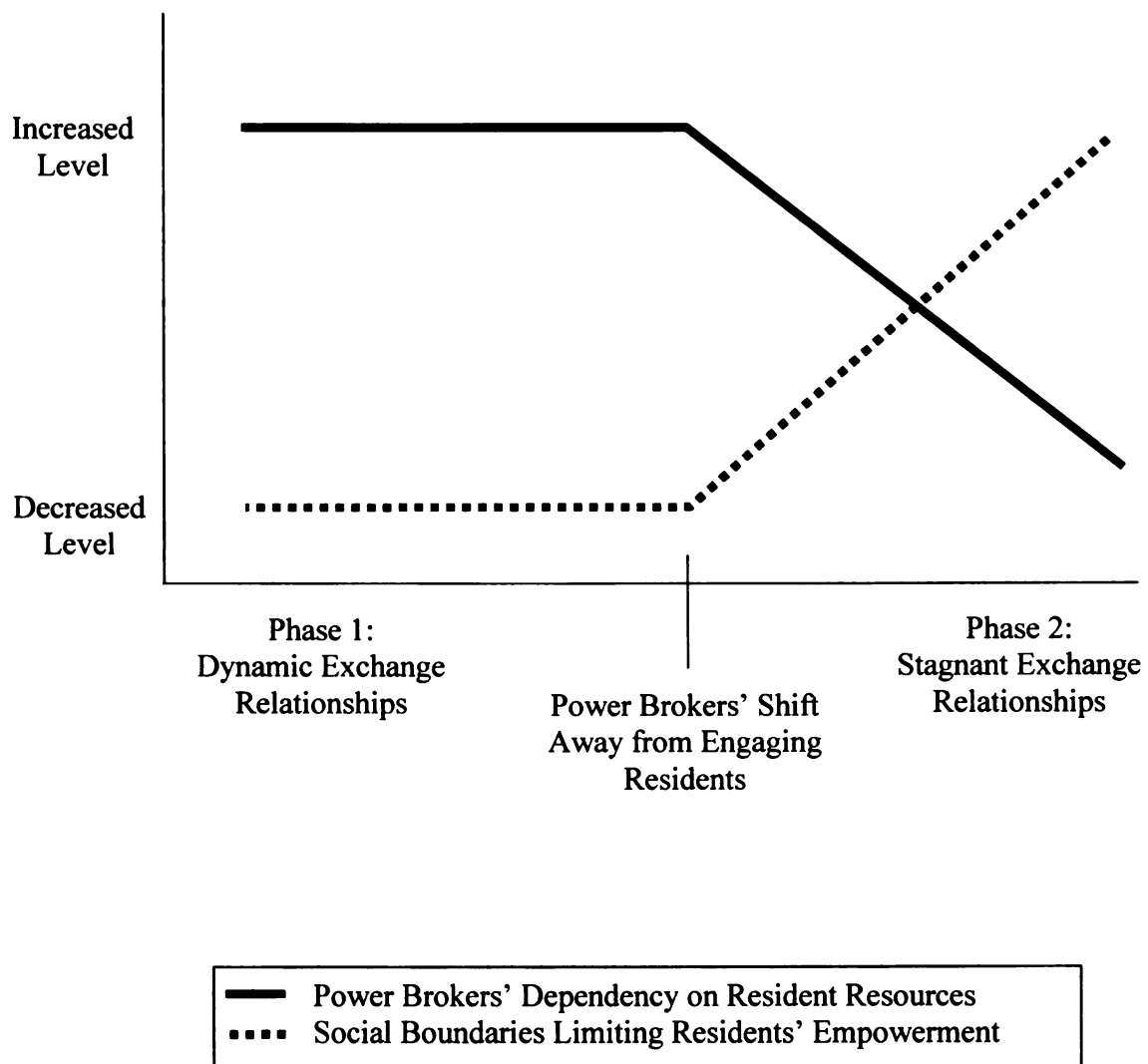
Figure 2. Changes in social boundaries and resource dependencies in the RAB context over time.

High Resident
Empowerment

Low Resident
Empowerment

Low Resident
Capacity

High Resident
Capacity

⎯⎯ Expanded Social Boundaries and Resource Dependencies
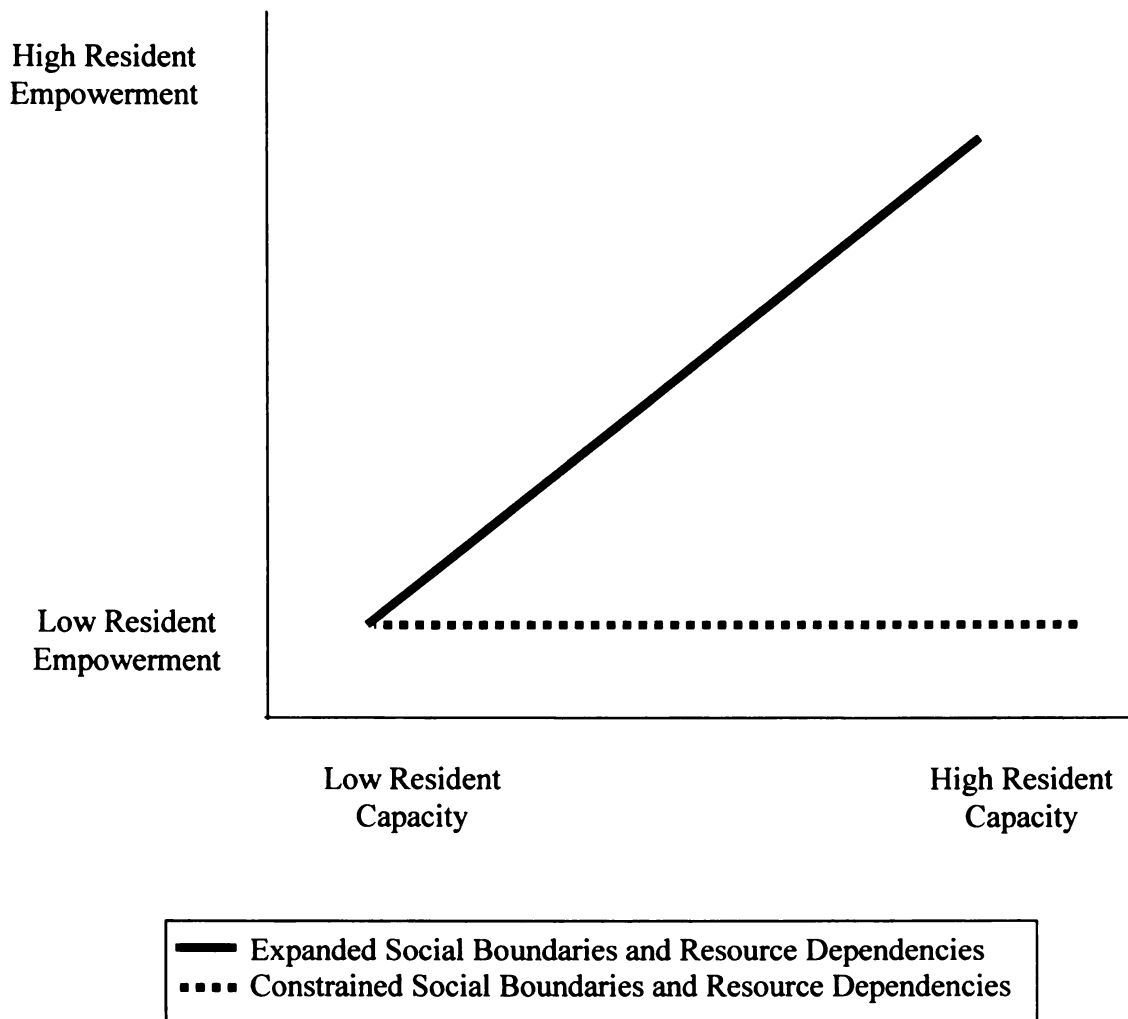▪▪▪▪ Constrained Social Boundaries and Resource Dependencies

Figure 3. Proposed model illustrating the extent to which capacity leads to resident empowerment depending on the moderating factors of social boundaries and resource dependencies.

APPENDIX B

Study Consent Form

Consent Form for Study on
Resident Experiences in a Resident Advisory Board

Purpose: The purpose for this research study is to learn about the experiences of residents participating in a resident advisory board. You have been invited to take part in this study because you served on the [power brokers'] resident advisory board. I am doing this study as part of my master's thesis in the Community Psychology program at Michigan State University.

Procedures: If you decide to participate in this study you will take part in an interview approximately 90 minutes in length. In the interviews you will be asked questions about your experiences in the resident advisory board as well as questions about your current involvement in the community. You will be paid $20 for your participation directly after completing the interview, regardless of how many questions you chose to answer. Following the interview, I may contact you over the phone and ask several follow-up comments to clarify or verify my notes. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Risks and Benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to you from participating in these interviews. Depending on what you talk about, you may experience memories or thoughts that make you uncomfortable.

Possible benefits include gaining personal insight into your experiences as a resident advisory council member.

Confidentiality: Throughout your participation in this study, your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. These interviews are confidential and your name will not be linked with any of the information gathered in this process. Your name will appear on this consent form, but this form will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office at Michigan State University (MSU). I am the only person who will have access to the audio recordings and will personally transcribe the interview. After our interview, I will temporarily store the digital audio recordings in a password protected file on my personal computer. Copies of the transcribed interviews will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at MSU and digital copies will be saved in a password protected file on my personal computer. Your name will not appear anywhere in the transcripts and any identifying information will be removed. After I have finished analyzing the transcriptions, all digital audio files will be destroyed. The interview transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at MSU for 5 years after the project has been completed. After these 5 years, the transcripts will be destroyed. Your name or any information that could identify you will not be included in my final report.

Withdrawal: Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary. If you do not want to take part in this interview you don't have to. You can choose not to answer any question I ask or stop the interview at any time without penalty.

If you have any concerns or questions about this research study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or if you believe you have been harmed because of the research, please contact Pennie Foster-Fishman at 517-353-5015, or email at fosterfi@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 125D Psychology Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824. You may also contact Erin Droege at 517-355-3825, or email at droegeer@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 120D Psychology Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824.

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact anonymously if you wish, Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Consent: By signing this form I indicate that I voluntarily agree to participate in the interview described above and to have these interviews audio recorded.

_____   _____   _____
Printed name of participant   Participant's signature   Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Thank you again for taking time to talk with me today. I am going to be asking you some questions about your experience with the resident advisory board – which I will call the RAB throughout our conversation. Many communities across the country are creating groups like the RAB and I am interested in learning what it was like to be on one.

SOCIAL EXCHANGE

1. In your opinion, what was the purpose of the RAB?
    - Why did [the power brokers] invite residents like you to the table?
2. Some RABs have residents at the table because of the resources, knowledge, skills, or connections they can offer to someone like [the power brokers]. Were there any specific resources, knowledge, skills, or connections you had prior to joining the RAB that [the power brokers] wanted to tap into?
    - Would you say [the power brokers] tapped into what you brought to the table? Can you give me some examples?
3. Overall, when you were on the RAB did you feel as though you were as an expert about anything in the community? For example, were there things that you were especially qualified to talk about in the meetings because of the neighborhood you lived in? Why did you feel this way?
    - How did having this expertise influence the way you interacted with [the power brokers]?
    - Did this feeling of being an expert change over the course of the meetings? Explain how it changed.
    - Did [the power brokers] learn more about what you could offer to the group as time went on?
4. Did you offer any resources to [the power brokers] that they couldn't have gotten from anyone else in the community?
5. Why did you decide to join the RAB?
    - What were you looking to get out of the experience? Did you actually get this?
    - For how long were you a member?

KNOWLEDGE

6. Sometimes in advisory board meetings there are opportunities for people to share their ideas and experiences with the group, sometimes there are not. Did you ever have a chance to share your ideas or experiences in a RAB meeting?
    - What kinds of ideas or experiences did you share?
    - When in the meetings did you share these things?
7. How did [the power brokers] respond to the information you and other residents shared? What did they do with it (i.e., incorporate it into their ideas, use it to make decisions)?
    - How did the other residents at the table react to what you were sharing?
8. Sometimes in advisory board meetings there are also opportunities hear about other people's ideas and lived experiences. Did you ever have a chance to learn about other people's ideas or lived experiences in the RAB meetings?

- What kinds of things did you learn about?
- What impact did it have on you to hear these things?

9. Were you ever encouraged to share their ideas and experiences with the group? How were you encouraged?

10. Did anything ever happen in the meetings that prevented you or other residents from sharing ideas or experiences? How did this happen?
    - What did it mean to you not to be able to share?

SKILLS

11. Were there opportunities for you to develop or use any skills through your participation in the RAB? These could be new skills or skills you already had (i.e., communication skills, how to problem solve, or how to make a persuasive argument).
    - What kinds of skills did you develop or use in the RAB? Did you develop or use any of these skills for the first time in the RAB?
    - Tell me about some of the experiences in the RAB that helped you to develop or use these skills.

12. Did developing or using these skills change the way you interacted with [the power brokers] in the RAB? How?

13. Did you ever use your skills or knowledge of the community to try to influence decisions being made in the RAB? Can you tell me about that? How did [the power brokers] respond?
    - Did you ever use your skills or knowledge of the community to try to get the RAB to do something differently? Can you tell me about that? How did [the power brokers] respond?
    - Did being on the board make you want to try and influence other decisions being made in the city? Can you tell me about that?
      - Was there anything about participating in the RAB that encouraged you to want to use your skills in the community?

14. Do you think there was a big difference between the skills you had on the RAB and the skills [the power brokers] had? Did this change over the course of the RAB meetings?

15. Were you ever encouraged to develop or use your skills in the RAB? How did this happen?

16. Where there things that happened in the RAB that made it difficult for you to develop your skills? How did this happen?
    - What did it mean to you not to be able to develop these skills?

ACTION

17. I hear that the RAB met for quite a long time. What kinds of things did you do on the RAB? (i.e., advising [the power brokers], helping with their evaluation)? What kinds of things did you do to get prepared for your meetings – did you ever gather information or talk to residents or other leaders to help you prepare?
    - Did you learn anything new or develop any new skills while you were doing these things on the RAB?
      - How did you learn these things?

o   What did you learn?
18. Did being on the RAB make you want to do anything new or different in the city?
        o   What about being on the board made you want to start doing these things [probe around their previous comments regarding skills and knowledge]?
- Did having these desires to do new things in the community change the way you interacted with [the power brokers]?
        o   How about with other stakeholders in the community?
19. Was there anything that you wanted to do on the RAB that you didn't get to do?
- What prevented you from doing these things?
- What did it mean to you not to be able to do these things?
20. Where there opportunities to interact and connect with other people or organizations in the city while you were participating on the RAB? Can you tell me about this?
- Did you gain anything from the connections and relationships with these people or organizations in the city?
- Did these people you interacted with offer you any new opportunities because of the role you played on the RAB? Did they become more supportive of residents taking action in the community?
- How did the things you gained from these organizations compare to what you were looking to get out of the RAB experience?
- Could you have gained these things from anywhere else in the community besides these organizations and [the power brokers]?
21. Overall, in what ways do you think your participation on the board has impacted:
- [the power brokers'] work?
- Your role or position in the city?
- Your opportunities?
22. Are you able to do anything now to improve your life that you would not have been able to do before participating on the board (i.e., working toward goals, trying to secure more resources for you and your family)?
- Did this change have anything to do with you being on the RAB? How?
23. Are you able to do anything now to improve the community that you would not have been able to do before participating on the board (i.e., partnering with organizations, applying for grants, or becoming a neighborhood leader)?
- Did this change have anything to do with you being on the RAB? How?

CONCIOUSNESS

24. Did being on the RAB over the years change the way you thought about yourself? Can you tell me about that?
- Did it change the way you thought about other residents? How did this happen?
25. As you participated on the RAB, did you start thinking differently about problems facing the city? Can you tell me about that?
26. Did being on the RAB make you start thinking differently about how to solve those problems? How did this happen?

27. Did being on the RAB change how you thought about ways you and other residents could play a role in community change efforts? Can you tell me about that?
   - More generally, did being on the RAB make you start thinking differently about how you and other residents could work to make positive changes in the community? How did this happen? What changed?
   - How is this thinking different than the way you thought about residents' roles in community change before joining the RAB?
   - Did changing your view on these things affect your desire to actually get involved in community change efforts? Can you tell me about this?
28. Was there anything that happened in the RAB that encouraged you to get involved in change efforts in the community? How were you encouraged?
29. Where there any experiences you had on the RAB that discouraged you from getting involved in change efforts? How were you discouraged?
30. Overall, do you feel you have more opportunities to influence decisions and powerful stakeholders in the city because of being on the RAB? Why or why not?
31. Many RABs serve as a model for how community organizations can engage residents. Would you say this RAB served as such a model? What do you think about that?
32. Anything else I should know about your experiences on the RAB?

DEMOGRAPHICS

33. Have you had any experience with groups similar to the RAB in the past?
34. What occupations have you had during your life?
35. Have you ever been involved with social change efforts before joining the RAB?

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